Seeds of Hope

Stories of Systemic Change

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This book is dedicated to the poorest of the poor.
In the upside down vision of the world that Jesus lays out
before us, they are the kings and queens.

The stories in this book were written by the members of the Vincentian Family's Commission for Promoting Systemic Change, all of whom are involved in projects that have significantly changed the life circumstances of the poor. The members invited Sr. Malou Baaco to add a chapter describing her experience in the Mindoro Project in the Philippines. We are grateful to Fr. James T. Keane, S.J., associate editor at *America* magazine, who read through the entire text and applied a deft editing touch.

Prologue

The Notion of Systemic Change

By Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Background

Today, those engaged in works among the poor speak frequently of the need for systemic change. In order to understand a systemic-change approach better, some background may be helpful.

Modern science focuses on "systems" whose parts continually interact with one another and influence each another, for better or for worse. Physicists and astronomers, for example, view the universe as a system. If a star explodes, everything else in the universe feels the effect. Medical science views the body as a system. A bad kidney affects the blood, and bad blood affects all the other organs. Economics and sociology view society as a system. If the elements that influence the lives of people within the system (family, institutions, jobs, housing, food and drink, health care, education, moral values, spiritual development, etc.) function together positively, people thrive; if one or several of these elements are lacking, the whole system begins to break down.

More and more, the various sciences share a common conviction: the unified nature of reality. All recognize that reality is complex, but at the same time all affirm that "everything is connected to everything else."

Those engaged in systemic change in works among the poor share that conviction. They affirm that, in order to change the situation of the poor, we must focus not only on one particular problem, like supplying food, important as that may be at times. Experience teaches that "quick fix" solutions, while temporarily helpful, prove inadequate in the long run. Beyond them, one must examine the whole socioeconomic situation in

which the poor live, and then intervene in such a way that the system as a whole is modified. Such an approach is necessarily interdisciplinary and involves many different actors within society: the poor themselves, interested individuals, donors, churches, governments, the private sector, leaders in business, unions, the media, international organizations and networks, etc.

The basic concept

Essentially, a system is a whole, a unified composite of things that work together. It functions through the interaction of its parts and is, actually, greater than the sum of its parts. As the parts interact, they affect each other constantly, either for better or for worse. Take the body as an example. If I break my ankle, I experience pain, which affects my overall happiness and my mood. That, in turn, affects how I relate with others. The broken ankle also distorts how I walk. As a result, my hip or my back may begin to bother me too. With a throbbing ankle and an aching back, I may also experience a headache or grouchiness. All this affects how I work or how I study.

On the other hand, as my ankle heals, I experience less pain and I begin to walk better. Gradually, my hip and back settle back into their normal working order. My headache disappears too. So does the grouchiness! I find myself relating better with others. I am working and studying better as well.

There are many other examples of systems. We speak, for instance, of the solar system, a railway system, a monetary system, a sewage system, or a system of government. We refer to the nervous system and the digestive system. We also use the word in the realm of ideas to describe a whole way of thinking, as when we talk of a philosophical system or the Thomistic system. Sometimes we use system to describe the prevailing way of doing things, as when we say that someone "knows how to work within the system"; or, we use "system" to describe a special well-worked-out way of acting, as when we speak of a system for winning at bridge or at black jack.

Etymologically, the word "system" comes from two Greek words: syn "together" + histanai "cause to stand". A system, therefore, in its root meaning, consists of things that "stand together". The concept has come to be applied in numerous branches of knowledge, from the philosophical notion of "a set of correlated principles, facts and ideas", to the medical notion of "a body as an organized whole", to the computer sense of "a group of related programs", or an operating system.

There are many synonyms for system, such as a whole, a complex, an entity, an organization, a scheme, a setup, a structure, a sum.

This book deals with systemic change in works among the poor. Systemic change, in this context, aims beyond providing food, clothing and shelter to alleviate the immediate needs of the poor. It focuses on assisting the needy to change the overall structures within which they live and helps them develop strategies by which they can emerge from poverty.

Clarifying the notion

"Systemic change" should not be confused with "systematic change." The latter phrase refers to a planned, step-by-step process. "Systematic change" can have very positive effects, but it may be limited in its scope, focusing on changing only one aspect of a larger system. "Systemic change" goes beyond that and focuses on the whole system.

Systemic change aims at transforming a complete series of interacting elements, rather than just an individual element. It also inevitably requires changing attitudes that have caused the problems which a group hopes to solve. So, to use a phase often attributed to Albert Einstein, systemic-change thinking helps us "to learn to see the world anew". It provides tools focusing on the relationship among a system's elements, interprets a group's experience of that system, and promotes structural change within it.

When, at a meeting in Rome in 2007, the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change made a presentation to the heads of many of the branches of the Vincentian Family and proposed that systemic change be our common theme for the next several years, Sr. Evelyne Franc, the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, remarked: "I find this theme very interesting. It gives a name to what so many in the Family are already trying to do or hope to do, and it clarifies and concretizes the idea." It is clear that the underlying idea of systemic change is already at work in projects within the Vincentian Family, even if the process has not been defined or examined step by step. This book will describe and analyze some of those projects. Readers will surely know of others. Reflecting on the stories of people who have been engaged in systemic change projects, the book will propose a series of strategies that helped make those projects successful.

An illustration of how systemic change works

Each of us lives within a socioeconomic system whose parts interact with each other. If the system is working well, it favors personal growth. If not, it thwarts growth and accelerates decline. If, for example, I don't have a job, I don't earn money. If I don't earn money, I can't buy food for my family. If my son doesn't have sufficient food, he suffers malnutrition. If he suffers malnutrition, he can't study well. If he can't study well, he won't graduate from school. If he doesn't graduate from school, he may not get a job. If he doesn't have a job, he doesn't earn money. So the circle begins again.

Similar things can be said about housing, sanitary conditions, health care, and other basic human needs. The elements in a poorly functioning system influence one another and move a person, step by step, deeper into poverty. The challenge for a systems thinker is to know where and how to break the circle. As the reader will see in the stories recounted in this book, the point of insertion, or the break-through point for changing the system, will vary.

In Akamasoa, Fr. Pedro Opeka began by creating jobs. These, in turn, generated revenue. Gradually, people were able to buy food, build homes and send their children to school. Their lives improved dramatically. In San José de Ocoa, water was the key. Clean water brought improved health. Irrigation brought crops that provided nourishment and also revenue. Revenue led to better homes and sanitation. With the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, micro-credit was the key. It enabled people to buy land, build homes, and organize other projects like digging wells, creating a sewage system and opening shops.

Transforming societal structures

In recent times, especially in light of wars and threats of war, an increased consciousness of the need for structural change within society has emerged.

In Catholic social teaching, the Church's call for such change was already evident in *Pacem in Terris*[1] and in *Gaudium et Spes*.[2] Pope Paul VI expressed the theme eloquently in *Populorum Progressio,*[3] and called Christians, in an address to the members of Cor Unum given on January 13, 1972, to commit themselves to enter into "the very heart of social and political action and thus get at the roots of evil and change hearts, as well as the structures of modern society."[4]

Today, we are conscious that sin deeply affects social structures. It becomes embodied in unjust laws, power-based eco-

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[1] *Pacem in Terris,* 89, 91.

[2] *Gaudium et Spes,* 85.

[3] *Populorum Progressio,* 78.

[4] *Acta Apostolicae Sedis,* 64 (1972) 189.

nomic relationships, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous other subtle obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. It is only when such structural obstacles are analyzed, understood and removed that society can establish abiding, peaceful relationships.

Over the last several decades, a heightened sense of the global community has also emerged. Local disasters like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis cry out for a global response. At times, regional conflicts make the international scene volatile, with the lurking danger that these limited military actions will escalate into "all-out war".

Meanwhile, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have appealed again and again for solidarity among the nations, a just world order, the guarantee of freedom, respect for human rights, and integral human development.

Within this framework, systemic change projects aim at creating more just social structures, so that the opportunities for jobs, education, housing, and health care might be more equitably distributed. They also aim at transparency and the elimination of corruption, as well as the eradication of discrimination because of race, tribe, gender, religion, age and other factors.

Of course, not all poverty is the result of injustice. Many other factors play a significant role in making people poor. Drought, flooding, earthquakes, cyclones and other natural disasters impoverish large numbers in many countries. Poor health, physical handicaps and age lessen opportunities for work. Individual irresponsibility has a significant role, too. It leads to the abuse of spouses, the break-up of families and the abandonment of children. Addiction to drugs, alcohol and other substances often brings disastrous economic consequences, as does the choice of an individual not to go to school.

Though these particular causes of poverty may not be related to unjust social structures, a systemic change approach can help reverse their effects.

Vincentian spirituality and systemic change

The concept of "systemic change" is a contemporary one. It was unknown in St. Vincent's time, though Vincent himself expressed many related ideas. When he gathered the first group of women to form a "Confraternity of Charity" at Chatillon-les-Dombes in November 1617, he stated, in the Rule he composed for them[5], that the poor sometimes suffer more from a lack of "order" in the help offered them rather than from a lack of charitable persons who want to help. So, he encouraged his followers to examine various elements in the lives of the poor to see what their most urgent needs were: nourishment, health care, education, job opportunities, spiritual care… He wrote precise rules for all the groups he founded, so that their service to others would be well organized.

There are three key phrases in Vincent's writings that today are moving the various branches of the Vincentian Family not only to assist the poor in their immediate needs by providing food, clothing and shelter, but also to help them change the social system within which they live, so that they might emerge from poverty.

The first phrase is that our love is to be both ***"affective and effective."***[6] Vincent repeated this theme over and over again. He says, for example, "The love of a Daughter of Charity is not only tender; it is effective, because they serve the poor concretely."[7]

The second phrase is that we minister to the poor ***"spiritually and corporally."***[8] Vincent uses this phrase in speaking to all the groups he founded: the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. He tells the Daughters of Charity that they should tend not only to bodily needs, but also share their faith with the poor by their witness and their words. And he warns the members of

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[5] SV XIII, 423.

[6] SV IX, 475, 592, 599; XI, 40.

[7] SV IX, 593.

[8] SV IX, 59, 593; XI, 364.

the Congregation of the Mission that they should not think of their mission in exclusively spiritual terms.[9] Rather, they too should care for the sick, the foundlings, the insane, even the most abandoned.[10]

The third phrase is that we are to proclaim the good news ***"by word and work"***. Vincent was deeply convinced that what we say and what we do must reinforce one another. First, do. Then, teach. That is St. Vincent's rule for **"effective" evangelization.** In other words, Vincent sees preaching, teaching and human promotion as complementary to one another, and as integral to the evangelization process.

Today, the unity between evangelization and human promotion, so much a part of Vincent's spirit, is one of the main emphases in the Church's social teaching.[11]

In light of these three phrases, so fundamental in our Vincentian Family's spirituality, we have often reflected over the last two decades on the appeal that Pope John Paul II addressed to the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 1986: ***"Search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long-term solutions – adaptable and effec¬tive concrete solutions. By doing so you will work for the credibility of the gospel and of the Church."***

Criteria of Systemic Change Projects

As is evident from the description and illustrations above, not every project involves systemic change. Many good projects

[9] SV XII, 87: "If there are any among us who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the gospel to the poor but not to comfort them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others.... To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works...."

[10] SV XI, 393.

[11] Cf. Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, in *AAS* LXIII (1971) 924: "...action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are integral elements in the preaching of the gospel." Cf. also, *Centesimus Annus, 5*.

address urgent, immediate needs, but do not go beyond that. Different from these, a systemic change project has, among others, the following characteristics:

1. Long-range social impact

This is the most basic characteristic of systemic change: that is, that the project helps change the overall life-situation of those who benefit from it.

2. Sustainability

The project helps create the social structures that are needed for a permanent change in the lives of the poor, like employment, education, housing, the availability of clean water and sufficient food, ongoing local leadership, etc.

3. Replicability

The project can be adapted to solve similar problems in other places. The philosophy or spirituality that grounds the project, the strategies it employs and the techniques that it uses can be applied in a variety of circumstances.

4. Scope

Concretely, this means that the project actually has spread beyond its initial context and has been used successfully in other settings in the country where it began, or internationally, either by those who initiated it, or by others who have adapted elements of it.

5. Innovation

The project has brought about significant social change by transforming traditional practice. Transformation has been achieved through the development of a pattern-changing idea and its successful implementation.

We hope that the stories which follow, and the strategies embodied in them, will encourage readers to initiate creative systemic change projects that will help transform the lives of the poor.

The Story of "Akamasoa," a Community of Good Friends

By Pedro Opeka, C.M.

My son, do not refuse the poor their subsistence and do not make the miserable languish. Do not make one who is hungry suffer, do not exasperate the destitute. Do not push away the severely distressed beggar; do not close your eyes to the poor. -Sirach 4:1

I. The first steps in laying the foundations for a new life

April 1989 – Meeting the Homeless of Tananarive

On a Saturday in April of 1989, I joined thousands of people who had gathered at Alarobia Stadium in Tananarive to celebrate the Eucharist with Pope John Paul II, who was on a pastoral visit to Madagascar. During the festivities, a young girl, clothed in rags and carrying a young child who was probably her brother, approached the Pope. He took the child in his arms, smiled at

him tenderly and embraced him with great strength. I still have this gesture of love and peace fixed in my memory – the meeting between a child devastated by poverty and the messenger of Christ. At that moment I felt that Christ was calling me to give my life to the thousands of poor people who live off the refuse of the city and make the streets their home.

Soon after the Pope's visit, I took my Provincial Superior, Father Danjou, to the garbage dump of Andralanitra, in the suburbs of Tananarive. Men, women and children, their faces emaciated and their bones protruding, were rummaging through the refuse to feed themselves and save up objects they could sell. Clearing ourselves a path through this virtual human ant hill, where dogs and pigs mingled with people, we stopped in front of a hut made of cardboard, plastic and canvas. We bent down and poked our heads into this meager shelter. Through the darkness, we noticed three small children, asleep and covered with flies. Filth was everywhere, and putrefaction made the smell unbearable. Beyond the hut, people had dug tunnels into the mountain of rubbish. Children disappeared into this labyrinth of burrows, crawling in to gather all that they could. How many have died here, I thought, buried by landfill? Just inside one of the tunnels, an old man appeared to be in agony. The Provincial, whose face showed horror before so much inhumanity, said to me, "Pedro, put into practice the message that our Congregation inherited from Saint Vincent. Go ahead with this work. We will all help you and pray for you."

The homeless can be found in the large cities of most countries. But in many countries, the wealthy and political leaders show little interest in them. Lacking social services, families with five, six, or seven children are left on their own and resign themselves to their fate. Despair invades the hearts of parents, who sometimes seek refuge in alcohol and drugs, and leave their children to live alone or in gangs. Prostitution wreaks havoc, because it is a means to survive from day to day. In this climate of indifference on the part of the authorities, and even of the homeless themselves, many municipalities consider it

expedient to empty the streets of the destitute by driving them out of the cities periodically. Thus exiled, these families are often unaware of the help offered by churches and private associations. This human drama is captured in the pertinent observation of Brother Roger de Taizé: "Poverty is to have no one on whom one can lean when all is lost."[1]

May to November 1989 – Emergence of Our First Projects

At that time, I was living comfortably at the Vincentian seminary of Soavimbahoaka. Because I taught the seminarians in the afternoon, I went to the garbage dump of Andralanitra each morning, and there I heard of more and more deaths. Where were we to bury the deceased honorably? This question tormented me. Honorable burial is extremely important to these families, since respect for ancestors lies at the heart of Malagasy life. To be unable to bury the dead, according to their tradition, is to arrive at the end of the line. I also saw dozens and dozens of orphans, abandoned children, and single mothers, as well as women and children who had fled from violent homes. I had no means to help these people. I felt completely powerless.

I had done an apprenticeship for 15 years in Vangaindrano, in the brush of South Madagascar, where I had discovered that

[1]"Choose to love" by Brother Roger de Taizé – Presse de Taizé, June 2006, page 33.

the Malagasy people had a beautiful tradition: gathering the community together to speak about problems. To share one's concerns and be listened to is very important to them, since it is the first step in building up human relationships and mutual understanding. Extreme poverty had caused this custom to fall into disuse. Living in misery, many no longer even thought about their neighbor; it was "everyone for himself". During this period, I decided to revive the custom of gathering the people together periodically. I knew that this would demand a lot of time and that, for the very poor, time was available only when they were able to find the means to survive each day. But I thought: if I can restore this custom here in the garbage dump, maybe people will have hope again and begin to believe that a solution to their problems is possible.

In the beginning, I had only words to offer. At first, I stressed the future of the children, since love for children lies deep in the hearts of all parents. "I come to help you. You still have a chance. You can still pull through. You are capable of working to rebuild your life and prepare a better future for your children. Today, I haven't a cent and I have no solutions. But together, if we want to do it, we can find solutions and make them work." In response, people often insulted me. They sometimes spit at me, and occasionally got violent. I felt the deep anger present in so many of the adults, adolescents and children. I heard, "Stranger, you speak, but your words don't give us food, medicine, or housing!"[2] They had heard promises before, and their lives had not changed. Extreme misery had vanquished hope. Violence was their response to the situation. It was a shock to witness the loss of a sense of dignity in those who had been exiled to a mountain of rubbish: society had discarded its refuse and abandoned its people.

I proposed to the parents that we all work together, but my invitation was at first incomprehensible to them. Parents who had lived in misery since childhood and had survived alone, without social solidarity, without employment and without

[2] "Vahaza, tu parles et tes paroles ne nous donnent pas de sakafo, pas de fanafody, pas de trano!"; Vahaza – stranger; Sakafo – meal; Fanafody – medicine; Trano – housing.

resources, had lost a sense of the societal and family values on which responsibility is built. Trust had to be rebuilt through renewed personal relationships. Perseverance was needed in order to devote the time necessary to re-awaken in them a sense of their duty toward their children. But even then, words alone were insufficient: material help was needed. How could I accomplish such a task? I couldn't give in to fear. Prayer was a great comfort to me, and I found in God the strength I needed to forge ahead.[3]

Every morning, amid the rubbish, I saw a young woman preparing meals. She was a student at the university. Seven young people accompanied her, and they had created a sort of day-care center which looked after about a hundred children. Some students that I had known in Vangaindrano[4] joined this group. Three Sisters of Charity also came to offer us their assistance. At the same time, a seminarian came to see me, and expressed his distress: "How can I do something significant? What is God calling me to do?" I told him what my life as a missionary had taught me. "Studying is important. Growing in faith is vital. But the nourishment you need, in addition to that of the Spirit, is contact with the other. The poor need hope. You can help them discover the resources they have. There are hundreds of destitute families who live in the rubbish. Something must be done. Are you ready to work with them?"

He joined our group. The hand of God was opening the way: a small team of Malagasies was being formed to work with the poorest of the poor in the garbage dump. We started to gather the people together regularly. Near the gathering

[3] "...neither leaving oneself to resignation, which would keep one from letting oneself be guided by love and, as such, to serve man. Prayer, as a means to draw again and again from the strength of Christ, becomes a completely concrete emergency. He who prays does not waste his time, even if that situation seems truly urgent and seems to push one to act. Piety does not weaken the battle against poverty or even against misery of our neighbor." From "God is Love" – Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI – December 25, 2005, paragraph 36

[4] I lived for 15 years (from 1970-1972 and from 1976 to 1989) in Vangaindrano, which was for me like a new novitiate/apprenticeship in order to know and understand the life, the culture and the conditions of the lives of the poor; this shared in the Malagasy language.

place where the adults listened to one another and discussed their situation, volunteers entertained their children with songs and educational activities. The abyss that separated us from these rejected persons was being crossed. We joined with them in searching for a way to meet the challenges that we all faced: to help re-create a fully human life. This would involve a long process of psychological and spiritual re-construction. Little by little, some regained courage. It was as if they had found a sandbar under their feet which gave them firm footing in the ocean of misery that was drowning them.

It took six months for us to line up a number of families to begin an initial project. We had met some older farmers who, impoverished from working on depleted land, had come to the capital hoping to find work. After much discussion, we decided that our primary goal should be to help them return to the land. Numerous families signed up to take part. Our first step was to find land and buy tools and materials so that they could take up farming once more. I visited the religious congregations of Tananarive, and collected seven thousand euros (a miracle!). A dozen of us went on ahead to prepare the way for the farmers 60 kilometers to the northwest of the capital, in the commune of Andranotapahina. The work was hard: building the first wooden huts to shelter the families, digging a well for potable water, and locating the first plots of land for planting. The more we worked, the more we saw how miraculous the project was: for these people, it was a new Exodus to a promised land!

On the 24th of November, seventy families moved into the camp we called Antolojanahary (Gift from God).[5] The number

[5] In the village of Antolojanahary, there are no more wooden huts today; 130 families live in the village which is endowed with a primary school (17 classes), with a secondary school (22 classes), and with a school cafeteria, a health center, a church, a nursery, an orchard, storage for agricultural products and produce, a décortiquerie, a market, soccer fields, basketball courts, and volleyball courts.

of families was low compared to how many had initially enlisted. Many did not have the courage to start all over. As we waited for the first harvest, we provided all the help we could for these families: one meal per day! It was extremely little nourishment, considering that clearing land which had never been cultivated was a very difficult task. A month later, at the beginning of 1990, we opened our first school, just a tiny wooden frame covered with canvas. The children sat on the ground. We laid planks on top of logs to serve as desks.

What to do now with the hundreds of families who stayed behind in the rubbish of Andralanitra? Could we at least help them prepare one daily meal? We had to find resources to buy rice, the staple of the Malagasy diet, so that they would not have to beg for it on the streets or search for it in garbage bins. Few had gone to school and few possessed jobs. One common sense solution emerged from our discussions: "the stones". Indeed, a few kilometers away from our camp, there was a granite quarry in a place called Macolline.[6] We decided to start a new project: to produce bricks, slabs, cobblestones and gravel and sell them to construction companies so that we could use the profits to pay the workers and to buy rice. We bought some sledgehammers and pickaxes with the money that we received from the religious Congregations. While the women were not always able to take on this very demanding work, they took on other tasks courageously and set an example for the men, who were generally more timid in responding to difficulties.

6 "Macolline" was named by the impoverished who came to live in "Manantenasoa", that is to say "Hope".

We voted on work rules. We urged everyone to respect everyone else's work and decided that each night we would count how much each worker had produced so that he or she could be paid for that day's work. But after a couple of weeks, we noticed that our gravel pile was not getting any bigger. So one night we organized some surveillance and surprised a few workers who had come back after dark to steal the gravel. Gathering everyone at the quarry, we reminded them that we were trying to emerge from poverty together and that theft is intolerable. A few days later, the guards caught another thief who said to them, "This isn't your quarry. I'll do what I want here and watch out if you talk!" He hit a guard with a rock. The guard had to be hospitalized immediately and fought for his life for two weeks. I gathered all the workers together again. I couldn't hide my anger. But I felt I had to be hard in order to make the workers understand the rules and to reestablish discipline.

Jaona, the man who had been caught stealing, was present at the gathering. I asked him to explain himself. He got up and denied having stolen anything. I told him to leave, since his behavior was threatening the work of all and the future of our enterprise. That evening, on the way home, I happened to be passing by the house where Jaona lived. I saw him with his head buried in his hands, his wife at his side. I said to him, "Jaona, I want to speak to you. Let's go inside." I reminded him that he had almost killed one of his brothers, someone as poor as he was, a man who wanted to overcome poverty by working. I urged him to go and ask this brother for forgiveness. His wife encouraged him to say yes, but he remained silent. I knew that he wanted to speak, but wasn't able to. I realized that he needed time to summon up, from deep within himself, the courage to speak, and that only by asking forgiveness would his heart be freed from the guilt he felt. An hour later, he finally said: "Tomorrow, I will go to the hospital and ask for forgiveness, and I will also ask forgiveness of all the workers at the quarry." His wife cried! I then said: "Jaona, when you have asked for forgiveness, you can return to the quarry."

Our project was saved. This difficult episode was a lesson for the future. We had to exclude those who would not accept the discipline of daily work or who stole and lied. Thefts continued from time to time, but little by little they diminished.

II. Building Durably

Our "Akamasoa" Association

Our tiny team had begun its work with few material resources but a lot of faith. We made decisions only after listening attentively to the poor. Our initial projects convinced some religious Congregations to give us the financial support we needed to complete them. Progress was possible only because of the persistence of our team. On Sunday, the 13th of January 1990, we formed a legally recognized association and gave it the name of Akamasoa (Good Friends).

We adopted three principles to help the poor themselves build their future. We determined to:

1. recognize the dignity of each person and promote employment, so that the people might emerge from economic misery;[7]
2. offer instruction in schools, so that children would have the capacity to learn a skill; and
3. provide education in family and social values, so that people would live in solidarity and peace.

We described Akamasoa as a "Humanitarian Association" because it unites its members so closely. We discussed our plans at length with all the people who joined us, with the hope that they would make these three principles theirs and concretize them in their lives.

Right from the start, we created committees at the worksites and in the villages to provide security, to care for the sick, to watch small children, to supervise the school, to sponsor sporting and cultural events, and to organize prayer. These committees revived the Malagasy tradition of regular communal meetings, which had been largely destroyed when people were living in miserable conditions. Of course, participation was not unanimous; but we would never have been able to carry our plans over the next seventeen years if the vast majority of members, most of whom are young, had not become actively involved.

The level of participation and organization grew as we hired young, jobless university students who came looking for work. When we interviewed them, we looked for honesty and a desire to see their country develop. Experience convinced us that when those two criteria were met, the results would be beneficial.

From the beginning, we made sure that the running of Akamasoa would stay in the hands of the Malagasy, so that the

[7] "...if anyone would not work, neither should he eat." 2 Th. 3:10

project's future would be assured. We were convinced that it was the local people who understood the situation in the country and the misery of the poor, and who would find ways to change the situation while respecting Malagasy cultural and social customs.

It was a labor of love and perseverance, not merely one of technical skill. We often recalled the words that St. Vincent repeated over and over again, "Love is infinitely resourceful." Experience taught us that creating a sustainable future for a community requires a reflective process in which concrete goals are identified. We decided to evaluate our work together at periodic meetings of the leadership team. The whole team now comes together every Sunday to discuss the problems we have run into during the week, search for solutions, and adjust our programs accordingly.

After 17 years, what changes do we observe in the behavior of the 17,000 people who live in the villages of Akamasoa? Many have acquired a sense of familial and societal responsibility. A clear indicator is our children's success on national exams: Akamasoa's children are the best in all of Madagascar. This means that our community's schools are competitive and parents support their children in their studies. Participation in community activities has also become impressive: neighborhood committees guarantee public safety and the maintenance of our villages. Finally, a true spirit of solidarity has developed with the creation of our Solidarity Treasury, which allows us to finance health care.

No victory is won once and for all. We continue to struggle to counteract unhealthy environmental factors: political corruption; widespread begging on the streets of the city; the selfishness of the "me" culture and of easy sex, transmitted by western media. We try to face the future realistically and humbly. Our hope is that the upcoming generation has learned that a fully human life – one which is principled and fraternal – is a difficult daily battle. Our work with the poor requires that we think and rethink our plans and that we begin over and over again.

Lodging and social services

At Akamasoa we made our first priority the humanization of peoples' living conditions. We set out to build lodgings quickly, even if only provisional ones, and to organize stable community services.

The funds we raised by selling products from the quarry allowed us to buy planks, nails, saws and hammers. We invited the homeless to build their own dwellings with these materials. Some of them quickly acquired the *savoir faire* to teach and supervise their fellow builders. Some prepared canvas for the roofs. Others built latrines. Some of the older people no longer had the strength to work, but those who were more able helped them perform community jobs like cleaning the areas surrounding the huts, watching the children, and preparing meals. One day I discovered that flowers had been planted. Someone had taken the initiative to bring beauty back to those who had lived in ugly surroundings for so long! Our first makeshift village soon became a community. Human living conditions replaced miserable ones. We hoped that this first instance of success would spark hope in other families.

In 1994, we started a program of building brick lodgings (there are nearly 2,000 such homes today) instead of the wooden huts, and we began the construction of social service buildings. We were able to do this because of financial aid from the outside. We obtained funds because we proved that we would not give up and were determined to overcome the difficulties that we met each day as thousands of people came to ask for help.

Because my father was a mason and had taught me how to build houses when I was 18, I was able to be useful in this project. I took care of the professional training of masons and construction crews, and taught the new masons how to train others too. Today, we pay more than 400 construction workers who provide quality work at all our construction sites. Numerous others have found jobs outside Akamasoa because of the training they received from us.

We are sometimes criticized for building homes and social facilities that are "too luxurious". But why should people whom society had abandoned to a heap of rubbish not have a brick home of 60 square meters that shelters an average family with five children?[8]

Our villages have now become urban communities with homes, stores, water fountains, a sewage system, workshops, solar-powered public lighting, schools with cafeterias, daycare and health centers, a hospital, maternity wards, administrative offices, meeting and celebration halls, places of worship, sports fields and cemeteries. As a result, a thousand community-service jobs have been created for the maintenance of streets and administrative offices, garbage pick-up, public safety and the other tasks of urban management.

Education, responsibility and discipline

The people whom we welcomed into our community had been doubly rejected: physically, since they had been forced into the garbage dump or abandoned on the streets, and socially, since the people in the city referred to them as "4 MI", an expression that expresses contempt[9] for the poor and designates alcohol, drugs, theft, and prostitution as their means of survival. Of course, that type of behavior is to be deplored, but so too is a situation in which the political, social and economic

[8] We have four types of sturdy lodgings: individual lodgings that shelter a family and three types of collective lodgings sheltering two, three or four families.

[9] "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her... Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." (Jn 8:7, 11)

structure in which these people lived brought about such inhuman conditions.

We spend many hours each day in meetings teaching residents that individual and social responsibility form the basis for self-respect. We begin by emphasizing the importance of education in school and at home, as well as concern for the common good.[10] Without self-respect, peaceful societal relationships will not exist.

Attendance at school depends on the collaboration of the children's families. Those who are hungry, who lack healthy living conditions and who cannot meet basic human needs often do not have the freedom to go to school. For that reason, the battle against poverty must take into account all the fundamental needs of the human person: food, lodging, work, and healthcare, in addition to education. These are the foundations of freedom.

To help prevent relapses into the problems mentioned above, and also to foster respect for the common good, we composed, with the help of the people themselves, a *Dina*, which, in the Malagasy culture, means a set of social rules or village agreements. The principal rules that we formulated treat the residents' obligation to work and to send their children to school, the maintaining of harmonious relationships between individuals and within families, and the conditions for owning a home and its upkeep. This *Dina* includes sanctions as a last resort, including the possibility of exclusion from the community. Unfortunately, sometimes we are forced to invoke those sanctions in order to protect the community, particularly in the case of the sale of drugs.

[10] Akamasoa provides schooling to 8,500 students in the villages of Tananarive (primary, secondary and high school) in 155 classes with 200 teachers and educators. The rate of scholarly success are far from the best of the province: 90% in primary, 75% in secondary and 80% in high school.

How can we not reach out to those who come to us every day? We respond to their needs at our Help Center in Mangarivotra. Each day, our social workers welcome dozens of poor, homeless men and women, including many elderly people and single mothers. Our team listens to countless requests, the most common of which are "give us something to eat", "heal my sick child, he is going to die", and "help us find a home". In response to these pleas, our means are limited. Eventually we formulated a rule for ourselves: tailor support systems to each situation, so that people achieve autonomy as soon as possible. Progress toward autonomy takes time. It requires an evaluation of each person's capacity. Depending on the circumstances, we provide food, healthcare, clothing, and tools. Those who are willing to work toward self-sufficiency are invited to join our association.

Have all succeeded in living a better life? No. Huge progress has been made, but some return to us several times.

One of our success stories is that of Mr. Claude, who came to us with his five children. His wife had left him. He was a baker and pastry maker who had lost his job. His request was simple: "I want to make pastry. Would you give me 25 kg of flour, 12 packages of yeast, 12 kg of sugar and 5 liters of oil, so that I can get a start?" After consultation, we decided to meet his request and provide him with the materials he needed to make a fresh start. He went back home and now supports his family as a pastry maker.

Another success story is that of Eloi, his wife, and their three little girls. "I had opened a small business selling things along the street," he told us when he arrived. "I fell gravely ill. We didn't have enough savings to pay for the medications I needed, so we had to sell our furniture. I could no longer pay the rent, and we found ourselves living on the street. Everything fell apart. We ate rubbish that we dug out of dumpsters. Akamasoa offered me work in the quarry. It was beyond my physical capabilities. So my wife went there. With the ration of flour that she received as pay, I began to make and sell 'mofomenakely' on a small makeshift table. We were able to buy thermoses and coffee cups, and then a twenty-holed mold to make 'mofogasy' and 'ramanonaka'[11] and a cabinet to store our merchandise. My wife was accepted for a position at the association's daycare center at Mahatsinjo. She was then able to help me with the business too. Now, we hope to open a small grocery store." Eloi's story is a powerful witness to the possibilities open to those who come to our association for assistance.

Some of the leaders[12] of our association are from the province of Fianarantsoa, 400 kilometers to the south of Tananarive. Various civic organizations and public authorities from that area, especially the communes of Vangaindrano and Alakamisy-Ambohimaha[13], came to ask for our assistance. Our team agreed to provide them with technical support as well as administrative personnel, but we insisted that they respect local customs and that they follow our operating principle of listening carefully to the people's requests and that they give priority to those who show promise of becoming autonomous. We financed and supervised the repair of trails and bridges and the construction of irrigation ditches, hydrants, schools, healthcare centers, maternity wards, sports fields, churches, and other things. These activities stimulated local employment and fostered social and economic development. Over the past few years, we have been asked to provide similar support in the provinces of Tuléar, South Amboasary, Bekily and Fort-Dauphin. Our activities in these areas, which are far from the capital, respect local wisdom and practices, and encourage new initiatives for the economic and social development of the rural poor.[14]

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11 Mofogasy – sweet rice fritters; Ramanonaka – savory rice fritters

12 Now 391 people, all Malagasy, assure the proper function of Akamasoa: 10 for management and personnel, 249 teachers, 40 healthcare providers, 26 social workers and 15 technicians.

13 Vangaindrano, on the southeast coast of the "Great Island", is 800 kilometers from Tananarive and 400 from Fianarantsoa; Alakamisy-Ambohimaha is 30 kilometers to the north of Fianarantsoa.

14 More than 12 million Malagasy live in rural zones (75% of the population) two thirds of whom live below the poverty level.

Our Financial Partners

We needed major financial help to run our programs in Tananarive and the provinces over the past 17 years. People have often asked me, "How did Akamasoa obtain all the funding needed to assist 17,000 people in an ongoing way, instruct 8,500 children, and help over 250,000 impoverished people?" My first response is always, "Providence! God is our best business partner!" That response leaves many international financial experts speechless, because they cannot imagine that we really rely on God's daily love. But without faith nourished through prayer, it would have been impossible for us to face the difficulties we had to overcome in order to accompany the poor in their terrible human, economic and social circumstances. Our conviction, rooted in the heritage of Saint Vincent, is that integral development is not possible without love.

Our first programs, financed by seven religious Congregations in Madagascar, focused on helping farmers return to the land at Antolojanahary, creating the quarry in Macolline, and building the first wood huts in Manantenaosa. All were highly visible projects that caught the attention of the media, which publicized our work. After the fourth year, major financial resources came our way and a snowball effect developed. Some of the NGOs, charitable associations, and donors that had confidence in us from the beginning were Manos Unidas, APPO and MAP MONACO, Electricians Without Borders, Doctors Without Borders, UNICEF, The Friends of Father Pedro from France, Madagascar and Us, Kiwanis of Austria, Reggio Terzo Mondo, P.A.M. and the Multi-Aid Association, AIDMOI from the Island of Reunion, the St. Bruno Association, the Saint John of God Center, Sharing and Friendship, Birth in Safata, the embassies of France, Canada, Germany, and Japan in Madagascar, and perhaps most importantly, the European Union. Church groups also provided valuable aid, including Misereor, Secours Catholique of Paris, CCFD, Aid to the Church in Distress, Service to the Missions of the Vincentians in Paris, and the Missionary Center of Slovenia. A number of these associations continue to help us to this day.

Donors often focus on projects that bring about specific results within a definite time-frame, so they eventually stop offering the financial assistance that they initially provided. To ensure the long-term viability of our work, we took great pains to finance many of our projects from our own economic activities. Today, almost half of our needs are self-financed.

Because our program is now well known, numerous private contributors have also helped us, often anonymously. One case is particularly memorable. While on a plane trip, a woman rose from her seat and came to ask me, "Are you Father Pedro?" "Yes, ma'am," I replied. She returned to her seat, but, not long afterwards, came back and handed me a check without waiting for any thanks. Her gift was two thousand euros! I sought her out and found her peacefully occupied with a book. I expressed my sincerest gratitude.

After years of pounding on the government's door, our association finally received recognition from Madagascar as a Public Entity.[15] This was an important concession from the State, because among other things it exempted us from the import tax on food, a tax which we had paid for many years.

III. Five strategies for fighting poverty

Before outlining some strategies for fighting poverty, I want to share some things that experience has taught me. To the question, "How did you do this?" my response is a simple one: "We help the poor by listening, by acting as quickly as possible, and by taking the whole human person into consideration." It is that simple.

I do not believe that poverty can be defeated once and for all. Selfishness and egotism are present in all cultures, and poverty will exist in all societies. Each generation will have to fight it anew. However, I object to the assertion that some people are fated to live in poverty. Statements like that serve as an excuse

15 Decree of 2004-164 of February 3, 2004

for irresponsibility on the part of political leaders and of those who cling to material riches. Fighting poverty is the duty, however difficult, of all human beings. We need to change people's hearts. The philosopher Paul Ricœur once noted, "Kindness is more profound than evil. We need to unleash this truth."

Below are five strategies which we use to direct the fight against poverty. They flow from experience and common sense and are adaptable to specific situations. They all have a single objective: to show concretely in daily life the love given us by God.

STRATEGY 1: *Go and Listen to the Poor*

Little by little, misery suffocates people. The destitute become accustomed to the worst situations and lose their enthusiasm for life. By listening to the poor, we can help rekindle the fire which has been smothered by years of sorrow and hopelessness. Side by side with them, we try to share their burdens and untangle the strings of each person's unique story, so that he or she can live fully again. The input of the poor themselves is the most crucial element in any plan to change their lives. By listening to their needs and working together with them, we can bring projects to fruition.

STRATEGY 2: *Do What We Say We Will Do*

Overly ambitious programs become unreachable dreams, mirages which only cause more hopelessness. The confidence of the participants in a project grows as immediate, everyday difficulties are resolved. It is important to think concretely and to adapt programs to the real conditions of the place. This requires the use of simple language that everyone understands. Projects must be designed together, taking into account all the dimensions of the human person: body, heart and spirit. Building up a community by challenging it to go beyond individualism is crucial, as is discerning the gifts of each person so that everyone can share the responsibilities. In the words of a Malagasy axiom, our goal is that "all will put their hands in the dough."

STRATEGY 3: *Call upon the Young*

Despite poverty, young people living on the street often have extraordinary energy and enthusiasm. Many provide secret support for their mothers. Young women frequently set an example for young men. The young are the seed from which the future will grow. It is crucial to include them in every community project. If they are entrusted with responsibility gradually, they develop the ability to grapple with concrete problems. Education is the foundation of their future. Sports and cultural activities help them mature and bond. Eventually, they become capable of training the next generation to continue the fight against poverty.

STRATEGY 4: *Show Deep Respect for the Local Culture*

Each society is unique, with its own culture and its own shared wisdom. Programs should respect local customs. Families are the basic cell of every society. It is essential to forge a link between one generation and the next. When we come to help a group, we begin by listening to the elders, for they see society through the lense of fidelity, courage, honesty, love and solidarity. Recognizing that a community, as it looks to the future, renews its culture only by dialogue with the past, we show respect for the heritage that its ancestors have left.

STRATEGY 5: *"It Is the Spirit That Makes a Man"16*

Material progress never completely satisfies the longing in people's hearts. Our spirits are restless as we seek a sense of purpose in life. The spark of God resides in all and moves the human heart to go beyond our limited daily horizons. In Akamasoa, we recognize that we must help people

to experience life's surprises. When we explore the mystery of the covenant between God and humanity, when we develop the gifts of compassion, mercy, and sharing, we move beyond the limits of human justice and begin to spread a charity that has no bounds. In this way, we live in joy and peace because we love deeply. To that end, we attempt to return continually to the source of the Good News and open our hearts to it. If we do that faithfully, then, in the footsteps of Christ, we ourselves will be Good News.

Fr. Pedro Opeka was born in 1948 in San Martin, Argentina, to parents who had emigrated from Slovenia to escape the totalitarian regime of Tito. After initial schooling in Argentina, he continued his studies in Slovenia and then at the Catholic Institute in Paris. He was ordained a priest of the Congregation of the Mission in 1975. He speaks Slovenian, Spanish, French, Italian, and Malagasy. He has served in Madagascar since 1970 and is the founder of Akamasoa, an extraordinary work where he combined deep faith with his skills as a mason, a trade he learned from his father. On October 12, 2007, in view of his outstanding works among the poor, he was named a knight of the Legion of Honor, the highest honor awarded by the French government.

I Have a D.R.E.A.M.

By Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

When Ana Maria first arrived at the DREAM Center in Matola, Mozambique, she represented, in many ways, the face of the grim reality of AIDS in the developing world. Upon discovering that she was HIV positive, her husband had left her and her neighbors had isolated her. As she struggled to take care of her six children, she realized that she was dying. By the time she arrived to participate in Project DREAM, she weighed a skeletal 64 pounds. Today, however, Ana Maria is an inspiring example of the possibilities of projects like DREAM; she and her children are well. In fact, Ana Maria is full of fighting talk and enthusiasm as she promotes the struggle against AIDS, fuelled by her awareness that she would be dead if she had not received treatment.

The Grim Reality of AIDS in the World

Today, with early diagnosis, proper care and well-monitored drug therapy, a person who is HIV-positive can live a relatively normal life; in the United States and Western Europe, most do. But in poorer countries, most die, since few receive high-quality treatment. Worldwide, AIDS killed 2.1 million people in 2007, and the total number of people living with HIV

reached its highest level in history, an estimated 33.2 million people. In 2007, 2.5 million new cases emerged; about 420,000 of these were among children under the age of 15. While the number of deaths from AIDS in the USA and Western Europe has diminished dramatically because of drug therapy, it remains the leading cause of death worldwide for people between the ages of 15 and 49.

The Reality in sub-Saharan Africa

No region has been hit harder than sub-Saharan Africa, where an estimated 22.5 million people have HIV/AIDS. In fact, two thirds of HIV cases worldwide are found in sub-Saharan Africa, including 61% of all women with HIV. The World Health Organization estimates that 95% of those with the virus do not know they have it. South Africa has the highest population living with HIV/AIDS (5,500,000) of any country in the world. Swaziland has the highest adult prevalence rate in the world, 33.4 percent.

One of the most striking demographic impacts of HIV/AIDS is its effect on life expectancy; the steady gains made in many countries during the last century have been reversed. Already, life expectancy for women in six highly affected countries has dropped to below 40 years. Today, a woman born in the USA can expect to live to 80; a woman born in Swaziland can expect to live to 32.9. A woman born in Japan can expect to live to 85.4; a woman born in Zimbabwe can expect to live to 36.5.

The Genesis of a New Approach

At the dawn of the third millennium, the Community of Sant'Egidio, many of whose members are health-care professionals, began to reflect on a glaring injustice in the global social structure: the majority of those with AIDS in Western

Europe and the United States were no longer dying because they received "triple-therapy," whereas millions of AIDS victims in Africa continued to die each year.

Sant'Egidio, a lay community founded in 1968 in Rome and recognized canonically by the Catholic Church, has a special bond with Mozambique. The relationship began in the early 1980s when Sant'Egidio sent humanitarian aid to Mozambique during the country's long, devastating civil war; it reached a high point when the community mediated the peace agreement signed in Rome on October 4, 1992 after 27 months of negotiations. After communal reflection on the AIDS crisis in Africa, the community formulated this priority: it would offer the same treatment, and the same hope, to patients in Africa as was available to victims in Western Europe and the United States. Consequently, the Community designed DREAM and began a pilot project in Mozambique in March 2002.

DREAM

The acronym DREAM signifies "Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition." Since 2002, Project DREAM has had extraordinary success in Africa by applying the state-of-the-art standards of treatment now used in developed countries. Recently the World Health Organization (WHO) chose it as a case study for treating AIDS.

DREAM provides treatment to children and adults who are HIV-positive, but its special focus is to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS from a pregnant woman to her newborn child and to maintain the ongoing health of the mother. The method

used is highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART), which is sometimes called "triple therapy" because of the three drugs administered. DREAM's success rate is very high: 98% of children born to HIV-infected mothers taking part in the project are born HIV-free. The ongoing results are carefully monitored daily through a computer hookup between Mozambique and Rome, so that DREAM, in addition to being a treatment program, conducts ongoing research aimed at improving patient-care. Accurate diagnosis plays a crucial role in DREAM. For that reason, a molecular biology laboratory is essential for analyzing the patients' situation, monitoring their therapy and counteracting any toxic effects the drug therapy might have.

DREAM has been creative in inventing means for keeping the adherence-rate of participants high. Its goal is 95% adherence. The principal incentive, of course, is the success of the therapy itself. Other means are home visits, a day hospital, a mother/child healthcare center, and a daycare program to which pregnant women bring their children, thus guaranteeing their presence twice a day for medication, at drop-off and pick-up times.

Hunger and malnutrition weaken the defenses of patients and increase the likelihood of their dying. In Mozambique, for example, about 14% of infants have a below-average weight at birth. For this reason, DREAM also monitors patients' nutritional state, devotes time to health education, promotes a balanced diet, and, with the help of the World Food Program and other NGOs, provides for food distribution to mothers and their families.

DREAM works in partnership with host nations, though its funding does not pass through local governments, and it focuses on capacity-building within local communities and the training of indigenous personnel, so that eventually local constituencies can take over the running of the program. In each country an agreement is signed with the Ministry of Health to assure the government's cooperation and support for DREAM.

The Partners

In June 2005, the Community of Sant'Egidio entered into a cooperative agreement with the Daughters of Charity, one of the world's largest communities of sisters, founded by St. Vincent de Paul in 1633 to serve the sick and the poor. At present the Daughters labor in 21 African countries and have numerous native-born sisters there. They staff hospitals and clinics in most of the 93 countries where they serve throughout the world and have well-trained personnel.

With the birth of this new agreement, the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity appointed a "DREAM Team" whose members are Sr. Catherine Mulligan and Sr. Jacqueline Gbanga. They represent the Mother General at the many meetings involved in launching DREAM in various countries. At the request of both the Daughters of Charity and the Community of Sant'Egidio, I serve as coordinator for the joint programs in which the two communities collaborate, sometimes with the assistance of other groups. My role is basically one of facilitation, helping the various parties work together smoothly. I also

help in making contacts with others who might be interested in collaborating in DREAM.

This cooperation between Sant'Egidio and the Daughters provides significant advantages to both groups. Sant'Egidio provides the DREAM model for AIDS treatment, as well as formation and evaluation in the use of that model. The Daughters provide personnel, their experience in health care, their native contacts within various countries and, perhaps most importantly, the assurance that the resources of the program will reach the poorest of the poor directly. The joint participation of these two communities guarantees that costs are kept low while quality is kept high. The program is totally free of cost for those receiving treatment.

Sant'Egidio and the Daughters are already collaborating in Nigeria, the Congo, Cameroon and Kenya, in addition to Mozambique. The two communities look forward, over the next few years, to initiating further joint projects in Burundi, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Meanwhile, Sant'Egidio is collaborating with other groups in other countries: Tanzania, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Malawi and Angola. As DREAM expands to new sites, its results are evaluated regularly so that Sant'Egidio and the Daughters can improve the quality of the program as it is established in new locations.

500,000 people have accessed the benefits offered by DREAM, such as nutritional support, water filters, health education, and so on. DREAM's staff members have tested 55,000 people for HIV. They have accompanied 5,500 women throughout their pregnancy and afterwards. Almost all of these

mothers are still alive, and almost all their children have been born HIV-free. Among DREAM's ongoing patients are over 1300 children. This is one of the largest groups of children receiving therapy anywhere in the world.

Since the Daughters of Charity also have significant personnel resources in 18 countries in Asia, they "dream" of establishing DREAM there too, to the extent that finances permit and the governments of those countries allow. The Daughters have a large number of sisters in India, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia and have well-established communities in continental China and Thailand.

In mid-December 2005, the Daughters and Sant'Egidio entered into a new collaborative relationship with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which, through a consortium of partners called AIDSRelief, is now providing anti-retroviral therapy in nine countries under a grant from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The first country to benefit from this new partnership is Nigeria, where in May 2006 a DREAM Center for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission opened in Abuja at a hospital of the Daughters. From there, in 2007 and 2008, a network of centers located at hospitals and clinics which the Daughters staff will extend outward into various parts of the country.

Unfortunately, the next two countries where DREAM centers are about to open, the Congo and Cameroon, are not eligible for PERFAR funds, since they are not on the list of the US government's focus countries.

Formation

In preparation for these collaborative projects, the Community of Sant'Egidio has sponsored thirteen month-long formation programs in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania; 952 participants from 20 countries have taken part. The cours-

es target various groups: doctors, nurses, team coordinators, lab personnel, social workers, computer technicians and home visitors, offering them specialized modules, providing practical experience in DREAM centers, and processing that experience in group sessions. Teachers aim to communicate to participants not only the most up-to-date scientific knowledge about AIDS, but also the principles underlying the DREAM model. In July 2006 almost 100 participants from eight countries joined in a formation program in Malawi with a view toward initiating Project DREAM in their own countries. On October 16, 2006, a similar number of participants gathered in Mozambique for a formation session.

Fallout from AIDS

One of the most tragic effects of AIDS is the huge number of orphans and vulnerable children the disease leaves behind. More than 11.4 million children under the age of 17 have lost one or both parents. UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Program for combating the pandemic, estimates that by 2010 there will be 42 million orphans in Africa. That surpasses the total number of children in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Holland. It also exceeds the number of children in the United States living east of the Mississippi River. With the death of their parents, these children face the loss of family income, the burden of caring for younger siblings, and withdrawal from school in order to provide for family members. They run a significantly greater risk of malnutrition, physical abuse, sexual exploitation, preventable illnesses and HIV infection. As DREAM seeks to counteract AIDS, the Daughters of Charity, the Community of Sant'Egidio, and CRS attempt to provide for the vulnerable children left in its wake.

Another tragic effect is the feminization of AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa, most young people living with HIV/AIDS are girls. 57% of all adults living with HIV/AIDS are women. Teens and young adults are at the center of the epidemic.

A third effect is the loss of leaders and professional people in the next generation: teachers, doctors, nurses and many others who could have helped to transform the life of poor African countries will not be there, as millions and millions of adults and children die. As a result, the poorest countries will likely remain the poorest because they lack the human resources to create a new future.

Financing

Funding the initial and ongoing costs of Project DREAM remains a huge challenge. Even though the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Daughters of Charity, and many CRS volunteers donate their services, startup costs in each country amount to almost a million dollars because of the need to train personnel, build a laboratory, buy equipment and medication and obtain computer hardware and software. Once the program is established, ongoing costs are considerably lower. But laboratory work, staff training, provision of food and the purchase of drugs remain indispensable expense items. Fortunately, DREAM has been able to obtain approved drugs at a much lower price than is possible in the United States and Europe. The annual per patient cost for drug therapy is only $300, a sum that might seem small but is close to the total annual income of many Africans.

The Seton Institute, which was founded in 1985 and has its seat in Daly City, California, has close historical connections with the Daughters of Charity and assists them in fundraising. It seeks support for DREAM from private and public sources. Since a sponsoring organization covers all of the Seton

Institute's operating costs, 100% of every contribution goes directly to aiding healthcare projects. A recently established office of the Daughters of Charity, called International Project Services, is also now assisting in the search for funds. Because the project envisions so many patients in so many countries and because therapy for those who are already HIV-positive is life-long, the ongoing search for both public and private funds is essential.

Systemic Change

Participants in projects such as DREAM are always reminded of the importance of promoting long-term systemic change while meeting the immediate needs of the poor. Of course, in situations where life and death are at stake, providing immediate help and working for systemic change are not an "either/or" option; they are a "both/and" imperative. DREAM attempts to incorporate a series of strategies into its project design, so that its results will be sustainable in the long run. Principal among these are those listed below.

The project:

- involves the poor themselves at all stages: planning, implementation, evaluation and revision
- enlists the service of the sick so that AIDS victims whom DREAM has helped then assist other patients too
- aims to provide quality service, applying to Africa the state-of-the-art standards that are used in Western Europe and the United States. Quality is monitored regularly
- takes a holistic approach, addressing a series of basic human needs: especially health care, nutrition, and education

- includes formation for indigenous people to administer and implement DREAM in an ongoing way
- builds in the human resources (e.g., leadership) and the economic resources which are needed for sustaining each project
- seeks, besides measurable results, to create a sense of belonging, participation, and community "ownership"
- promotes collaborative partnership among various sectors of society: the needy themselves as the principal agents, local and national governments, the private sector (NGO's, businesses), churches and interested individuals.

Along with success stories like that of Ana Maria, the mother whose enrollment in a DREAM Center gave her back her life, DREAM workers also take great inspiration in the stories of the children who have been saved from an HIV-positive future. One such child is Joãozinho, the thousandth baby born to HIV-positive women receiving treatment. He has become a symbol of DREAM and one of its most loved patients. Like other children born in DREAM before and since, he now has the chance to lead a healthy life.

Joãozinho has another reason to rejoice as he faces the future: his mother is alive and healthy and will take care of him in the years to come. Treatment helped her so much that, as her medication was phased down, her immune system became almost normal.

As the success of treatment at the DREAM Center in Matola, Mozambique, has become well-known, husbands are now com-

ing in increasing numbers for testing. So it is very probable that Joãozinho will lose neither mother nor father and will avoid joining the ranks of the millions of orphans in sub-Saharan Africa, making him the ultimate success story and the realization of a true dream for the people of the DREAM Center.

Fr. Robert Maloney is a priest of the Congregation of the Mission. After serving for many years in seminaries, he became the pastor at a missionary parish in Boquerón, Panama, and had pastoral care of 38 villages in the surrounding area. In 1986 he was elected as Assistant General of the Congregation of the Mission. In 1992 he was elected to a six-year term as Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity and was re-elected in 1998. Since 2005 he has been the Coordinator of the joint efforts of the Daughters of Charity and the Community of Sant'Egidio in Project DREAM, a program for combating AIDS, especially in Africa. He also serves as Chairperson of a Commission for Promoting Strategic Change in works among the poor. He is the author of numerous articles on spirituality, published particularly in America *and* Review for Religious *and of six books:* The Way of Vincent de Paul; He Hears the Cry of the Poor; Seasons in Spirituality; Go: On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul; Turn Everything to Love: a Rule of Life for Lay Members of the Vincentian Family; *and* Faces of Holiness.

Strategies for Systemic Change

Mission-Oriented Strategies

By Patricia P. de Nava

The strategies described in this chapter and in three later chapters are not the product of abstract reflection; they are the fruit of practical experience. The Commission for Promoting Systemic Change, adopting as a starting point a group of projects in which systemic change has actually taken place, analyzed the project leaders' stories and then identified a series of strategies that helped produce lasting change in the lives of the poor. It was quickly clear that many of these strategies flow from the Gospels and from our Vincentian tradition.In an address given in New York on October 2nd, 1979, Pope John Paul II encouraged his listeners to analyze the situation of the poor carefully, to identify the structural roots of poverty and to formulate concrete solutions:

> *Social thinking and social practice inspired by the Gospel must always be marked by a special sensitivity towards those who are most in distress, those who are extremely poor, those suffering… from hunger, neglect, unemployment and despair. You will also want to seek out the structural reasons which foster or cause the different forms of poverty in the world and in your own country, so that you can apply the appropriate remedies.*

The Commission has attempted to seek out the structural reasons for poverty and to find appropriate remedies. For pedagogical purposes, the strategies which we have identified are grouped below in four categories, though the reader will notice that, in practice, they overlap and interact with one another:

1. Mission-oriented strategies (focusing on direction and motivation)

2. People-oriented strategies (focusing on the poor as the persons who are most capable of changing their own situations)

3. Task-oriented strategies (focusing on organization)

4. Strategies directed toward co-responsibility, networking and political action (focusing on participation and solidarity).

I. Mission-oriented strategies (direction and motivation)

Under this heading, the Commission identified three strategies that proved fundamental in each of the systemic change projects we examined. These strategies are closely related to our identity as Christians who attempt to listen to the word of God attentively and to our identity as members of the Vincentian Family who seek to serve the poor in word and work. The strategies are:

- Consider poverty not just as the inevitable result of circumstances, but as the product of unjust situations that can be changed, and focus on actions that will break the cycle of poverty.
- Design projects, creative approaches, policies and guidelines that flow from our Christian and Vincentian values and mission.
- Evangelize while maintaining a profound respect for the local culture, thus inculturating our Christian and Vincentian charism and values within that culture.

Etymologically, the word "strategy" comes from a Greek root referring to the role of a general who executes well-designed plans as effectively as possible during peace and war. In that sense, designing and executing strategies is both an art and a science, and involves a plan of action that is geared toward a specific goal.

The first strategy, **"Consider poverty not just as the inevitable result of circumstances, but as the product of unjust situations that can be changed, and focus on actions that will break the cycle of poverty,"** aims at developing a fundamental attitude; namely, that individuals and society need to view the cycle of poverty as breakable rather than inevitable. Without this conviction, nothing will happen. The U.N. Millennium Development Goals affirm that the world possesses more than enough material goods to satisfy the needs of all members of the human race. The poor remain poor largely because of changeable economic and social structures that favor the interest of the strongest and work to the detriment of the weakest.

Pope John Paul II wrote in *Solicitudo rei socialis* (16):

> *One must denounce the existence of economic, financial and social mechanisms which, although they are manipulated by people, often function almost automatically, thus accentuating the situation of wealth for some, and poverty for the rest. These mechanisms, which are maneuvered directly or indirectly by the more developed countries, by their very functioning favor the interests of the people manipulating them and in the end they suffocate or condition the economies of the less-developed countries.*

It is essential that individuals and groups work to change such unjust "mechanisms". Poverty can be eradicated only by building just social structures in which the poor have equal access to education, employment, housing, health care, nutrition and other basic human needs. In an address given in February 2005 at Trafalgar Square during a rally to "Make Poverty History", Nelson Mandela noted:

> *Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is a human creation and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity – it is an act of justice. It is my wish that this award helps activists around the world to shine their candle of hope for the forgotten prisoners of poverty.*

Fredrick Ozanam, the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, made precisely the same point 160 years ago: "Charity is not sufficient. It treats the wounds but does not stop the blows that cause them … Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is Justice's role to prevent the attacks."

All the projects that the Commission examined began in situations that cried out for justice. In speaking of the villages served by the Homeless Peoples Federation in the Philippines, Fr. Norberto Carcellar describes such a situation:

> *These settlements have many characteristics similar to slums around the world: rapidly increasing population; limited access to basic social services; no legal possession of land and housing. They are often located in high-risk areas such as dumpsites, shorelines, under bridges, or alongside railways. These communities represent the "invisible" city, hidden behind gaily painted walls and more often than not omitted from official maps and documents. They are excluded from participation in governance structures, further restricting their already limited access to resources. This situation is exacerbated by government policies which rarely distinguish between overall poverty and poverty in the slums, resulting in urban development policies and investments that do not include or properly serve slum areas. Consequently, as the country increasingly adopts open market economics and cities strive to be more globally competitive, the poor are pushed more and more to the fringes of society.*

Similar circumstances can be found all over the world.

The second strategy, **"Design projects, creative strategies, policies and guidelines that flow from our Christian and Vincentian values and mission"** affirms that we will best bring about systemic change when there is a close affinity between the projects we design and our Christian and Vincentian values, so that those values guide whatever we do in the service of the

poor. The Vincentian mission is clear. St. Vincent, after a period of wandering as a young priest, committed himself to following Christ as the evangelizer and servant of the poor. He believed that God guides human history and has entered it definitively in Jesus. He was equally convinced that the actions of Christ's followers are the signs of God's providence in the world. He wrote to a friend: "There is no better way to assure our eternal happiness than to live and die in the service of the poor within the arms of Providence and in a real renunciation of ourselves by following Jesus Christ" (SV III.392). Vincent knew how to give concrete shape to ideas. He founded associations and communities that have lasted for almost four centuries, and laid down both a spiritual and an economic foundation for all the works he began. Combining prayer and action, he urged his followers to give themselves completely to God and to the poor. A dynamic blend of the spiritual and the practical is a keystone in the spiritual foundation of his family.

In his first encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the importance of this combination of prayer and action, writing:

> *We can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it might seem that, in any event, nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive... People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbors, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor, but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service.* (*Deus Caritas Est*, 36).

The third strategy, **"Evangelize while maintaining a profound respect for the local culture, thus inculturating our Christian and Vincentian charism and values within that culture"** emphasizes that we should evangelize "by word and

work", as St. Vincent puts it. But at the same time, to use Vatican II's phrase (*Ad Gentes* 11, 15), we should value the "seeds of the Word" present in each culture, and avoid transporting foreign values unconsciously from one nation or one era to another. Each culture must be evangelized, and all evangelization must be inculturated. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II writes:

> *It is by means of "inculturation" that one proceeds towards the full restoration of the covenant with the Wisdom of God, which is Christ Himself. The whole Church will be enriched also by the cultures which, though lacking technology, abound in human wisdom and are enlivened by profound moral values.*

Cultural values are transmitted through any number of methods and vehicles: religion, rites, sayings, proverbs, legends, folklore, myths, fables, customs, laws, meals, language, literature, poetry, drama, songs, hymns, lullabies, artifacts, crafts and physical symbols. Recognizing this, Fr. Pedro Opeka writes of the strategy used in Akamasoa

> *Each society is unique, with its own culture and its own shared wisdom. Programs should respect local customs. Families are the basic cell of every society. It is essential to forge a link between one generation and the next. When we come to help a group, we begin by listening to the elders, for they see society through the lens of fidelity, courage, honesty, love and solidarity. Recognizing that a community, as it looks to the future, renews its culture only by dialogue with the past, we show respect for the heritage that its ancestors have left.*

"The Perfect Storm": Achieving Systemic Change in San Jose de Ocoa

By Deacon Eugene B. Smith

A "perfect storm" is the concept of a series of extraordinarily destructive elements that, taken singly, would pose little danger; however when they come together to create catastrophic results. What if a perfect storm could produce positive results? What if a "storm" was what was needed? Such a "perfect" storm infused life giving change into the Dominican Republic's San Jose de Ocoa. A community of people generated it. Powerful positive elements intersected, creating a unified vibrant community.

Poorest of the Poor

A few years ago, the Ocoa River community was plagued by thousands of infant deaths, chronic hunger, a shortage of clean water, and practically non-existent sanitation facilities. People scarcely existed day to day. With no assurance of food or survival, the women walked for miles each day just to obtain water from often polluted streams. Families tried to help each other exist, yet they struggled on their own. This sight filled Jack Eshman's eyes when he arrived at San Jose de Ocoa.

This was Jack's first visit to a developing country. As an active member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Jack was experienced in assisting families in crisis - those in need of

food, clothing and basic necessities. He and his fellow Vincentians in Long Island, New York, visited people who had lost jobs or experienced havoc creating illnesses. Jack thought he had seen the many faces of poverty. Single mothers struggling to care for their families on limited incomes, having to make choices between paying the rent and buying food for their children, elderly women and men isolated and lonely with barely enough money to provide for their daily existence – these faces were heartbreakingly familiar.

Jack arrived believing he was prepared for the sight of the Ocoa River area village communities, instead felt stunned and overwhelmed by it. Like many Americans before him who visit developing countries, he saw malnourished children and infants in unfathomable numbers. No clean water, sanitation or proper nutrition existed. He saw the filth and degradation of poverty – and it pained him to his core. This was Jack's introduction to the poorest of the poor.

Jack knew he and his fellow Vincentians must help. He learned that the greatest basic need was clean water. He daily saw the women of the village, like women all over the developing world, walk for miles with buckets on their heads and children on their backs in search of life giving water. Distant streams were the only sources of such water. The area supported no farming or even the raising of the smallest chickens, with which families might sustain themselves. Jack realized, "We in the United States must respond. We have so much and they have so little." He didn't have the answers; all he thought about was finding solutions.

Intersecting Positive Elements

A vision emerged – a project developed. The lives of thousands in the Ocoa River area were forever changed. Jack, Father Louis Quinn (Father Lou) and the people of San Jose de Ocoa achieved a life sustaining change. One would have to ask, "How did they do it?

Jim Claffey, another Vincentian from Long Island, with much animation shared his excitement: "It was incredible what happened! A "perfect" storm. First, you have the visionary - Father Lou, the pastor of the Ocoa River parish (over a hundred impoverished villages). Second, Jack and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul resources and the last most needed element, the people of the Ocoa River.

Father Lou was the first "perfect" storm element. He arrived in the Dominican Republic years before as a young Canadian Scarborough missionary to evangelize the poor. He soon realized, as St. Vincent de Paul did, that you cannot expect people to embrace the Gospel message if they and their children are without the basics of life. Father Lou had the vision of what could be, if there was a constant source of clean water.

The second element was Jack. Father Lou believed in Jack's stewardship and compassion. He took him to one impoverished village after another, and witnessed Jack's response. He realized in Jack a person with connections to resources, the drive to bring them together and the will to create change. Even though there were over 300 villages without water Father Lou suggested taking six villages as a starting point. He cautioned Jack, "Remember, do nothing for them – do it with them." Father Lou knew and Jack agreed on the importance of involving the indigenous population and starting small and growing one step at a time.

Jack's first step was to bring in a water technical specialist from the organization Hermidad. The specialist took them high up in the surrounding mountains where, they located with

God's guidance, several springs with clean, nourishing water. The Hermidad professional engineers then laid out a plan for a system of aqueducts and pipes to transport the water from the mountains to the villages.

What was needed now was money and labor. Jack decided the St. Vincent de Paul Conference in San Jose de Ocoa was pivotal to establishing a "twinning" arrangement. Twinning is an international process whereby St. Vincent de Paul conferences and councils share resources. Jack returned to the United States and convinced 20 conferences to contribute $75 a month. Soon the amount was raised to $100. More and more conferences joined in, as did the Council of Rockville Center, New York.

Traditionally, the Society's twinning is a process where resources are sent from one conference to another. Members can then give direct assistance to those most in need. Jack, with his creative energy flowing envisioned "cluster twinning." He encouraged large numbers of conferences and councils in the United States to send twinning support through the San Jose de Ocoa Conference, and subsequently, to other newly formed Dominican Republic conferences. Jack's efforts bore fruit. Twinning money, letters, and prayers flowed to the Conference in Ocoa. Donations of up to $50,000 were received to buy equipment, pipe and the materials to construct aqueducts.

The last most significant storm element was to establish a collaborative relationship with the local area's people. Father Lou passionately encouraged the community's leaders to act. These leaders enthusiastically embraced the project and took ownership. They formed work brigades and these volunteer brigades accomplished the bulk of the physical work. People from different communities collaborating in this massive effort, created bonds where relations had often been strained. Solidarity was established in one community after another as villagers sacrificed days of pay to accomplish the work for their community. They toiled to build aqueducts and connecting systems of pipes, bringing life to Hermidad's plan. Hundreds and hundreds of people worked together. It was an incredible example of the poor helping the poor - serving as the heart of the entire project.

The "perfect" storm's power was unleashed. Water flowed. Jack returned to Ocoa two years later and was astounded. The land was flourishing and the water system served 19 villages and that number grew by a factor of five. Bringing water to villages, improved nutrition and health, created new opportunities for work, and encouraged area communities to share resources and grow closer. Jack saw a holistic change - villages aiding other villages so they too could survive through irrigation and land management. This synergy led to new visions and new projects:

- Irrigation for crops
- Water purification plants
- Private/shared potable water
- Thatched roofs replaced with zinc roofs, and dirt floors with cement
- Nutritious home gardens
- Farming cooperatives
- Latrines for sanitation
- Home building

When asked how the American Society reacted, Jim Claffey proudly stated, "Our St. Vincent de Paul Society funds are well invested in the Dominican Republic. 'Invested' is the right word. More than merely spent, our funds invest in development projects of greater impact and serve as seed money for projects that have induced other foundations to provide alternative funding and grants. This would not happen without the 'cluster twinning' approach. Each project is well organized and administered. The discipline and

control is obvious and provides great confidences in the personal relationships between the leaders, the community and the funders. The members of the Society feel like equal partners." Jim reflected, "Now they have a type of voluntary land reform: they share land for water and water for land."

The national president of the Society in the Dominican Republic declared, "It was incredible to see everyone working together, the local conferences of St. Vincent de Paul along with women associations, community councils, farming associations, and thousands of people from the villages.

The "perfect" storm transformed San Jose de Ocoa. The Dominican Vincentians responded with hundreds of thousands of dollars and the local community responded with thousands of work hours and mountains of commitment and dedication. Together they achieved the results Father Lou had dreamed of and prayed for.

Father Lou, forever the visionary, however was not one to settle for one "perfect" storm. The community leaders and he came forward with a wider scope project-to bring back the Ocoa River. During the past 20 years the river had been reduced to a trickle of muddy water, resulting from soil erosion and deforestation. He asked, "What if we planted millions of seedlings along the river to stop soil erosion and build up the river again?" Jack and the members of Long Island's Society of St. Vincent de Paul responded. They pledged to achieve Fr. Lou's vision.

Jack approached Bob Ellis, Executive Director, of the council of Rockville Center and asked for $200,000. When Bob heard what this change would mean to the Ocoa community he

agreed - "We can't afford not to be part of this." Money started flowing again. The villagers volunteered again. They planted seedlings along the river up and down the banks in tight horizontal rows, to form a barrier against soil erosion. "Water is beginning to run again in the Ocoa River, and five villages are producing like crazy," said Jack: "It is the salvation of the communities."

Wisely Jack organized yearly trips for Vincentians and benefactors to the Dominican Republic to see the fruits of their twinning efforts. One member, Gabe Velasquez, described the results: "Millions of seedlings were purchased with American St. Vincent de Paul funds. The community of families throughout the Ocoa area planted them one by one. Now, the river flows again. There is terraced farming by communities along the once dead river. They even have greenhouses and are growing flowers for income. Rabbits and pigs are being raised. All of this because of the water."

A Perfect Storm = Systemic Change

This collaborative Ocoa River project is an exemplary example of what can be accomplished when a group has: (1) a visionary; (2) the necessary resources and (3) a community of people willing to work and take ownership of a project's planning, implementation, evaluation and revisions.

Jim Claffey's analogy of the "perfect storm" is fitting-all the right elements in synergy. This holistic project involved the poor of the community and addressed their basic human needs. The community owned it and plans to sustain it. The management of water resources, improved health and nutrition, spurred the creation of jobs, encouraged collaboration and enabled new spiritual life for the people.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam urged such efforts in 1848. "Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is Justice's role to prevent the attacks."

Systemic change is justice. We of the Vincentian Family are challenged to be leaders for social justice and achieve positive systemic changes. We can replicate triumphs like the Ocoa River Project with the will and efforts to do so. With sound strategic thinking and the helping hand of Providence, we cannot fail. We can create "perfect" storms that nourish life and wash away injustice.

"Let justice roll down from the mountainside and God's impartial love be an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

HAIC Madagascar
"To Be Transformed In Order to Transform" A Story of Systemic Change within an Association

By Patricia Palacios de Nava

It is a source of pride to tell the story of AIC Madagascar, yet it is also a challenge, because it is not easy to recount in just a few pages a story full of trials and obstacles, but also of hope turned into reality. This small part of the story, which tells of Malgache volunteers working in a country whose poverty is known throughout the world, illustrates how they turned their association into a transformative force in the society around it.

St. Vincent de Paul channeled great energy into Madagascar, and the AIC volunteers working there today attempt to keep his missionary spirit alive. In recent years, this association of volunteers has transformed itself from a few isolated groups into an important national network, a vibrant part of AIC International. Through networking, which is one of the association's chief characteristics, goals that were previously unattainable have been achieved. The spirit and tenacity of Madagascar's volunteers are an example of the transforming hope that has been AIC's objective in recent years. This is a story of change, determination and hope.

Encountering a Problematic Reality

In 1988, shocked by the huge number of children begging on the streets, a group of four disadvantaged women and a Daughter of Charity decided to take action. Their initial effort to care for fifteen street children was, without their even realizing it, the formation of the first AIC group in Magadascar and the beginning of this story. From the start, they and other groups that began to form around the country faced significant

obstacles, including widespread malnutrition and lack of education among the children they saved from the streets. Even as efforts to obtain food and other essential articles bore fruit, the number of children suffering from malnutrition increased while the resources to feed them remained scarce.

These early groups felt some inner tension because they sensed that they needed to find a new methodology to bring about a deep change among themselves, so that they could work more effectively. Eventually, the volunteers recognized that they needed help from the outside, from someone who could evaluate their projects with different eyes and work with them to develop new strategies to help the marginalized.

The Beginnings of a Solution

The initial step toward change took place almost fifteen years ago, when the volunteers turned to AIC International, whose first groups in Madagascar had been founded by the Daughters of Charity. They requested that the International Executive Board help the groups in Madagascar and invited members of the Board to visit their country.

Faithful to our commitment to support grass roots volunteers, we, the members of the international Board, immediately began to form a team to visit the various groups in Madagascar. We knew that in order to take the steps needed to support their efforts, we had to evaluate their situation and learn their hopes in person.

Upon arrival in Tananarive, we were immediately struck by Madagascar's poverty, which the capital city contained in abundance. As we moved throughout the country and made contact with local AIC groups, we realized that we needed to give further support to local AIC women to help them get organized and create a network of mutual support. The situation in the country was alarming, and it was exacerbated by the lack of

organization and structure. Some of the most pressing issues impeding the volunteer groups in their efforts included malnutrition, a low and declining education index, high infant mortality, a high birthrate, mothers performing exhausting labor during pregnancy, single-mother families, a host of diseases including malaria, dysentery, rashes, tuberculosis and respiratory infections, and a lack of access to medication.

All the AIC groups we encountered were made up of very poor women, the great majority of whom were unmarried, widowed, or abandoned. They shared the little they had to provide a substantial breakfast, once a week, to their own small children and to the abandoned children found in great numbers all over the country. In such a bleak situation, these small cells of poor women interested in changing the situation were a sign of hope. Their desire to do something convinced us of the need to initiate a process of change which would begin with them. So, with them, we started to build a network that eventually reached unexpected dimensions in Madagascar.

AIC Madagascar: A National Network in Favor of Women and Children

From the beginning, the Manakara group of volunteers took up the challenge, while maintaining a realistic attitude about their own capabilities. They possessed an indispensable prerequisite, the confidence that they could succeed. They realized that they needed formation and economic support in order to be able to launch a major nutritional project that would address the needs of the poor. The local AIC group indicated that,

with a grant of one hundred dollars, they could start a sustainable project in which they could give a nourishing breakfast to children not once but five times a week. With the hundred dollars they could purchase a small food reserve of non-perishable edible articles. The mothers would prepare and distribute the meals. By charging a minimum amount, they could also buy perishable food. Their project was the first link in a national network to fight hunger and support children and mothers. The principal agents were these very poor women, who were struggling everyday to improve their own living conditions, as well as those of their families and communities.

Initial Steps in the Creation of the Network

The International Board and the local AIC volunteers started to discuss the needs of the local AIC, while focusing on their strengths. We acknowledged their work, offered the positive reinforcement that is so important for effective collaboration, and expressed our admiration for their efforts in such a difficult situation. We were able to establish an atmosphere of confidence, and we began a process to improve their self-esteem, which was both an indispensable condition for dialogue and a way to change their way of struggling against poverty and its causes. We did not yet speak about Association guidelines or the importance of networking to change the situation. We only pointed out the advantages of getting to know one another and sharing ideas.

Detection of Creative and Daring Leaders

The Board visited several regions, always finding groups that had a similar makeup and similar needs. We were conscious that, generally, a decision to change cannot be imposed from the outside or from above. The local AIC groups needed to proceed from an analysis of their own needs and an awareness of possible resources, including the abilities of the women

themselves and the group's future members. It was necessary to find local volunteers with leadership abilities who would be willing to accept this challenge.

In Manakara, we began to see clearly what the future of a larger national association might be. There was already a recognized leader: a young woman, intelligent and strong, with a good formation and deep faith. She had a vision about what participative teamwork meant. Her leadership, based on her formation and her ideals, was a good springboard for promoting systemic change.

Team-Work Strategies

AIC International, eager to help bring about change, began a formation process for the volunteers. The majority of volunteers were poor. Many also had serious problems in their own homes. After initial dialogue, a formation team consisting of members of the International Executive Board and two local volunteers began preparing local volunteers to work more effectively on projects.

Soon, the first volunteers became multiplying agents, training others to be active in working toward social change even in the poorest communities of this budding network. To facilitate their work, we initiated a project in which we donated computers to one of the AIC groups and gave the members, with the help of experts, the training they needed to use them. This was an important step towards empowerment, improving their self-esteem and confidence.

The changes this brought about could be soon seen in the way they worked. The results were reflected not only in Madagascar, but in other places in the world since they began to participate in various international forums and meetings, in which their voice, and through it the voice of poor, was heard and valued.

Links with Other Networks, Organizations and Social Agencies

Madagascar's internal network has strengthened its bonds with other networks that participated in the founding and growth of the Association in the country, especially with the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. The internal network now also collaborates and receives support from international organizations, like UNICEF, which helps through subsidies, didactic material, school materials and food. AIC Madagascar has been recognized by UNICEF as a privileged partner, and Madagascar's volunteers have been invited to speak at international meetings sponsored by this and other organizations. Volunteers have had the opportunity to make presentations and share their experiences at such meetings; in addition, their projects to aid children and foster nutrition have been selected as pilot projects.

On several occasions, the women responsible for the association in Madagascar have been invited to organize workshops about their projects at UNESCO, ECOSOC (in New York), the PNUD (United Nations Development Project) and "Manos Unidas" in Spain, among others. Their proposals pertaining to the nutrition of children, maternal care and the prevention of violence have influenced decision makers.

Madagascar's volunteers work in an admirable manner and have committed themselves to collaborate in the global effort to eradicate poverty. Examples of their commitment abound, but a particularly striking instance is their focus on attaining the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, a global initiative to eradicate poverty, or at least diminish it. Local efforts included the eight concrete goals and sought to address them concretely: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality rates; improving maternal health; working against AIDS/HIV, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and creating partnerships for development. The initiatives they have taken, and some of the results, follow.

GOAL ONE: Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger

The AIC volunteers soon realized that it was not enough to feed the children; it was also necessary to provide them an education. The first step towards reintegrating them into school was to offer students a regular meal, thus keeping them from begging. The volunteers are very proud of the fact that that they have never had to close any of their school-kitchens for a single day. In addition, the volunteers devised basic courses to prepare children who were living on the street to enter public schools. It quickly became apparent that the mothers of most of these street children were too poor to care for them. The volunteers invited the mothers to help in the kitchen and to grow vegetables for the children's meals.

They also offered them training in hygiene, nutrition and skills such as embroidery and the production of juice. This enabled many mothers to take care of their children. For the older children, the volunteers created a workshop where they learned to build carts to bring vegetables for sale in the market.

As they began training programs within the country and established international contacts, the members of AIC Madagascar soon became aware that combating poverty among children requires more than isolated acts, but, rather, a whole set of organized activities involving networks of families, communities, and organizations that are pursuing the same objective.

Another important step in the struggle against hunger was training in agricultural methods, initiated by the Manakara volunteers. The cultivation of rice, a staple crop, was promoted by several groups around the country. With the collaboration of UNICEF, the volunteers bought seeds, tools and a piece of land for the cultivation of this essential crop.

Later, they began to cultivate the Moringa tree to replace the wood burnt for fuel, which the children were required to bring to school each day to cook their food. Several groups also encouraged the planting of vegetable gardens, with crops like tomatoes and peanuts. Mothers used these vegetables for family meals, and they were also used in the school cafeterias.

GOAL TWO: Achieving Universal Primary Education

Once they realized that many children were not officially registered with the local government, the volunteers, with the local authorities, started a program in all of their centers for registering children, thus giving children access to health care and education, and also the opportunity to exercise their civil rights.

Among their educational efforts were preschool programs. By offering students meals at school every day, and by paying for uniforms, fees, books and other things, they enabled them to enter primary school; some even went on to high school and college. For those who were beyond school age or had left school, as well as for the handicapped, the volunteers tried to find jobs and offered professional training in agriculture, woodwork, sculpture and sewing, thus enabling them to take care of themselves.

All this was possible through partnership and matching-fund agreements within AIC, in cooperation with the National Ministry of Education. Through joint action between NGOs and the government, they were able to offer two years of primary education for free. Various ministries in the government invited the volunteers to participate in formation courses that prepared them to be educators and trainers.

GOAL THREE: Promoting gender equality and empowering women

Promoting the welfare of child, the volunteers discovered, is not really possible without promoting the welfare of their mothers. In partnership with AIC-France, the volunteers created a very simple micro-credit project, combined with budget training, which benefited about a hundred women and their families. During the initial phase of the project, AIC volunteers and other experts provided technical training in agriculture, reading, health, sewing, basket-making, management and trade. Besides this, they tried to help men and women discern which local traditions were favorable to development and which were not. The main objective was to enable women and their families to develop skills and self-esteem and to empower them to create well-balanced relationships based on confidence and mutual understanding.

Today, with the help of experts supplied by international organizations, the Association has channeled its efforts into the development of further networks which will focus on a problem that is widespread among low-income women: violence within the family. Volunteers have joined the worldwide campaign against domestic violence in which AIC International is engaged, and they have begun several local initiatives in the struggle against domestic violence. A key element in the achievement of this goal has been the participation of the victims of violence themselves.

Aware that the persistent poverty of women and children often stems from the abandonment of families by husbands and fathers, AIC volunteers, in their August 2003 Assembly, created a National Project for Responsible Paternity. Together with partners like KODAK, the Alliance Française and the ministries of Social and Family Protection, a national campaign was launched, with the help of the media, through press releases, national television, posters and advertisements. The program's objective was to sensitize men especially, and society as a whole, to the fact that a fundamental form of violence against women is abandonment, leaving mothers alone with their children and with no financial means, and forcing them and their children to beg in the streets.

The campaign has organized discussions to increase society's awareness of the problem. Through formation programs and through the development of adequate legal structures, the volunteers hope to reduce the number of homes abandoned by the father and thus help resolve the problem of poverty among mothers and children.

In addition, using photographs taken during a contest involving fathers who were helping their children in daily chores, AIC volunteers made and sold a calendar, and thus raised the funds needed for subsidizing projects. They also published a pamphlet, distributed all over the country, focusing on responsible paternity and promoting a change of mentality on this issue.

GOAL FOUR: Reducing Child Mortality

Another crucial element in creating better living conditions for children has been an investment in healthcare through vaccination (against poliomyelitis and measles), distribution of Vitamin A and the AIC partnership project "To Be in Good Health", which is offered in all centers. In some of their centers the volunteers distribute a bowl of milk and/or a bowl of corn-

meal, and volunteers, including doctors, offer a physical check-up for babies. This checkup includes careful monitoring of each baby's weight. These initiatives are co-financed by Catholic Relief Service and the Terre des Hommes, and are important steps toward the reduction of infant mortality in Madagascar.

GOAL FIVE: Improving Maternal Health

In order to meet this goal, education in health and hygiene is offered to mothers at weekly meetings. AIC also participates in a campaign for the protection of mothers that involves "training the trainers," preparing women to give workshops in which they raise the consciousness of mothers with whom they work. With the help of a subsidy, the volunteers have begun a project called "Mutuelle Santé" which aims at fostering maternal health care. The mothers pay a small monthly fee, which is used to cover the cost of treatment and the purchase of medicines to cure common illnesses. Medicines are purchased after consultation with those overseeing maternal health within each group.

GOAL SIX: Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases destroy large numbers of families in Madagascar. AIC assists in national and international campaigns against AIDS, Malaria, and cholera through a series of activities: by promoting vaccination against infectious diseases and training mothers in how to prevent their transmission; by distributing new medicines like Palustop and training mothers how to use them; by distributing mosquito nets treated with insecticides, which the government offers to pregnant mothers; and by promoting the use of water-cleaning systems and iodized salt in school kitchens.

All this is done in collaboration with NGOs like Roll Back Malaria and PSI (Population Services International). AIC

Madagascar's centers offer training for whole communities about the sanitation measures needed to create better hygienic conditions and to prevent diseases. AIC, along with seven other Vincentian associations present in Madagascar, has also proposed its national program to fight malaria to the Malgache Government for its use.

GOAL SEVEN: Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

Because appropriate housing is a primary human right, the project "A Roof First" was created to help restore dignity to homeless mothers and their children. AIC Madagascar also takes part in an annual national campaign of reforestation. They plant and help mothers plant Moringa trees. This tree has multiple uses: the leaves and fruit are used for nutrition, the seeds for cleaning water and producing oil. In addition, all AIC Madagascar's groups attempt to sensitize society little by little to join in the struggle against corruption in matters related to the environment.

GOAL EIGHT: Creating a Global Partnership for Development

Of all these significant initiatives, Madagascar's volunteers consider this the most important, because it paves the way for the attainment of the other seven goals. One of AIC's policies all over the world is to network with civil and ecclesiastical organizations and with national and international organizations. AIC Madagascar is now collaborating with the main organizations in the country that are working on the campaign to eradicate poverty and to reach the Millennium Development Goals. To help reach the Development Goals has not been easy. It has required constant effort, planning and evaluation. It has also required creativity. Above all, the participation of the poor themselves has been indispensable. They, along with the volunteers, have taken up the challenge to change their own situation.

Below is a table listing the main groups and the activities in which AIC Madagascar is involved:

N°	Number of Volunteers	Groups	Activities	Number of Beneficiaries
1	18	MANAKARA	Schooling Canteen Mutual Health Micro-credit Rice cultivation	260 children 140 mothers
2	13	FIANARANTSOA	Schooling Canteen Workshops Micro-credit Struggle against violence in the family	300 children 50 young women 30 mothers
3	9	ANOSIZATO	Schooling School Canteen Workshops Micro-credit Nutritional recovery Child protection	105 children 125 children 40 young women 25 mothers 156 children 1800 children
4	9	ANKADISOA	Schooling School canteen Workshops Child protection	128 children 15 young women 40 babies
5	13	FARAFANGANA	Schooling School canteen Sewing workshop Micro-credit	120 Children 25 Mothers and young women 30 Mothers
6	9	VOHIPENO	Schooling School Canteen	50 Children

N°	Number of Volunteers	Groups	Activities	Number of Beneficiaries
7	7	ANDEMAKA	Schooling School Canteen	50 Children
8	7	VANGAINDRANO	Schooling School Canteen	60 Children
9	7	TANGAINONY	Schooling School Canteen Rice cultivation	50 Children 30 Mothers
10	8	MARILLAC	Schooling School Canteen	10 Handicapped Children
11	8	CATEDRAL	Schooling School Canteen Boarding school	60 Children 20 Handicapped Children
			Embroidery workshop	30 Mothers
12	5	ANJEVA	Schooling School Canteen Agriculture	60 Children 20 Mothers
13	10	AMBONDRO	Schooling School canteen Agriculture and knitting Paper fabrication workshop Goat raising	100 Children 30 Elderly persons 30 Mothers and young women
14	6	IHOSY	Micro-credit	10 Mothers
Total	**119**			**3669 persons**

Several things should be noted in regard to the chart above. Some groups, such as the one in Anosizato, offer shelter to poor families in the neighborhood and care for those who are ill. All groups work with women and men for the prevention of domestic violence and strive to sensitize society to this important issue. The number of people involved in these efforts has not been listed above, since many of the activities are massive campaigns.

The map of Madagascar shown below gives an idea of the places where the existing groups are today. The missionary spirit of the volunteers, the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission ensures that they will eventually expand further north to help more citizens of Madagascar to achieve the millennium goals.

Systemic Change

In all the centers in which its volunteers work, AIC Madagascar has felt the need to join forces: uniting volunteers and beneficiaries, civil and church authorities, local, national and international organizations. In the many projects described above, volunteers are engaged in a daily struggle against a multitude of closely related problems like malnutrition, hunger, homelessness, domestic violence, lack of health-care, HIV, the violation of the rights of women and children, and gender inequality.

With each passing day, the volunteers are becoming more and more aware of the importance of carrying out their work in accord with a series of policies and strategies that are inspired by the Vincentian charism and AIC's guidelines, such as those listed below:

- Plan in accordance with the local situation and the real abilities of the local team
- Address a series of human needs with a holistic vision
- Strengthen the physical, social and human capacities of the people by fostering equal access to health and education, thus empowering all those suffering from poverty
- Involve the poor themselves, particularly women, at all stages, from the identification of needs to the evaluation of the various projects implemented
- Have an unconditionally respectful attitude, try to improve mutual listening, and create an atmosphere of mutual confidence
- Promote the training, civic education, and spiritual formation of the leaders and community members
- Struggle to transform unjust situations and to have a positive impact on public policy through political action and networking

- Promote respect for human rights, acting together against the causes of injustice, with a prophetic attitude

- Act locally, reflect nationally and think globally so that AIC and its volunteers can participate in an international movement.

Through its projects, AIC Madagascar has helped sharpen AIC International's focus and has become an example for other local and national AIC Associations.

Conclusion

The journey begun by Madagascar's volunteers is now moving on toward the future, using a process of ongoing evaluation and adaptation. The volunteers' efforts are contributing significantly to peace and stability among the people of Madagascar.

I would like to underline how much the process of change that has taken place in Madagascar has affected AIC International as a whole. Significant changes, when they result from serious reflection, the use of well-tested strategies, and a deeper understanding of the charism of the founder, contribute to the creation of a world in which humanity, equality, justice and solidarity enable the poor to occupy the place they deserve in society.

I would like to end this the story with the words of the volunteer who initiated the AIC network in Madagascar:

In these ten years of life, confidence and faith have moved AIC Madagascar forward… it is the Spirit who has encouraged us after each fall, after each apparent failure… The Spirit has always been present to urge us to advance when all of us wanted to stop because of hesitation and discouragement. It was the Spirit who whispered that we must smile, even laugh, when, deep inside ourselves, we felt nothing but despair and tears.

The Spirit said "mission" when, deep inside, we felt like staying home. Ten years in which we have never ceased trying to be "creative to infinity," turning ourselves into rice growers, raisers of egg-laying hens, promoters of innovative ideas, initiators of projects great or small, ambassadors, teachers of the handicapped and others – roles we could never have envisioned years ago when AIC Madagascar was founded, when we started to work… thanks to the support and confidence of the Daughters of Charity.

Patricia P. de Nava is from Mexico. She is married and is the mother of three children, with five grandchildren. She has participated in activities related to democracy and human rights in Mexico, in public posts, civic organizations and local AIC groups. She has been actively involved with indigenous communities in the state of Chiapas. She has been a member of AIC since 1971. Over the years she has been responsible for AIC's International Formation Service. In 1998 she was elected AIC's International President, and was reelected for a second mandate in 2002. In 2002, as AIC's International President, she was granted a Doctorate honoris causa by the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, in recognition of her dedication to the poor and her social engagement. Since finishing her two mandates as president, she has continued to collaborate actively with AIC as the person responsible for its relations with the International Vincentian Family.

Strategies for Systemic Change

Person-Oriented Strategies

By Patricia P. de Nava

The strategies identified under this heading focus on the poor as the persons who are most capable of changing their own situation. As members of the Vincentian Family, inspired by Christ the evangelizer and servant of the poor, we seek to be attentive to their needs and their hopes so that we might not only evangelize and serve them, but also be changed by our contact with them. Analyzing the stories recounted in this book, and others as well, we identified seven strategies that focus on the poor as persons and that foster solidarity with them in the quest for systemic change:

- Listen carefully and seek to understand the needs and aspirations of the poor, creating an atmosphere of respect and mutual confidence and fostering self-esteem among the people.

- Involve the poor themselves, including the young and women, at all stages: identification of needs, planning, implementation, evaluation and revision.

- Educate, train, and offer spiritual formation to all participants in the project.

- Promote learning processes in which the members of the group, especially the poor themselves, speak with one another about their successes and failures, share their insights and talents, and work toward forming effective multiplying agents and visionary leaders in the local community, servant-leaders inspired by St. Vincent de Paul.

- Construct structural and institutional models, where communities can identify their resources and needs, make informed decisions, and exchange information and effective strategies within the community and among various communities.

- Promote engagement in political processes, through civic education of individuals and communities.

- Support and respect the mechanisms for promoting solidarity that exist among the community members.

To employ these strategies, it is important that we know the poor face to face, enter into their world and make it our own. If we hope to help bring about systemic change, it is vital that we walk in their footsteps, accompany them on their journey, and support them in their decision-making processes. Only if we draw near and stand at the side of the poor can we help them transform their lives positively. In his book, *The Way of Vincent de Paul*, Fr. Robert Maloney insists:

> *… in your ministry, as St. Vincent says, first do and then teach. As a follower of Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, your proclamation on the good news will resound in the hearts of your people, especially when you give vibrant witness: … through the language of relationships: being with the poor, working with them, forming a community that shows the Lord's love for all.*

Louise de Marillac underlines the attitude that those who serve the poor must have:

> *As for your conduct toward the poor, may you never take the attitude of merely getting the task done. You must show them affection; serving them from the heart – inquiring of them what they need; speaking to them gently and compassionately; procuring necessary help for them without being too bothersome or too eager.*

The first strategy in this group, **"Listen carefully and seek to understand the needs and aspirations of the poor, creating an atmosphere of respect and mutual confidence and fostering self-esteem among the people"**, states that it is indispensable for us to listen to the poor and to help them be aware of their dignity as God's children and of their right to control their own destiny.

Experience teaches that many poor people feel incapable of changing their situation because they have lost a sense of their dignity and potential as persons. But they grow in self-esteem when others treat them with respect. Unless we succeed in awakening self-esteem in them, it will be impossible to assist them to be active participants in their own empowerment and in that of their communities. Without the participation of the poor, sustainable systemic change cannot be achieved.

St. Vincent insisted on the importance of a respectful attitude toward the poor: "Whenever I happened to speak abruptly to the convicts, I spoiled everything. But whenever I praised them for their acceptance and showed them compassion, whenever I sympathized with them in their sorrows, when I kissed their chains, and showed them how upset I was when they were punished, then they always listened to me and even turned to God."

This strategy is very clearly illustrated in the story of the AIC Madagascar, as the following account demonstrates:

> *(We) started to discuss the needs of the local AIC, while focusing on their strengths. We acknowledged their work, offered the positive reinforcement that is so important for effective collaboration, and expressed our admiration for their efforts in such a difficult situation. We were able to establish an atmosphere of confidence, and we began a process to improve their self-esteem, which was both an indispensable condition for dialogue and a way to change their way of struggling against poverty and its causes. We did not yet speak about Association guidelines or the importance of networking to change the situation. We only pointed out the advantages of getting to know one another and sharing ideas.*

The second strategy underlines the importance of the active participation of the poor in the project: **"Involve the poor themselves, including women and the young, at all stages: identification of needs, planning, implementation, evaluation and revision."** In this way, we help them be responsible for all stages of the project, from analysis of the situation to evaluation. As a result, they will be the principal agents in their own development, conscious of their rights and responsibilities, rather than simply recipients of aid from others.

Charity should not simply apply a soothing balm to society's wounds; it should bring parties together in active dialogue to build a more just society. Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan dramatizes the principle that love of God is displayed in love of neighbor. But today we recognize more and more that charity involves not just binding up the victim's wounds and pouring oil on them, but also making the road from Jerusalem to Jericho safe for all.

Members of the Vincentian Family attempt to live and work in solidarity with the poor rather than merely encourage others to share their superfluous wealth with them. Vincent, Louise and Ozanam recruited large numbers of people from various strata of society to join in the mission of solidarity, and they built social institutions that would carry that mission into the future.[1]

In his project, Fr. Pedro Opeka underlines the importance of women's role as a fundamental human resource for bringing about systemic change, and the education of children as an indispensable step toward a better future: "Women and children are the project's flesh and blood. They have the enthusiasm and the hope needed for the success of any project."

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[1] Craig B. Mousin, "Vincentian Leadership. Advocating for Justice," Vincentian Heritage 26 (2005-2006), 278.

The third strategy under this heading focuses on spiritual formation: **"Educate, train, and offer spiritual formation to all participants in the project."**

Historically, a deep concern for the education of the young has played a very important role in successful Vincentian projects. Louise de Marillac began the "petites écoles" for children; Frederick Ozanam taught university students; Elizabeth Ann Seton started the first free Catholic elementary school in the United States, which became the foundation for the huge Catholic school system in that nation.

While food, clothing, shelter, good sanitary conditions and work are fundamental for emerging from poverty, the life of the spirit is crucial for integral human development. St. Vincent, in addition to providing material help, was very concerned about the spiritual dimension of the persons he and his followers served. He underlined this on many occasions throughout his life: "We have not done enough for God and our neighbor when we have given just food and remedies to the sick. How did Jesus serve the poor? He went from place to place, curing the sick and instructing them with a view to their salvation." Vincent showed great interest in the spiritual formation of those who shared his mission: the members of the Confraternities of Charity, the priests and brothers of the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity, and the poor themselves.

Pope Paul VI tells us in *Populorum Progressio* (35) that education is the "first and most basic tool for personal enrichment and social integration; and it is society's most valuable tool for furthering development and economic progress." He states forcefully: "Lack of education is as serious as lack of food." An understanding of this concept is well illustrated by the Clancy Night Shelter project:

> *In order to reach this stage, the Depaul Trust had to establish a comprehensive training and formation program for staff and managers in the organization, as well as ensure that critical questions are always kept on the agenda so that the service does not change gradually without notice (a frequent phenomenon in such services that is often recognized only in hindsight). Staff were trained and informed in critical areas, including the use of best practices in working with drug users, health matters, safe drug injection practices and safety issues. They were encouraged to take further courses relevant to their work, such as counseling and addiction studies. Also, we have worked to educate and inform the staff on our values and mission through sessions on our founders, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac.*

The fourth people-oriented strategy expresses this conviction from another point of view: **"Promote learning processes in which the members of the group, especially the poor themselves, speak with one another about their successes and failures, share their insights and talents, and work toward forming effective multiplying agents and visionary leaders in the local community, servant-leaders inspired by St. Vincent de Paul."** Forming people for leadership roles is fundamental for producing change. But a vertical style of leadership is rarely effective in educational processes geared toward systemic change. In the gospels and in our Vincentian tradition, leadership is oriented to service.

Eduardo Marques, a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, states in an article entitled "Being Creative in Vincentian Leadership"[2]:

> *The first question to ask is: What are the necessary ingredients for someone to be considered a servant leader?" This question assumes that the leader can acquire the skills – or ingredients for someone to be perceived as a real servant leader. The subsequent question is "how to acquire these skills?" The initial answer to this second question is that these skills cannot be acquired only through training, but must be accompanied by the leader's true desire to serve.*

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[1] Marques, Eduardo. "Being Creative in Vincentian Leadership: the Case of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul." Vincentian Heritage 26 (2005-06) 229-242.

Margaret Posig, P.H., in "St. Vincent de Paul as a Leader of Change," adds[3]:

> *Both Vincent and Louise were models of servant leadership, and Jesus Christ was the model of this style of leadership. Indeed, servant leadership may be a key to empowerment, and several authors have noticed the connection between the two concepts… Exemplary leaders use their power in service to others, and enable them to act by strengthening them and developing them into leaders.*

St. Vincent excelled in the process of empowerment. He listened to others' ideas, sought their advice, and provided the tools that collaborators needed for carrying out their mission. He empowered his followers by insisting on core values and virtues such as respect and mutual support. He encouraged "affective and effective" relationships in serving the poor. Vincent proposed Christ as the model of servant leadership.

In a sense, servant leaders assume the role of followers, listening to others and empowering them to reach their goals. They realize that, when they themselves listen well, their followers accomplish more.

This strategy is illustrated in the AIC-Madagascar story:

> *Soon, the first volunteers became multiplying agents, training others to be active in working toward social change even in the poorest communities of this budding network. To facilitate their work, we initiated a project in which we donated computers to one of the AIC groups and gave the members, with the help of experts, the training they needed to use them. This was an important step toward empowerment, improving their self-esteem and confidence. In Manakara, we began to see clearly what the future of a larger national association might be. There was already a recognized leader: a young woman, intelligent and strong, with a good formation and deep faith. She had a vision about what participative teamwork meant. Her leadership, based on her formation and her ideals, was a good springboard for promoting systemic change.*

[2] Posig, Margaret, Ph.D. "Saint Vincent de Paul as a Leader of Change: The Key Roles of a Higher Purpose and Empowerment." Vincentian Heritage 26 (2005-06) 27-41.

From his experience in the Philippines, Fr. Norberto Carcellar notes that inter-community meetings in which disadvantaged groups participate pave the way toward rethinking a project and increase efficiency. Such meetings also provide communities with an opportunity to change their own way of thinking, "so that the poor are not seen as problems, but as part of the solution." Searching for the means to emerge from poverty is a risky experience. Servant leadership encourages the community to take such risks.

The fifth strategy in this grouping is to **"Construct structural and institutional models, where communities can identify their resources and needs, make informed decisions, and exchange information and effective strategies within the community and among various communities."** This strategy emphasizes the importance of setting up structures and creating institutions; that is, the need for communities to think beyond a particular project and to set up decision-making bodies to serve their ongoing needs, represent them, and foster collaboration with other groups. Such structures also serve as informal schools in which participants grow in understanding themselves, develop leadership skills, and take further steps toward responding to the community's needs. Through such structures, communities work toward collaborating with other groups that focus on the eradication of structural poverty and look for outside expertise in project writing, the search for funds, and other matters.

An important aspect of this strategy is that it expands the concept of "the community." St. Vincent encouraged his family to develop a spirit of partnership, to look beyond its own bor-

ders, to see the interests of the poor from the perspective of a greater whole, and to facilitate connections between one group and others.

"When Jack returned to Ocoa," explains Gene Smith in "The Perfect Storm," "he could not believe what he saw. Everything was green and the water system had grown from six villages to 19. Eventually there were 120. He saw one village helping another and so on. There was a holistic effect. The excellent work led to many spin-off projects."

The sixth strategy expresses the importance of civic education in achieving systemic change: **"Promote engagement in political processes, through civic education of individuals and communities."** Civic involvement is indispensable as participants in projects work toward the structural transformation needed to produce real, lasting change.

Charity and justice go hand in hand and cannot be separated from the political dimension of life. Love for the poor is not ultimately effective if it does not grapple with the causes of unjust situations in which the needy live, whether those situations are social, cultural, economical or political. St Vincent understood this and used his influence at the French court and elsewhere to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. For her part, St. Louise invited the early Sisters to speak simply and directly with those in authority, and when necessary, to make known and defend the needs of the poor. She encouraged the Sisters not to be afraid to make decision-makers reflect on the consequences that their acts were having on the poorest. Today, the Daughters of Charity working in the Mindoro Project give great importance to civic education, as is evident in their curriculum: "The Formation Program included topics on spirituality, leadership, the Bible, human formation, and ecology as well as special seminars on new trends in agriculture, cooperatives and political voters' education."

The final people-oriented strategy is to **"Support and respect the mechanisms for promoting solidarity that exist among the community members."** In a talk entitled "Toward the Third Millennium as a Missionary Family," given on January 1, 1999, Fr. Robert Maloney underlined the importance of solidarity in all our actions for and with the poor:

> *The third millennium will be the millennium of solidarity, of networking. It will also be the millennium of the laity, as Pope John Paul II has already proclaimed on numerous occasions. Our service of the poor will be all the more effective to the extent that we can channel our energies, which are huge, into collaborative projects.*

With this conviction in mind, we must create mechanisms for fostering solidarity. Such mechanisms enable communities to continue to exist. In communities, programs and networks that foster mutual help play a fundamental role. Many poor persons could not survive if there were no solidarity in the community. A good example of such solidarity is the savings and loan program that began in Payatas, in the Philippines, and has now spread to many other places. Other examples are the dining rooms for children that were set up by the AIC volunteers in Madagascar and the community-based work done in the Dominican Republic, which is illustrated in "The Perfect Storm." In each of these programs, mutual help has been fundamental. Using these examples as a starting point, one can imagine other programs in which marginalized peoples forge bonds of solidarity. These should be encouraged. As members of the Vincentian Family, we are increasingly conscious that the poor themselves are best suited to find solutions to improve their situation and to promote sustainable change in their lives.

The Story of the Passage

By Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C.

Early beginnings

The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul have resided at St. Vincent's Center, Carlisle Place, London, since 1863. The work for the homeless and the poor which continues in that location today can be traced back over almost 150 years, even as that work developed and changed over the generations.

Built for them by generous benefactors of the time, St. Vincent's Center was one of their first houses in Britain. In keeping with the primary emphasis of the Daughters of Charity (service to the poor and the alleviation of poverty), the Sisters' first mission in Carlisle Place was to receive and care for innocent women and children who had been released from the large nearby prison which occupied the site on which Westminster Cathedral now stands and stretched almost to Westminster Abbey. The prevailing philosophy of the time criminalized poverty and consequently imprisoned the poor, deeming them of no use to society. Through local political intervention and the considerable influence of Cardinal Manning, the Sisters set up a laundry, soup kitchen, workshops, orphanage, and a school in their building.

The World Wars

A hallmark of the Carlisle Place house has been the Daughters' willingness and ability to work in harmony with local government. During World War One, they took on duties as an auxiliary hospital, while during World War Two the entire building was converted to a massive public feeding station. After the war, the orphanage was disbanded, as the building was deemed too old and inadequately structured for such work. Two projects were set up at this time. One was for supporting what we would now call "key workers" - young professional women vital to the postwar effort who could not otherwise afford to live nearby. The other was for a different group of young people, lost on the streets of London or estranged from their families, because undesired pregnancy or some other tragedy had removed them from their homes.

The Birth of the Passage

The school continued to thrive until the early 1970s when it relocated to its present position beside the Cathedral. In the middle and late seventies, a small school for people with special learning needs was set up in its place. The extra space attracted

the attention of a property developer, who proposed to convert the entire building into self-contained flats. Meanwhile, the Sisters had again started to provide sandwiches to homeless people who sought refuge near Victoria Station.

When Chalice Housing abandoned their development schemes in 1979, Cardinal Hume organized a meeting between the Cathedral staff and the Daughters of Charity to decide what to do next. All parties were concerned about the number

of vulnerable people living on the streets around the Cathedral and on the Cathedral Piazza. Cardinal Hume was particularly keen that the Daughters, with their specific approach to poor people, set up a project in the basement of the Carlisle Place building.

All groups decided upon a day center for homeless people, especially those sleeping rough in central London, and the center was duly opened by the Sisters in October 1980. Thus The Passage Day Center was born. It has expanded to become one of the largest in Europe, and each year it receives almost 50,000 visits from up to 7,000 homeless or insecurely housed individuals, seeking help with health, housing or employment issues, a hot meal, a shower and fresh clothing. All this and more is still done from the basement of the building. The Passage has since become a charity in its own right and moved on to be a project with Vincentian roots and ethos, run and supported by an enormous number of collaborators from all walks of life. The current Chief Executive is a Daughter of Charity, and the Christian and Vincentian character is protected by the governance structure of the Center.

Mission

The mission of The Passage is to provide resources which encourage, inspire and challenge homeless people to transform their lives through projects such as the Day Center, a Street Outreach Service and two Residential Projects: Passage House and Montfort House. Homeless people include those who are sleeping on the street and those poorly housed. The Passage currently has an operational turnover of £3.5 million. It receives part of this money from local and central government but raises over 50% from voluntary and charitable sources.

Those who arrive at The Passage are victims of all kinds of human misery ranging from health issues to family breakdown, from unemployment to loss of possessions. Many have lost

their self-worth and even their identity. They have become nameless and voiceless, and are socially excluded. They are often sleeping on the streets or taking shelter in a variety of impoverished ways. Public response to these victims is often judgmental or takes on aspects of denial of the problem.

Social Exclusion

Poverty in Britain is often hidden and insidious, and not always openly acknowledged. Homeless people in particular are often totally alone and isolated, having no sense of community or belonging. Legislation and benefit systems can work against them as they fall outside the "norms". The balance in society often swings violently between social care and control. Sleeping on the streets is viewed by many as nothing more than "anti-social" behavior.

To counter these problems, The Passage stresses the importance of serving individual human beings with respect and dignity and aims to provide quality services that empower, restore confidence and signal inclusiveness to all our stakeholders and observers.

Our services are designed to work proactively with people to break out of cycles of poverty and to improve quality of life. Working against poverty in the First World can often mean being constantly blocked by policy and legislation, so The Passage openly takes government money and sits at the political table in order to have influence. It collaborates with the local public to educate and promote awareness, builds bridges between sectors and works in partnership with other voluntary agencies. In this way The Passage seeks to challenge and transform the immediate society in which it operates as well as the individual lives of the poor.

Location

The Passage is situated in an unusual site for such a visible work for the poor. It is surrounded by power and wealth, close to the British seat of government and to Buckingham Palace. The neighboring residential accommodations are expensive and affluent. Those who work in the nearby government offices, business headquarters and commercial enterprises find this extraordinary juxtaposition heart-wrenching, challenging and annoying all at the same time.

Yet this location is key to the services of The Passage and its role at the front line of homelessness. It has been called the "arrivals lounge of homeless people into Britain", because of its proximity to the large travel terminus at Victoria Station, including the cheapest way into London, the coach station. People also arrive from all over Britain, having become homeless for a variety of reasons; refugees, mostly African, arrive from various nations; economic migrants come from all over Europe (predominantly Eastern Europe at the time of writing). All these provide The Passage with a constantly fluctuating population of over 250 people a day, 20% of whom are new each week. Hence the Day Center is simultaneously a gateway and a safety net.

Ethos and Values

The Church's current social teaching is clear about the preferential option for the poor and the basic right of every person to life, to freedom, to education, to create a family, to own property (or to have a home) and to receive a just wage (one sufficient to support a family). "These rights, together with the duties that go with them, flow from our nature as human beings, and we especially need to respect and protect those who lack the power or the visibility to defend these rights for themselves – the poor, the sick, the uneducated and the homeless." (Stratford Caldecott, *The Church's Social Teaching – A Way In,* CTS, 2001, 52)

In addition to taking its inspiration from Catholic social teaching, The Passage also finds its ethos in the teaching and example of St. Vincent de Paul, who co-founded the Daughters of Charity in the year 1633. Vincent served poor people as though he was serving Christ himself. He wanted his followers to seek out the poorest and most abandoned and serve them with loving respect. He had little patience with hollow enthusiasm but required practical hard work, through which compassion was put into concrete practice. He favored a non-judgmental approach and an ability to listen that accorded people their dignity. He promoted works that enable people to improve their quality of life and not remain in poverty, insisting that people were whole human beings with material and spiritual needs, emotions and intellects, and that each whole and unique person should be valued and treated with dignity, even if their attributes were hidden by their need.

St. Vincent de Paul believed in working in partnership and collaboration with anyone from whatever walk of life who could help him achieve a better lot for the poor. He took his inspiration from the gospels, throughout which there are numerous examples of Jesus' meeting, inspiring and curing those in need. The Passage and its staff strives to continue to live by these enduring values, encompassing the diverse and

rich culture of its members, clients, volunteers and staff. Hence The Passage has always worked with the most marginalized members of society and is now of major strategic importance in London and particularly the borough of Westminster, where it stands at the cutting edge of emerging needs. Actively working with others in the voluntary sector and across sectors, The Passage welcomes and seeks change and innovation, responding to changes in the environment and underpinned by values that reach back over four hundred years.

The work of The Passage is supported and enhanced by the contribution of some 200 volunteers without whom some functions would not exist or would become prohibitively expensive. Their contribution to the work of The Passage, through time freely given, is immeasurable.

Current Services

The Passage offers a range of services to maintain the self-respect of homeless people and to help them move towards a settled way of life. Having opened the Day Center in 1980 with one employee and three volunteers, The Passage now has four projects employing ninety staff and two hundred volunteers.

Outreach Service

The Passage Outreach Team works in partnership with Westminster City Council and several other providers to reduce the numbers of people sleeping on the streets. It has access to borough-wide Day Center and Hostel provisions and aims to find the most appropriate service for each individual. The team also works to help people return to their place of origin if possible and to divert people away from homeless services if another option is more appropriate.

The Passage Day Center

The Passage Day Center sees up to two hundred people per day and provides the following:

- Assessment and referral, including entry into The Passage Day Center, social interaction, information gathering, and referral to an internal or external appropriate service.

- Primary Services, including food, clothing, laundry facilities and showers. A small charge is made for food and clothing, consistent with our ethos of helping people back to independence. This service would not run without the considerable contribution made by volunteers.

- Health Services, including evaluation by a mental health team, a substance abuse team, and a local health authority run by Personal Medical Service, with nurse practitioners every day and regular visits from doctors.

- Housing and Advice Services, including a meeting with a housing adviser, access to limited accommodations, advice and practical assistance for lost identification and access to and advice on benefits.

- Education, Training and Employment services, including routes into employment, work experience, resume writing and job search, a variety of training options, computer literacy and internet training, publishing projects, the availability of mentoring (especially for those undergoing life changes), life skills training, basic literacy and help with English as a foreign language.

All these Day Center services collaborate with a large number of external partnerships and satellite services, both on-site and elsewhere, with which they are closely linked.

In an average year, The Passage will see around 5,000 different individuals in the following breakdown: 88% male, 12% female; 80% claim to be sleeping rough; 43% are white British, 20% black British, 12% Irish, 16% East European (although this percentage has been peaking at 35% in recent times); around a third have an alcohol problem and a third a drug problem; 37% have a mental health problem; increasingly individuals will have a dual diagnosis (abuse of several substances and/or a mental health issue).

The Day Center has expanded considerably and is now inadequately located in the basement. Space remains an issue.

Passage House

The Passage has specific experience of managing a large capital project: the purchase and refurbishment of the building which is now Passage House, which opened in 2000.

Passage House is a 47-bed first-stage emergency hostel for people coming in from the streets. It offers assessment and care planning for each individual person arriving for a limited stay, referring people on to other longer term hostels or health establishments and sometimes to more permanent single or shared accommodations. Another new unit offers support to those who wish to return to work. This project is located on a nearby site and is now being expanded.

Montfort House

Montfort House provides sixteen self-contained training flats for people preparing for their own permanent accommodation. The staff provides individual support for clients at each stage of resettlement, paying attention to life-skills and mentoring needs and focusing on activities that will help sustain future tenancies. The average stay is nine months. This project is located on two floors above the Day Center in St. Vincent's Center, and is known for its high quality. There are plans to expand it to 24 units in the future.

Outcomes

In 2006, the overall outcomes achieved included 140 people moving from our residential projects into their own tenancies; 290 clients helped into accommodations from the Day Center; 171 clients moved off the streets in the area through Streetlink; 111 clients case-worked into detox and rehab programs (1,207 ongoing clients); 15 full mental health assessments (1,640 ongoing), usually leading to hospitalization; 1,293 clients assisted by welfare rights team including 194 who had lost all their proof of identity, which had to be restored; 122 assisted job searches (627 internet searches); 56 people moved into full time employment; 141 bank accounts opened and 34 given financial advice; hundreds more took part in training, literacy classes and more.

The Heart of The Passage and Its Vision

At The Passage, our ethos, values and chaplaincy work are inextricably linked, encouraging reflection on what has truth and meaning in peoples' lives and guiding all members to focus on the principles by which they hope to accompany one another on life's journey. Services are holistic, flexible, and time-limited. The environment encourages social interaction for all and constantly references peoples' rights and responsibilities. Mentoring is provided throughout for any member who would benefit from it. With the addition of education, training and employment activities, The Passage becomes a place of choice and opportunity for all who visit, live, volunteer and work in it. Thus, The Passage is an integrated enterprise in which all its participants (homeless people, staff, volunteers and visitors) are treated with equality, dignity and respect.

These core concepts are encompassed at the heart of The Passage and pervade the whole structure, moving outward in circles to the external environment, beginning at the micro level of an individual person and growing ever outward into society. They strike at the ills of social exclusion and attempt to restore the experience of wholeness and healing into peoples' lives, engaging us all in greater compassion for each other and in reaching out toward the essence of all that is deeply human.

Thus The Passage tries to be a creative and flexible organization for those who are most vulnerable in our society, with an unprecedented ability to respond to the ever-changing range of needs and diversity of the people who visit us.

Systemic Change

Over more than 25 years, change has taken place in a variety of ways. The service has gradually developed a level of professionalism which assists many individual people to break out of the cycles of poverty and homelessness in which they have been trapped. Homeless people are now expected, no matter how long it takes, to engage with change while accompanied by us. We are clear in this mission and recognize that sometimes people need to be motivated to work together with us. The standards are important for people on the outside looking in, as well as our staff, volunteers and homeless people. The fact that we provide a quality service shows our regard for the human beings we serve, no matter how low their own self-esteem is, or how serious and degrading the issues they face.

It has been important to pause from time to time and consolidate. Change needs a level of sustainability in order for people to engage in it confidently. No charitable endeavor is ever fully secure and a certain amount of risk is healthy, but it is important not to be irresponsible and inconsistent.

We try to play our part in attacking the root causes of homelessness by accepting money from various sources, including government, and being part of national and local strategies. This brings us to the political arena where we can influence policy. We try to use our experience and hard evidence in this way, bridging the gap between grant makers, donors and others. It is hard to evaluate this in terms of success but the relationships themselves are of enormous value, resulting in awareness-building and attitude-change. On several occasions we have helped prevent legislation which would have effectively criminalized rough sleepers.

The tightrope can be difficult to walk, and we struggle to balance a number of agendas arising from operating our service in an affluent city-center residential neighborhood. Correct information and good communication can change perceptions,

but a delicate tension always remains, and perceptions can swing very easily between tolerance and hostility.

Every type of human misery walks through our doors under the umbrella of homelessness. Alone, The Passage has no hope of success, and to try to do it all would be arrogant. We provide our services through a large number of partnerships with NGOs and with governmental help. Part of our mission has been to promote partnerships and to work together for improved impact. We have found that it is essential to develop close relationships with key likeminded collaborators. Shared goals have been enriching and have brought opportunities for influencing the future and widening circles of debate. Thus change flows in and out of our collaborative experiences.

Sister Ellen Flynn, a Daughter of Charity of St Vincent DePaul, is currently the Chief Executive of The Passage, helping homeless people in Central London, UK. She has a background in education and management, initially working with disadvantaged young people, and later in group facilitation and management. Sr. Ellen been instrumental in focusing the work of The Passage on services which have potential for changing peoples' lives and attacking the root causes of their homelessness. Service users are encouraged to engage in a range of services aimed at transforming their lives. Sr. Ellen is committed to working proactively to encourage, inspire and challenge respectfully each homeless person, as an individual with gifts and aspirations. She believes in collaboration between voluntary and statutory agencies for the alleviation of suffering and greater justice for all.

The Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines

By Norberto Carcellar, C.M.

I. The Story

Kindling: Poverty and Urbanization

As in many other countries where a large percentage of the population is poor, the presence of families living in makeshift structures that pass for houses is one of the most visible signs of poverty in the Philippines. These settlements have many characteristics that are present in slums around the world: rapidly increasing population; limited access to basic social services; no legal possession of land and housing. They are often located in high-risk areas, such as dumpsites, shorelines, under bridges or alongside railways.

These communities represent the "invisible" city, hidden behind gaily painted walls and, more often than not, omitted from official maps and documents. They are excluded from participation in governance structures, so that their already lim-

ited access to resources is further restricted. This situation is exacerbated by government policies which rarely distinguish between overall poverty and poverty in the slums, resulting in urban development policies that do not include or properly serve slum areas. Consequently, as the country increasingly adopts open market economics and cities strive to be more globally competitive, the poor are pushed more and more to the fringes of society.

Despite this bleak portrait of slum settlements, people continue to migrate to the cities in the Philippines. Since World War II, there has been a marked increase in the movement of individuals and families to urban centers, driven by the hope that there would be abundant work in the cities. As a result, the Philippines has one of the highest rates of urbanization in the Third World. Of the total Philippine population – 76 million in the May 2000 census and approximately 91 million in July 2007 – it is estimated that 52 percent live in urban areas. Of these, roughly 40 % live in slum communities. Residents of these communities face significant obstacles that are compounded as their numbers increase: high unemployment; generally low income; the lack of access to education, health and medical services, electricity, and water; and limited ability to secure legal land and housing.

Payatas lies in the northeastern part of Quezon City, one of the most populated cities in the Metro Manila area . With an area of approximately 2,800 hectares, it had a population of less than 20,000 in the early 1980s. Because the land was mostly vacant at the time, part of it came gradually to be used as a dumpsite for the city's garbage. In 1988, the local government designated it as a relocation site for the growing number of urban poor, mostly migrants from various provinces of the Philippines. Soon after this governmental act, families from slum areas around the city started to arrive. By the early 1990s, Payatas had a population of more than 50,000 people, most of whom were living in makeshift shelters in the growing dumpsite that had become their source of livelihood.

That was the situation in Payatas when Fr. Norberto Carcellar was assigned there in 1991. Poor families in this burgeoning community were increasingly confronted with multifaceted issues, including high infant mortality, malnutrition, lack of education for children, very limited access to potable water, health risks caused by the growing dumpsite, and lack of financial means to address these problems.

Fr. Carcellar and others envisioned a potential solution to these problems in the community-based development program called the Vincentian Missionaries Social Development Foundation, Inc. (VMSDFI), which began to function in Payatas in 1991. Beginning with a wastepicker development program and a Grameen Bank type of microfinance facility that was set up in 1993, the programs of VMSDFI evolved during years of continuous experimentation and learning.

The search for a savings program that could be scaled up while remaining sustainable led to the idea of a program run by the community itself, rather than by a large administrative staff. While the microfinance facility that already existed had high repayment rates, it was heavily dependent on a staff that performed all the functions related to the program, including screening, organizing, monitoring, and collecting. This placed the beneficiaries of the program in a no-win situation since any increase in the program's outreach would necessarily entail higher costs because of the need for additional staff members. As a result, the program enlisted only 350 women members in two years, and the amount of savings remained low.

Sparking a Movement

The program faced this dilemma at a time when Fr. Carcellar was becoming acquainted with community savings initiatives in other countries. During one of his visits to Misereor in Germany, he received documentation about Misereor-supported savings programs in South Africa and India. Others encouraged him to visit South Africa and see how

communities there implemented their savings programs. It struck Fr. Carcellar that a good savings program could be a unifying force that would weave together VMSDFI's various community projects in Payatas. At that time, the VMSDFI was sponsoring a child development and nutrition program, waste-pickers' promotion, disabled persons rehabilitation, elderly care, and young scavengers' welfare promotion.

As the matter was being re-thought, a training course in 1995 further influenced the shape of the program that was emerging. Organized in India by the British Durham University, it centered on the role of self-help groups as implementing agents in microfinance programs. The course placed particular emphasis on how these groups could provide delivery and control mechanisms. Procedures were suggested that would be readily understood by volunteers who worked in the program. What developed were policies, receipt and loan forms, passbooks, and collectors' notebooks that are still used to this day. The course also gave a preview of how microfinance self-help groups grow and mature through time and what issues they might face in the future.

Bursting into Flame: Next Moves

In June 1995, Fr. Carcellar and several community volunteers began experimenting with the new idea of a community-based and community-operated savings program. Having sought the participation of groups of savers in the parish, Fr. Carcellar himself sat in his parish office accepting savings from parishioners. Volunteers began to learn the basics of bookkeeping from hands-on practice. They also organized savings groups and taught residents the rudiments of the new microfinance project. Spending more time in the community, they became the contact points for other residents interested in the program. Soon, numerous groups interested in saving began arriving in the parish asking for orientation in the basics of the microfinance program. In a single year, the savings program listed

2,000 new depositors, and in less than three years, a total of 5,300 depositors belonging to about 540 savings groups in Payatas alone, including jeepney drivers, market vendors, tricycle drivers, school children, the elderly and mothers saving for infants.

The years between 1995 and 1998 were a period of both expansion and consolidation. As news of the savings program spread rapidly beyond Payatas, residents of poor communities in Mandaue City, Bicol, General Santos City, Iloilo and Muntinlupa City started coming to Payatas to learn about the program. Interaction between communities became the means of transferring technology to new urban poor groups.

In 1996, VMSDFI's network began to extend beyond the borders of the country. Misereor linked VMSDFI with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), and an initial visit was made to the ACHR in Bangkok, Thailand. These visits allowed the VMSDFI to become acquainted with regional and international networks that would eventually become its partners. These networks included the ACHR, Slum Dwellers International (SDI) based in South Africa, and the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) based in India. Shortly afterwards, the Philippine savings groups became a member of Slum Dwellers International, whose membership also includes savings groups in South Africa, Namibia, India, Thailand, Nepal and Cambodia.

The first international meeting took place in February 1997, when community leaders from savings groups in Payatas and Mandaue City went to Mumbai, India, to observe the savings activities there. They were impressed with how the savings of the poorest people were successfully collected and recorded even by illiterate women. The solidarity of the Indian groups also served as an inspiration to the Philippine attendees, who came home with renewed energy to promote savings and encourage greater cohesion among their own groups.

In mid-1997, two key personalities within Slum Dwellers International, Jockin Arputham and Joel Bolnick, visited the Philippines to offer support and direction to VMSDFI and to the Philippine savings groups which are members of the SDI. They encouraged the VMSDFI and its members to link savings to community needs; namely (a) to forge a greater link between the savings activities and poverty and community issues, particularly because land is a major concern for the residents of Payatas and other member communities, and (b) to expand beyond Payatas into other slums and cities where savings and loan operations could serve as a means for uniting the community. They also recommended additional visits of the Philippine groups to India and South Africa.

VMSDFI began responding more energetically to the need for land security. Community volunteers were given formal training in paralegal work, engineering, and financial management. This provided them with the technical capability to manage community finances, understand land titles, research land status and ownership, and go through the legal processes that are necessary to legalize their land tenure initiatives. Training in engineering provided them with the tools to understand maps and house designs, so that they could design their own homes at manageable costs.

Community representatives continued to learn from their experience at international gatherings. After returning from trips to India and Africa, they initiated what was to become a city-wide savings program for land and housing. The Philippine group was also challenged to form their own federation and to engage the government constructively. Another idea that emerged was how to organize the savings groups better in order to maximize savings for land and housing.

Thus, 1998 saw the continued expansion of the savings program. Interaction between communities intensified within the country, with groups visiting each other to learn not only how the savings program operated, but also the technical and legal complexities of dealing with land and shelter issues.

In September 1998, the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines (HPFP) was officially launched, giving formal status to a national network of urban poor communities that had already been active for two years. Since then, interchange between communities has continued to grow at different levels. National meetings among leaders and community representatives have become a venue for talking about technical know-how, sharing experiences, and learning innovative ideas. After discussions with VMSDFI, the federation made a decision to concentrate its efforts on communities living in danger zones, such as along rail tracks, shorelines, riverbanks, under bridges, and around dumpsites, as well as those under threat of eviction.

The true test of how savings programs bring communities together occurred in July 2000 with the trash slide in Payatas. According to the government's tally, it killed more than 200 people. On that fateful morning, the news of the tragedy spread like wildfire in the community. Among the first groups to arrive were volunteers from the savings-based community paramedics program. Other savings groups came to help comfort bereaved families as they waited for news about relatives and friends who were missing. In the days that followed, savings were used to provide food for affected families.

It was feared that the tragedy would have a negative impact on the savings program. However, according to the research conducted by the Institute for Church and Social Issues (ICSI) of the Ateneo de Manila University, savings rose to record levels as the community realized the value of the program. A new round of expansion occurred as new savings groups were organized.

The years between 2000 and 2005 saw the gradual handing over of program operations and management from the VMSDFI to the HPFP. As the latter gained more experience and matured as an institution which promoted community-led initiatives, it took on more responsibility in deciding courses of action for existing projects, formulating policies, and imple-

menting programs. For its part, the VMSDFI relegated itself to providing directional and technical support to the HPFP, including research about funding sources.

The maturation of the federation did not escape the attention of its international partners. Whereas federation members had previously been invited to attend international meetings as participants, they were now increasingly being asked to suggest courses of action based on their experience. In 2004, the international network asked the HPFP to take on a leadership role in promoting savings in Southeast Asia. Soon, community leaders were traveling to East Timor, Banda Aceh, Indonesia and Mongolia to share their technical expertise in organizing communities through savings programs.

This period also saw organized groups of poor communities engaging government constructively in achieving slum upgrading. It became evident that community initiatives sparked not merely interest, but also support from those in local and national governments. HPFP was asked to be involved in projects sponsored by the national government, such as the relocation program for the North and South Railway Projects and the Iloilo City Flood Control Project (IFCP). In other areas such as Davao City and Digos City, the federation has become one of several advisory bodies that deal with relocation. It has also added disaster mitigation to its list of concerns. In March 2006, leaders from HPFP member communities from Iloilo City and Mandaue City went to the St. Bernard, Southern Leyte, to find out how it could assist in the reconstruction efforts for communities ravaged by the February 2006 rockslide that killed more than 900 people in Barangay Guinsaugon. After that initial visit, the group instituted a program that led to the formation of settler organizations. This led to several visits of leaders and local government officials from St. Bernard to Iloilo City and resulted in the building of 100 temporary shelters for families still living in evacuation centers. Plans for building another 100 shelters are in the pipeline.

In the last quarter of 2006, several catastrophic typhoons lashed the Bicol region in the southern part of Luzon Island. This resulted in the death of hundreds of persons and the dislocation of more than 100,000 families. The successive typhoons also destroyed more than 150,000 houses and caused more than $100 million damage to utilities and other infrastructures. In response, before the end of 2006, the HPFP sent a team of community leaders to initiate contact with affected communities. In January 2007, the team returned to Bicol with the intention of assisting communities in planning people-led reconstruction processes that included resettlement to safer ground for hundreds of families living in areas designated as danger zones.

Feeding the Fire: A Movement Called the HPFP

From the very beginning, the people themselves have figured prominently in this movement. Their involvement, beginning with the very first volunteers in the savings scheme, has been the driving force behind all efforts to find solutions. Since then, the HPFP has continued to evolve as an institution that formulates its own code of policies, management structures and financial systems, manages and implements projects, and engages government and the private sector. It is now present in 18 cities and 15 municipalities all over the Philippines, and has more than 150 community associations.

HPFP has enabled poor communities to formulate solutions for their own problems. Beyond providing necessary services to address people's needs, it has been an effective vehicle for helping those living on the margins of society to regain their dignity and develop confidence in their capabilities.

The savings program has matured into a community integration process with the title of the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF). UPDF has enabled urban poor communities to gather approximately US $3.5 million in pooled resources to help meet subsistence needs and develop the various communities. Structures and policies are currently being formulated about how UPDF might act as the community's agent in negotiating with the government and the private sector in other community-led projects that are being envisioned.

As community-led initiatives move into the foreground, on the one hand they disprove the widespread negative caricature of the poor as obstacles to societal development, and, on the other hand they mobilize resources to support programs. By engaging the government and the private sector, they have made inroads into previously inaccessible governmental and corporate structures.

One of the factors that has made all this possible has been a formation program organized for the current set of community volunteers, for others who have expressed interest in participating more actively, and for people who, in the communities' judgment, have the potential for leadership. Workshops on legal matters, engineering, architecture, financial management, leadership, and organizational development have provided a structured environment for learning. Also, the sharing of experiences among peers on local, national, and international levels has served as an unstructured but valuable educational tool.

Also significant for the formation of leaders and other helpers has been the setting up of regular meetings, feedback systems, reflection sessions and monitoring mechanisms. These have engendered a mentality of mentoring and ongoing learning in which both experienced and new volunteers benefit from the group's collective experience.

Volunteers from new member communities are also invited to participate in hands-on activities that show how established programs function. This has served to improve the learning curve for all volunteers, allowing newly organized communities to benefit from the experience of more established communities. These activities have been made possible through the financial support of church-based agencies such as Misereor in Germany and Cordaid in the Netherlands. Other support has come from multi-lateral institutions such as the World Bank/Cities Alliance and the Asian Development Bank.

Fanning the Flames: A Multi-stakeholder Environment

Links with other like-minded organizations began when contact was made with international groups such as ACHR, SDI, and NSDF. Very early on, these organizations provided encouragement and offered direction to the fledgling savings organization that was to become the HPFP. Since then, the VMSDFI and the HPFP have been able to establish significant relationships with multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Through the SDI network, meaningful links have also been forged with UN-HABITAT and the United Nations Development Program.

Nationally, the HPFP has forged significant working relationships with national shelter agencies such as the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC), the National Housing Authority (NHA) and Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board (HLURB). These links have been advantageous for the HPFP, as they have provided opportunities to discuss innovative ideas about legalization of land tenure for marginalized communities. They have also opened avenues where issues such as eviction, demolition and relocation can be debated and courses of action can be agreed upon. It is hoped that, eventually, these links will enable HPFP not only to influence policy change but also promote pro-poor housing regulations.

Within their cities and communities, the urban poor have established links with the local government, resulting in their representation in local development councils that act as advisory bodies for the formulation of local policies and development plans. These relationships have matured to a level where representative groups among the urban poor have been able to sponsor better housing legislation and regulations.

On another level, partnerships have been forged with academic institutions such as the ICSI, the University of the Philippines in Mindanao, and the University of San Agustin in Iloilo City, all of which have expressed a willingness to assist the federation, particularly in collating and analyzing data. As time has gone on, these institutions have provided technical assistance to federation volunteers, who have gradually learned the various stages and technical requirements for collating data and interpreting results.

II. An Analysis of What Has Been Accomplished

Burning Bright: The Present and How Systems Have Changed

Today, member communities of the HPFP continue to promote various projects that provide for the acquisition of land by urban poor communities. These projects focus particularly on high risk settlements and demonstrate the viability of community-led slum upgrade programs in which communities take on a more significant role in the development of their own cities. While special attention has been devoted to large-scale resettlement of people into better-housing projects, the massive dislocation caused by calamities and disasters has also been a part of HPFP's interventions.

The concrete results can be classified as follows. HPFP has:

a. *Promoted community-led processes on a city-wide basis* in response to the demands of a widening membership

base. HPFP's multi-faceted response – the mobilization of community resources, the acquisition of land, and the delivery of social services to vulnerable groups in the slums – is a departure from the "micro-sized" view of development. Rather, this response takes into account a multi-stakeholder environment that aims at secure land tenure for urban poor communities and uses a city-wide perspective.

In addition, financial resources have grown because of the increased number of communities who have become members, a marked growth in the number of persons who are saving money, and the use of diverse savings programs. Programs emphasize transparency and accountability on the part of those in leadership roles. As micro-lending has increased, local communities have designed various types of savings programs; many of them focus on saving for land acquisition. The development of a variety of financial models and the training of local people to manage funds has paved the way for micro-lending to people are unable to get loans from banks, such as the urban poor. At the same time, financial assets have increased and opportunities for supporting family and community projects have improved.

Beyond the obvious financial considerations, the savings programs have also brought slum communities increased social capital and leverage. Increasing collaboration with government and with the private sector has provided communities with the opportunity to discuss and make decisions about their own problems, thus empowering the urban poor to take on a significant role in urban development.

The federation also delivers social services to vulnerable groups in the slums, whose lives are made more difficult by their mental or physical condition – i.e. the disabled, the elderly and children – and attempts to address their needs. By including these vulnerable groups when it addresses tenure issues and by linking them with appro-

priate institutions, the HPFP has expanded the scope of government-initiated programs so that slum living does not become a barrier to accessing the safety nets needed by those in these groups.

Their location in cities where the federation is present permits the various savings programs to be more responsive to the unique needs of each community; at the same time, local "ownership" of various community-based processes has increased.

b. *Created a database on slum dwelling and influenced city management*. The generating of a database on slum dwelling is a sign of the desire of the urban poor to gain a deeper understanding of their situation. They themselves took the initiative to obtain accurate information about the number of slum dwellers and their living conditions. In all the urban centers, the federation has used data from community-initiated research as the basis for its meetings with the local government. Through partnership with local academic institutions and technical groups, HPFP has gathered data that has broadened the scope of community plans by opening up other options for development.

The arena has, in effect, moved from mere data collection to a political one that underscores the right of the urban poor to representation in city planning processes. Within varying political environments, the HPFP has single-mindedly concentrated its efforts on communities living in danger zones and on strengthening ties with the various urban poor groups in each city, while actively forging stronger links with agencies and institutions that share the same goals.

c. *Built productive partnerships*. By dialoguing with the government, by taking advantage of existing laws such as the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA) of 1992, and by using community-generated data on slum dwelling,

communities have been able to forge links with local governments and with housing agencies at local, regional, and national levels. Locally, this has translated into community participation in special consultative bodies such as: the Local Housing Board (LHB); project-instituted local inter-agency committees (LIACs); various housing- or relocation-related technical working groups (TWGs); and development councils at the district level or city level, where the importance of community-led processes is further impressed on other participants. Communities have also played an active role in drafting City Action Plans and have contributed to the formulation of comprehensive land-use plans. They work to keep the urban poor at the center of the agenda and to ensure that they are included in the results of the meetings.

The Vice President of the Philippines – who also heads the HUDCC – has requested Federation involvement at all stages when government projects result in large-scale displacement. HPFP involvement ranges from pre-relocation preparation to post-relocation support through community-building. HPFP also provides help in finding jobs.

As part of a wider urban poor movement aimed at guaranteeing the right to own land, HPFP has established links with other urban poor groups at the city and national levels. The city-level coalition-building process, at times made difficult by the ideologically-guided agendas of some associations, has been especially fruitful in promoting the federation's drive for a city-wide perspective on slum upgrading. In meetings with institutions from civil society, the federation maintains political impartiality and remains agenda-focused.

International partnerships with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) and the Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) have been strengthened by the active participation of key volunteers from regional groups of the HPFP in regional meetings and global activities.

International contacts have become a bargaining and promotional tool, especially when visiting representatives from HPFP and their local counterparts are present in a city and show solidarity and numbers during major events. This has been particularly useful when seeking the cooperation of government. One of the most notable examples was the launching of the UN-HABITAT campaign for secure tenure, which took place in Davao City in October 2002. A delegation from UN-HABITAT attended, led by the executive director, Ms. Anna Tibaijuka. National and local government officials took part, including 3 mayors. So too did representatives from SDI member countries and close to 14,000 participants and representatives from communities throughout the Philippines.

d. *Advocated for policies that respond to the needs of the people*. Advocacy for such policies at the city level aims at pressuring local governments to carry out the mandate to provide socialized housing contained in the UDHA, the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, and the Comprehensive and Integrated Shelter Finance Act (CISFA) of 1994. Taken together, these legal documents provide a basis for communities to claim their rights and to demand quality participation in governance structures.

Another advocacy goal of the federation is to have structures for resettlement set up. This is utterly necessary because most local governments do not have guidelines for working our tenure-related issues, such as eviction, demolition, and socialized housing – despite the presence of pro-poor laws like the Urban Development and Housing Act. Drafts of City Action Plans have been formulated and presented. There is still, however, a need for intensive follow-up action to ensure that cities implement these plans through legislation.

e. *Designed innovative strategies*. In order to guarantee the inclusion of community-led processes in city-level development projects, strategies are being refined to influence the design of slum upgrading programs and to set up a city-level fund.

With a view toward designing collaborative resettlement processes, the HPFP is spearheading a pilot program involving several community-led upgrading projects. While institutional buy-in from government agencies and the private sector is still being awaited, the federation continues to work on possibilities for guaranteeing pro-poor influence on the development of slums.

The Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF) has been in operation in several cities even while its definitive structure has been evolving. As a program, it can boast of several communities that have been able to secure land through the pooling of community financial resources. Steps are currently underway to set up administrative, financial, legal, and technical mechanisms to further strengthen the UPDF as an institution. Simultaneously, there has been massive promotion of this idea among the various member communities. Not only has this triggered an increase in savings, but the UPDF has reinforced the communal nature of the HPFP.

f. *Built alliances with learning communities*. Because documentation is so important today, a comprehensive account has been written describing everything that the member communities of the federation are engaged in. Besides telling the federation's story, this is important because it provides a full description of the processes that instill in communities the three fundamental characteristics of the HPFP; namely, community-led processes; savings, not only as a financial tool, but as a way of bringing people together; and critical engagement with government.

Another important outcome has been a manual for community-level financial operations. It helps safeguard the people's hard-earned resources by promoting transparency and accountability in all transactions.

Conclusion

From a simple savings and loan program in Payatas, the work of the Homeless People's Federation Philippines (HPFP) has evolved into mobilizing urban settlers and slum dwellers around shelter and land tenure issues. A critical component of this work has been to create the opportunity for people and communities to build their own social institutions, decide how to gather resources and allocate them to meet the needs they have identified. Having done that, they develop the skills and the confidence needed not only to engage in community-based processes, but also to participate in city-level discussions.

As its work grows, the HPFP has found ready partners among various institutional stakeholders; namely, professionals, academicians, local governments, national agencies, international organizations and multi-lateral institutions. Gradually, a broad support system is evolving that is made up of networks of communities which employ strategies to manage their resources, define their involvement with the private and public sectors, and participate in the growth of their cities. Through the work of HPFP, we see how possible it is to mobilize urban settlers, so that they are no longer symbols of the social cost of development, but are active partners who demonstrate how cities can work for them.

Norberto Carcellar, C.M., has been working for most of his priestly ministry in urban parishes administered by the Vincentian Fathers in the Philippines. His training in Social Development and Micro-finance has helped him focus the work in those parishes on the issues of slum dwelling and informal settlements. He is presently the Executive Director of the Philippine Action for Community-led Shelter Initiatives, an NGO which he initiated. He is also an active member of the Vincentian Social Ministry of the Philippine Province, which serves as the coordinating group to enhance the involvement of the Vincentians in human and community development. At present he acts as a delegate to the Council of Federations of Slum Dwellers International (SDI), and a member of the advisory body to the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights.

Strategies for Systemic Change

Task-Oriented Strategies

By Patricia P. de Nava

St. Vincent's life and work have inspired countless charitable services over the last four centuries. Clearly one the keys to his success was his organizational talent and his ability to transmit his vision to his followers, helping them become servant leaders and empowering them to meet the challenges they faced.

Vincent's stay at Chatillon-les-Dombes saw the beginning of an enormous network of charity that channeled individual good will into effective service. There he wrote the first of many documents on organizational matters addressed to the Confraternities of Charity (now called the AIC), the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. These documents demonstrate how Vincent translated the gospel into organized action.

Under the heading of task-oriented strategies, the Commission has grouped six strategies that it found in the projects whose stories this book narrates:

- Start with a serious analysis of the local reality, flowing from concrete data, and tailor all projects to this reality.
- Have a holistic vision, addressing a series of basic human needs – individual and social, spiritual and physical, especially jobs, health care, housing, education, spiritual growth – with an integral approach toward prevention and sustainable development.
- Implement coherent strategies, starting modestly, delegating tasks and responsibilities, and providing quality services respectful of human dignity.

- Systematize, institutionalize and evaluate the project and its procedures, describing measurable indicators and results.
- Make the project self-sustaining by guaranteeing that it will have the human and economic resources needed for it to last.
- Be transparent, inviting participation in preparing budgets and in commenting on financial reports. Maintain careful controls over money management.

The first strategy in this group is fundamental: **"Start with a serious analysis of the local reality, flowing from concrete data, and tailor all projects to this reality."** Analysis of the real-life situation is the foundation for attacking the causes of poverty and engaging in transformative action. It enables us to be aware of the positive and negative elements within our own situation and the problems and risks that a project will involve not only for the beneficiaries but also for the promoters. To analyze a problematic reality properly, we must situate it within a geographical, economic, political, social and cultural context. We must identify the group that will participate in the project, listen to its difficulties and aspirations, and discern the causes of the problem that it is struggling against. Accurate analysis of the situation is imperative. This can be carried out in different ways: through direct observation, interviews, assessment of statistical data compiled by organizations, etc. Nevertheless, no technical method, no matter how efficient, can substitute for respectful, attentive listening to the voices of the poor.

Pope Paul VI wrote in *Octogesima Adveniens* (4):

> *It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and … to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed.*

The crucial role preliminary analysis plays in any project can be seen clearly in the story of Project DREAM, coordinated by Fr. Robert Maloney. He writes:

> *No region has been hit harder than sub-Saharan Africa, where an estimated 22.5 million people have HIV/AIDS. In fact, two thirds of HIV cases worldwide are found in sub-Saharan Africa, including 61% of all women with HIV. The World Health Organization estimates that 95% of those with the virus do not know they have it. South Africa has the highest population living with HIV/AIDS (5,500,000) of any country in the world. Swaziland has the highest adult prevalence rate in the world, 33.4 percent.*

Without access to and knowledge of preliminary information, no project can proceed effectively. In the case of Project DREAM, analysis of the situation in sub-Saharan Africa inspired project leaders to undertake their ambitious initiative.

The second strategy in the group, **"Have a holistic vision, addressing a series of basic human needs – individual and social, spiritual and physical, especially jobs, health care, housing, education, spiritual growth – with an integral approach toward prevention and sustainable development"** is essential for an effective approach to changing the lives of the poor. This approach is clearly illustrated in Rosalie Rendu's words: "There are different kinds of charity, and the small help we give is only a palliative, for it is necessary to set up a more efficient and lasting charity; to study the attitudes and the level of instruction of the poor, obtaining work for them, with the result that they can escape their own condition of misery."

Though the concept of systemic change is a relatively recent one, many members of the Vincentian Family throughout its history have recognized that the poor whom they were serving had a series of basic human needs that remained unmet, so they initiated a wide variety of programs to assist them. Rosalie Rendu's works included a primary school, where Rosalie herself originally taught and which she later ran. In it, she and

others labored strenuously to teach children to read, to write, to do basic mathematics and to learn their catechism. In order to provide work for young girls and needy mothers, Rosalie organized courses in sewing and embroidering. She later founded a day-care center and a nursery school where working mothers could have their children cared for during the day. Though Rosalie was not an advocate of orphanages, she took over the running of one. She also began a home for the elderly. Besides these works, she and the Sisters ran a center for the distribution of food and firewood, with a pharmacy, a clinic and a clothes dispensary. Throughout her life, Rosalie visited the poor and infirm in their homes. She encouraged the newly-formed Society of St. Vincent de Paul, as well as the re-established Ladies of Charity, to do the same. She and her followers cared for the sick and the dying in the cholera epidemics which recurred from 1849-1854. They attended to the living, accompanied the dying and buried the dead.

People emerge from poverty only when they have stable means for satisfying their basic human needs. A holistic project like Akamasoa helps them to find those means. It offers participants a job, the opportunity to educate their children, the possibility of owning their own home, a community of friends, and also religious education and prayer together. Fr. Pedro Opeka states Akamasoa' approach very clearly:

> *Attendance at school requires cooperation; people must take part willingly. Those who are hungry, who lack healthy living conditions and who cannot meet basic human needs often do not have the freedom to bear the burden of education. For that reason, the battle against poverty must take into account all the fundamental needs of the human person: food, lodging, work, and healthcare. These are the foundations of freedom. We describe Akamasoa as a "Humanitarian Association" because our plan unites its members so closely. The human person is a whole; its parts do not grow independently. Genuine human development is achieved only when we are attentive to all the dimensions of the human person.*

Projects for the poor usually begin modestly and grow step by step. All the authors of the stories in this book say the same thing: start small! The story of Vincent's experience as parish priest of Chatillon-les-Dombes sets the pattern for the third strategy in this group: **"Implement coherent strategies, starting modestly, delegating tasks and responsibilities, and providing quality services respectful of human dignity."** This is a strategy to which Vincent gave particular importance. When he saw the needs in Chatillon, he called a meeting, formulated a plan, created an association, and delegated responsibilities to the people of the parish. From this seemingly small beginning, a whole movement emerged.[1] Similarly, many of the AIC's current projects had a humble start and have grown into much larger works. For example, in the story entitled "AIC-Madagascar", Patricia Nava explains how the volunteers used a small grant of one hundred dollars to start a nutritional project that later became a national network against hunger and malnutrition, one that is now recognized by international organizations like UNICEF.

Quality, competence, gentleness and respect should characterize the service provided in a project. Both Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, and later Frederick Ozanam and Elizabeth Ann Seton, insisted that services be carried out well, with adequate resources and at the same time with warmth and concern. Louise, ever the practical person, gave enormously detailed instructions as to how tasks should be carried out, while insisting that they be done with tenderness:

> *Above all, be very courteous and gentle with your poor; you know they are our masters and we must love them tenderly and have great respect for them. It is not enough for us to bear these maxims in mind: we must give proof of them by our charitable and gentle attention. By our state of life and profession we are dedicated to this… "In serving the sick, you should have God alone in view. You should not be too lenient and condescending when the sick refuse*

[1] José-María Román, *San Vicente de Paúl* (Madrid:BAC, 1982) I, 123.

> *to take remedies or become too insolent, yet you must beware of showing either resentment or contempt in your demeanor toward them. On the contrary, treat the sick with respect and humility, remembering that all harshness and disdain, as well as the services and the honor you render them, are directed to our Lord himself.*

The gospel stories of Jesus' healing the sick and transforming the lives of the poor lie at the heart of the life and works of our Vincentian Family's saints. The scene in Matthew 25 inspired them to serve the poor concretely. Sr. Ellen Flynn underlines this third strategy in the story of The Passage: "The fact that we provide a quality service shows our regard for the human beings we serve, no matter how low their own self-esteem is, or how serious and degrading the issues they face."

The need for serious evaluation is signaled by the fourth strategy in this group: **"Systematize, institutionalize and evaluate the project and its procedures, describing measurable indicators and results."** St. Vincent was very concerned about the results of projects he was engaged in, and on many occasions asked qualified experts to give their opinion about how things were going. Among his legal documents we find the following statement:

> *To this end, the sites will be seen and visited, and the aforementioned improvements inspected and appraised by experts upon whom the parties will agree before said Monsieur Gontier, the arbitrator, unless he himself should be appointed for this ex-officio. The said experts will make a report on the sites, as well as on the damages if there are any. In execution of the decree, the petitioner appointed an expert, with a view to the prescribed report.* (SV II, Appendix 2. Petition of St. Vincent to the Parliament)

Evaluation is an indispensable follow-up to action. A periodic review of a project allows for an assessment of its positive and negative aspects and provides an opportunity to adjust goals, methods and means if problems are arising. When presenting a project to obtain a grant, interim and final evalua-

tions must be included, since without a regular qualitative and quantitative review there is no way to ensure a project's steady development. Fr. Norberto Carcellar expresses this in the chapter on the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, a project which has had extraordinary results and which is being replicated in many Asian countries:

> *As the matter was being re-thought, a training course in 1995 further influenced the shape of the program that was emerging. Organized in India by the British Durham University, it centered on the role of self-help groups as implementing agents in microfinance programs. The course placed particular emphasis on how these groups could provide delivery and control mechanisms. Procedures were suggested that would be readily understood by volunteers who worked in the program. What developed were policies, receipt and loan forms, passbooks, and collectors' notebooks that are still used to this day. The course also gave a preview of how microfinance self-help groups grow and mature through time and what issues they might face in the future.*

A fifth strategy judged to be essential in all the project is to **"Make the project self-sustaining by guaranteeing that it will have the human and economic resources needed for it to last."** Before starting to work, those designing a project must assemble the human and material resources they will need. A detailed budget should be formulated. If a grant is sought, one must justify all expenses. That involves determining carefully the cost of materials, labor and salaries (hourly cost, hours of service, monthly salaries, etc.). Organizations that offer financial aid will demand certified receipts and bills of sale from the companies that sell the materials. All the actions planned should form a coherent, feasible, and sustainable project. In addition, one must assess beforehand the strengths and weaknesses of those who will be running the project. Good leadership will be crucial.

To make a project successful and have a lasting impact, it is important to create networks, when possible, collaborating with other groups or institutions that have similar objectives.

This is exemplified in Project DREAM:

> *The Seton Institute, which was founded in 1985 and has its seat in Daly City, California, has close historical connections with the Daughters of Charity and assists them in fundraising. It seeks support for DREAM from private and public sources. Since a sponsoring organization covers all Seton Institute's operating costs, 100% of every contribution goes directly to aiding healthcare projects. A recently established office of the Daughters of Charity, called International Project Services, is also now assisting in the search for funds.*

In the story of the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, sustainability was a key aspect from the beginning of the project: "The search for a savings program that could be scaled up while remaining sustainable led to the idea of a program run by the community itself, rather than by a large administrative staff."

The last of the task-oriented strategies is: **"Be transparent, inviting participation in preparing budgets and in commenting on financial reports. Maintain careful controls over money management".**

What we call "transparency" St. Vincent called "simplicity". He wrote: "God has given me such a great esteem for simplicity that I call it my Gospel. I have a particular devotion to saying things just as they are." In a talk on "Living the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul Today" given in Ireland in March 2000, Fr. Robert Maloney noted:

> *Jesus, the Lord, expects us to have the simplicity of a dove. This means giving a straightforward opinion about things as we honestly see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without any double-dealing or manipulation, our intention being focused solely on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in the spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with*

the simple, and that he conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and the prudent of this world and reveals the to little ones. I say to all the members of our family today: have passion for truth. Be true.

Transparency instills in others a spirit of trust and ownership. Today, just as in St. Vincent's time, simplicity, or transparency, means genuineness. It remains very attractive to the modern men and women whom we are called to serve. It entails:

- speaking the truth (a difficult discipline, especially when our own convenience is at stake or when the truth is embarrassing)
- witnessing to the truth (or the personal authenticity that makes a person's life match his or her words)
- searching for the truth as a wayfarer rather than thinking that one possesses it an "owner"
- striving for purity of intention
- practicing the truth through works of justice and charity
- living modestly and sharing what one has
- using clear, transparent language, especially in teaching or preaching.

For the Homeless People's Federation Philippines, the following guideline is important:

Financial resources have grown because of the increased number of communities that have become members, a marked growth in the number of persons who are saving money, and the use of diverse savings programs. Programs emphasize transparency and accountability on the part of those in leadership roles. As micro-lending has increased, local communities have designed various types of savings programs; many of them focus on saving for land acquisition.

Clancy Night Shelter

Meeting the Needs of Dublin's Poorest

By Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C.

When the Clancy Night Shelter first opened its doors in Dublin in 2001, it faced a grim reality. The city's homeless centers were not able, or in many cases not willing, to deal with the many young men and women who were homeless in the city. Worse, in some cases those who were the most in need of help were often the least likely among Dublin's homeless to find support. Created as a response to this dilemma, the Clancy Night Shelter has worked for the past six years to reach out to that homeless population which is most in need.

The Clancy Night Shelter is a low-threshold service for homeless young people who have a history of drug abuse, predominantly with heroin. Located in the northern part of Central Dublin, the project offers accommodation and support to 17 people on a nightly basis seven days a week. The property is owned by the Dublin City Council and is supported through statutory funding via the Homeless Agency of Dublin. Clancy's doors open at 5pm and close at 9:30am from Monday to Friday, and open at 10am on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Residents share rooms with one other person for the night, and are offered a cooked evening meal as well as breakfast before they leave the next morning. Each resident is assigned a key worker who works with them for education on health promotion (safer drug use), addressing substance misuse (from reduction to abstinence) and locating appropriate accommodations. The shelter is

staffed by a team of 11 full-time workers supported by full-time and part-time volunteers. The staff strives to stay true to the vision and mission of the Depaul Trust, that "everyone has a place to call home and a stake in their community", and the mission is "to offer homeless and disadvantaged people the opportunity to fulfill their potential and move towards an independent and positive future".

Environmental context

To understand how the Clancy Night Shelter began, one must first understand the environment that existed in Dublin prior to its opening. In the autumn of 2001, many homeless young people in Dublin had few housing options open to them. They also had a range of needs, many of which can be identified in the identity profile list below.

Typical Profile of a Clancy Client

- Long-term homelessness (81% are homeless more than 1 year)
- Active drug use, usually of heroin (92%)
- Between the age of 18 and 35 (71% between the age of 18 and 25)
- From Dublin, mainly the south and north inner city or surrounding estates (75%)
- Usually male (88%)
- Has experienced family breakdown
- Has seen drug use play a common part in personal and family life, with other siblings taking drugs and parents potentially misusing drugs or alcohol
- Potentially using Class A drugs in early teens, and in some cases introduced to soft drugs as early as 8 or 9 years old. Many of them may have been introduced to drug use by peers or family members

- Has been in prison more than once
- Mental health issues (either because of personal history, substance misuse or long-term homelessness)
- Physical health issues, including vulnerability to infectious diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis C and others
- Challenging behavior due to active drug use, which leads to difficulties in managing strict rules and regulations in existing services
- Exclusion from most of the mainstream homeless services in Dublin
- Left school early with very low educational achievement
- Has never found full-time employment.

With this in mind, it became clear from the beginning that the needs of the typical client were immense. For this reason, the Clancy service needed to be very flexible, with rules kept at a minimum but with enough structure provided to support them in addressing their needs. The service needed to be holistic, and staff had to be able and willing to work with the range of issues that many of these young men and women were dealing with. In Dublin in 2001 the reality was that homeless services were not always willing or able to deal with the young men and women who matched the identity profile above. In some cases, those most in need were the least likely to get the support they needed, for a number of reasons:

- Most homeless services in Dublin had strict abstinence policies, and would not admit a young person unless he or she could prove to be drug-free
- Even a homeless person with a prescription for methadone script would need to be very stable to get a bed for the night
- Often service users had to produce proof of clean urine to be admitted, to demonstrate they were drug-free
- It was a commonplace activity to be physically searched on entry in hostels
- If caught with drugs in their possession, clients faced immediate eviction

- If a young person was caught with drugs in their possession or "stoned" they could be barred for 6 months or more, and in many cases for life, with the expected serious consequences for young people
- Projects often had rigid behavioral codes, which meant that service users could easily be excluded from shelters. Often many of the men and women would be excluded from a range if not all of the homeless services available
- Couples could not find joint accommodations
- There were few places for females in the city.

The situations described above made it obvious that a new service was needed. This service would have a huge task ahead of it, particularly in its efforts to change perceptions of the best way to work with this group of homeless clients.

The history of Clancy Night Shelter and the Depaul Trust's involvement

In 2000, the Chief Executive of Depaul Trust UK, Mark McGreevy, took a three-month sabbatical and moved to Ireland by invitation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP). He explored services and partnerships in Ireland and assisted the

SSVP in reviewing some of their services. During his stay he held positive discussions with the SSVP, the Vincentian Fathers, and the Daughters of Charity about establishing the Depaul Trust in Ireland. Mark made significant contacts with the Homeless Agency in Dublin (an organization set up to lead and deliver the strategy of the Irish government on homelessness in the greater Dublin area). Senior management members of Depaul Trust also met with a number of other main agencies delivering services in the city. McGreevy and senior managers from Depaul Trust UK met with agencies working with homeless people in the greater Dublin area. In particular, the Depaul Trust gained the attention of Mary Higgins, the Director of the Homeless Agency, who was putting together the first Cold Weather Strategy for Dublin.

In November 2001, the Depaul Trust was asked by the Homeless Agency to consider running a night shelter for young homeless persons who had a history of substance abuse. The project would be the first and only one of its kind in Dublin. The Depaul Trust UK declined to offer a proposal for such a shelter, because they had not yet been established as a charity in Ireland, but offered practical support to another successful agency and to the Homeless Agency. In December, the Homeless Agency came back to the Depaul Trust to tell them that no agency had taken up the challenge, and asked DPT to reconsider their decision. After careful consideration, The Depaul Trust UK agreed to take on the project. A manager arrived from England to head up the project, and an empty army facility called Clancy Barracks was offered as a suitable venue for the project.

The project opened its doors for the first time on February 4, 2002. It was funded as a cold weather service, and so was scheduled to close down at the end of April. At that time, it received an extension of a further three months; in July, it was given permanent status and permanent funding was found. A staff team was recruited from Dublin and England, supported by volunteers recruited locally. The project opened in the

evenings for young people sleeping on the street who had been identified by outreach street workers and had been taken to the project by Dublin City Council Night Bus. A hot meal (cooked by volunteers) was offered, as well as space for young people to talk about their situation.

It was evident that many of the young people using Clancy were not only very appreciative of the project but full of praise for the way that staff allowed them in and respected them as individuals, even in very small ways; for example, by knocking on their bedroom door before entering and not searching them at the door of the project. They had a range of issues, including intravenous drug use, poor health and medical issues, chaotic life styles and a range of histories, such as abuse and broken or violent family backgrounds. They had experienced much exclusion and often felt unwanted, many saying that they were barred from all other projects and were sometimes moved on from the place where they were sleeping on the street. Some had been abused as they slept. They ranged from 18 to 35 years of age, with the majority between 18 and 25.

After some time, a visible change could be seen in many of the clients. There was much less chaotic behavior, replaced by a willingness to engage with staff to address their issues, and some clients even started to talk of coming off drugs or getting resettled or making contact with their family again. Some young people were moved on to more stable hostels, even though this process was difficult because suitable places were few. Physically, many of them improved due to information about safer injection methods provided by staff and the provision of health promotion sessions run by the Health Board.

In 2003 Clancy Barracks was sold and the service was transferred on a temporary basis to central Dublin, where it is situated today. We are currently looking for a permanent home where we could offer services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Systemic Change

Looking back, we have seen a great deal of positive change. Today in Dublin there are a number of other service providers delivering similar services, including several working with those groups who would have been seen as difficult to engage with, such as those with a history of street drinking. With the introduction of low-threshold services run by the Depaul Trust, such as the Clancy Night Shelter and another project for long term street drinkers (Aungier Street opened in December 2002), other providers have been challenged to review their referral criteria and methods of intervention. This is not to say that it is a general free-for-all in all homeless services regarding substance abuse in Dublin, but there are more and more service providers recognizing the need to reach out to people presenting challenging behavior in a more proactive way instead of simply excluding them. It is important to recognize that not all services should operate in this way, but there is need for a "continuum of care" to meet the needs of a large and varied homeless population.

In order to reach this stage, the Depaul Trust had to establish a comprehensive training and formation program for staff and managers in the organization, as well as ensure that critical questions are always kept on the agenda so that the service does not change gradually without notice (a frequent phenomenon in such services that is often recognized only in hindsight). Staff were trained and informed in critical areas, including the use of best practices in working with drug users, health matters, safe drug injection practices and safety issues. They were encouraged to take further courses relevant to their work, such as counseling and addiction studies. Also, we have

worked to educate and inform the staff on our values and mission through sessions on our founders (St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac), through information in periodical staff newsletters, and more recently by the formation of our own in-house values and mission training course run by the Depaul Foundation. This included an experience where six staffers from DPT Ireland and six staffers from DPT UK came together and looked at our values and mission within the context of seeing ourselves as leaders and of our Vincentian heritage and ethos. The process of formation and training is ongoing and is under constant review. Recently, we have been fortunate to establish through the Daughters of Charity a new pastoral program with the employment/assignment of a full time pastoral development worker.

Through the Clancy Night Shelter, the Depaul Trust has shown that if you adapt and build policies and procedures around the pressing issues of the men and women being served, there will be greater engagement with service users and therefore more appropriate support provided to assist them to address their identified needs. Strict abstinence policies have the effect of putting drug abuse under cover and increasing the chance of people failing to engage with needed services. The removal of strict abstinence policies means that men and women are more likely to approach projects and engage in key programs. Early evidence has shown that fewer and fewer services in Dublin operate strict exclusion policies. In general, services are becoming more flexible in dealing with those who come with complex needs and challenging behavior.

As stated, services for women were and still are underrepresented in the homeless sector in Dublin; however, the Clancy Night Shelter was one of the first projects which demonstrated that a facility could successfully accommodate male and female residents, as well as couples, in one unified project.

Without the will of government agencies to support and fund the project, the Clancy Night Shelter could not have been created. Government agencies now have confidence in the program and help to pursue funding on a permanent basis. They have also looked at other client groups that are not funded, such as our Aungier Street project. The government has also started to think of further strategies for this client group and others. Public perception has also changed due to the high profile of the project and the willingness of the Depaul Trust to put the project into the limelight. This has been accomplished through radio interviews with staff and young people telling their stories. Further attention has come through newspaper stories, as well as by word of mouth through volunteers discussing their experience of working at the shelter. Since opening this project, the Depaul Trust has successfully secured additional funding from the Homeless Agency for a day liaison worker and a full-time nurse manager who works across four Depaul Trust projects, providing clinics, advice and referral to other agencies.

Happily, the most prominent changes can be seen in the young people we have served. As was mentioned in the historical context above, for the first time service users had a place to go where they could stay even when their drug history was known. Their drug abuse was an open story rather than something to be hidden. Young people may access Clancy on a recurring basis and are never judged negatively for returning. Rather, this is viewed as an opportunity to engage with a young person again and again and to gauge levels of motivation and work with them accordingly, meeting clients with where they are.

The physical well-being of these young people is crucial. One of the indicators that we have used to evaluate the success of Clancy is a simple one: the consumption of food in the facility. When we first opened, the young men and women would not eat much — mostly cereal and toast. Four years later, if the staff is late serving food (as can happen from time to time) they are not slow to let us know of their dissatisfaction.

Over time, we have worked to ensure that the service at Clancy is flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of

clients. Some of this is achieved by reading and interpreting what is happening in the society that our service users live in. This includes keeping current on changes in the drugs of choice or drug availability on the street, increases in drug use and other trends. In addition to consultation with funders and other providers, we have also received feedback from our clients through regular resident meetings where we encourage the men and women to contribute suggestions and complaints about our services.

Conclusion

Every year the staff of the Clancy Night Shelter serves almost a hundred different young people who cross our threshold. We work with them to find detox programs, to secure longer-term housing (mainly through transitional hostels), to access medical services and to learn about safer injection practices. The Clancy Night Shelter has demonstrated that we can work proactively, and not just simply respond to needs as they arrive. This is achieved in a meaningful way by doing more than simply providing a roof over clients' heads, but engaging with them and meeting their individual needs. At Clancy, we not only measure our success by the number of people we see, but also by factors such as length of stay, ability to offer further referrals, and our level of engagement with our clients.

The Depaul Trust and the Clancy Night Shelter hold aloft a candle of hope for the young men and women who cross our threshold. We recognize that more needs to be done, that our clients have further needs that we can and should meet in the future, and so we will continue to lead by example and provide services with a truly Vincentian ethos.

Clancy Statistics

Year	Age 18-21	Age 22-25	Age 26-30	Age 31-35	Males	Females	Total
2002	25	41	32	24	97	25	122
2003	12	42	25	16	75	20	95
2004	10	23	29	21	76	7	83
2005	14	28	33	17	83	9	92
2006	10	40	25	14	81	8	89

The following two case studies are an appropriate coda to the story of the Clancy Night Shelter, showing both the impact of our services and the possibility of hope these services offer to our young clients.

Case Study One

A couple (both under 25 years of age) was referred to Clancy after a month of "sleeping rough" on the streets. They had been barred from other homeless accommodations because of their chaotic drug use. At first, they were reluctant to work with our staff, as previous exclusions from hostels had left them feeling that staff members were not to be trusted. After approximately one month, they started to work with our staff members and both expressed a desire to make changes in their lifestyles.

The staff team helped them gain access to methadone maintenance programs for the first time. They both linked in with counselors at a clinic and continued to meet with staff at Clancy. As a result of this support, they felt prepared to move to a more secure living environment, as this would help them maintain stability in their methadone programs. They were then referred to the Community Welfare Officer (CWO) at the Homeless Persons Unit, where they received a deposit for private rented accommodations and an agreement that a monthly rental allowance component would be included in their social welfare payment once they moved into suitable accommodations. Within two weeks they moved to a one-bedroom garden flat in the north inner city. For the first few months following their move, they would drop by to let staff know how well they were adapting to independent living.

Case Study Two

A single male aged 21, originally from the south inner city, came to us after "rough sleeping" on the streets for over a month. He had been homeless during the previous year, and was excluded from other Dublin hostels because of drug use. He had originally become homeless when he was asked to leave the family home after his mother became concerned about the effect his drug use was having on his younger siblings.

Soon after arriving at the Clancy Night Shelter, he asked for staff support; he was concerned about his severe drug use, which had led to numerous outstanding arrest warrants. He also wanted to re-establish contact with his 3-year-old daughter, who was in the care of foster parents.

Staff members arranged for him to have an assessment for methadone maintenance, at which point he was also put in touch with a counseling service. Staffers then accompanied him to a meeting with his probation officer, where a court report was drawn up in the hope that he would not face a custodial sentence. He remained at Clancy for a further three months. During this time, he renewed a relationship with the mother of his child. He informed staff that he wanted to establish a home with her and regain custody of their young daughter. With the support of our staff, he was referred to other accommodations through the Homeless Persons Unit.

Four months later he returned with another referral, as he had been sleeping on the street for over a week. He informed staff that his relationship had broken down and that he was no longer on a methadone program. Staff members were concerned about his poor appearance and obvious weight loss. He informed staff that his drug use had increased and that he was now addicted to benzodiazepines. Staff helped him register with a doctor and start another methadone program at a local clinic.

After approximately one month, he had stabilized on his methadone and continued to work well with his support staff. He complained of being bored during the day, so staff provided information on homeless day services. He participated in a peer support program run by one of the addiction day services, which he successfully completed after 12 weeks. This success further motivated him to address his other drug addictions. After undergoing a benzodiazepine detoxification program under the supervision of the doctor at his clinic, he is now stable on methadone and is currently waiting for a bed in a residential detoxification unit. He remains highly motivated and continues to meet with his counselor on a weekly basis.

The Mindoro Project in the Philippines

To Participate Fully in Life Building Basic Ecclesial Communities

By Sr. Malou Baaco, DC

This is the story of farmers – men and women, young and old – who, awakening to their potential, recognized the opportunity to use their gifts, reclaimed responsibility for their lives and brought change to their communities. How can we help a people with so much promise and so much practical wisdom to believe not only in themselves, but also in what they can do to shape their lives in accord with their dreams? How we offer formation to farmers and farming families so that they can bring the virtues of patience, creativity, fortitude and forbearance, a deep sense of community, and a simple trusting faith in God to bear upon their struggle for justice and a more humane life? How can a people excluded from participation in life because of their poverty reclaim their birthright? This is the journey of eight farming communities on the island of Mindoro off the coast of Luzon in the Philippines. They moved, to use the words of Sr. Suzanne Guillemin, "from a complex of human inferiority to full participation in life."

The Context: Occidental Mindoro: "the forgotten half …"

The island of Mindoro, near the southwestern tip of Luzon, is divided into two parts by a mountain range running from north to south, which serves as the boundary between the island's two provinces. The western province, Occidental Mindoro, poorer and less developed than the eastern part, is often dubbed the "forgotten half of the forgotten island." Geographically, it is less accessible from the mainland by land or by air than its counterpart.

Communication, commerce, and travel are very difficult because transportation facilities are underdeveloped and often depend on weather conditions. During the rainy season, the whole province is sometimes cut off from the mainland.

Blessed with extensive tracts of agricultural land, Occidental Mindoro's economy depends largely on agricultural products, particularly rice. Farmers comprise a large majority of the people and the workforce, but less than one percent own the land they till. Large tracts of land still remain in the hands of absentee landowners. Through the years, the farmers' situation has remained miserable because they are oppressed by unjust tenancy conditions and loan systems. Many of the farmers are victims of loan sharks who take advantage of their need for capital.

The province has a literacy rate of 81.6%, but only 5.4% attend college, and only 2.6% are degree holders. This is mainly because the children of farm households must help out as soon as they reach an age when they are able to work.

The farming communities have no access to basic health services. The combination of malnutrition, poor sanitation isolation and ignorance makes the people of the countryside very susceptible to the simplest sicknesses. This fragile health situation is

further undermined by illegal logging, which pays no attention to the possible effects on people and ecology. Power, wealth, and social connections remain in the hands of political dynasties and the landed elite. Predominantly rural (85% live in the countryside), the population also includes settlers from other provinces in search of a better life.

The faith of the people, marked by a deep trust in Divine Providence, is expressed largely through the sacraments, the feasts of patron saints, and popular religious devotions.

The Situation: Exclusion from Life

Farmers in the area are caught in a cycle of poverty and all its consequences and are voiceless in political matters, with little education, poor health, and unjust tenancy conditions. They are often victims of lending agencies, especially during the planting and harvesting seasons. Farming communities find comfort in their faith practices, but the people hardly recognize their potential to be agents of their own development. Bound by a "culture of gratitude" to patrons and benefactors, they are susceptible to political intimidation and manipulation.

On the other hand, they are blessed by the habits of directness, simplicity, realism, openness, and wisdom that characterize people who live close to nature and who have learned to respect the coming and the going of the seasons. They have a quiet dignity and a strong capacity for forbearance that have enabled them to bear their poverty without being beaten down by it.

A Holistic Response: The Building of Basic Ecclesial Communities

In 1990 the Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of San José invited the Daughters of Charity to work with the poor in the countryside, specifically in the Parish of San José. At that time, one of the major directions of the Philippine Province's pastoral ministry was the formation of Basic Ecclesial Communities. This involved building community, forming people in faith and enabling them to work for social change. The formation process was holistic, participative, and rooted in a spirituality of social transformation. Because the Church in the Philippines has declared itself a church of the poor, the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) has become an important focus.

Basic Ecclesial Communities are intentional communities "built" perseveringly through programs that use specific methods, processes and structures, and aim to transform persons, communities and societies, empowering them to move from being powerless and passive to being self-sustaining and self-governing.

A. The Method:

From the very beginning, the original organizers of these communities used a specific methodology which was applied consistently in the formation sessions in Occidental Mindoro and in all other activities that were part of the BEC Program.

The method, called "Action-Reflection in Faith-Action" (ARFA), is more commonly known as the "See – Judge – Act" method.

B. The Process:

The building of Basic Ecclesial Communities is a process that is formative by its nature. It brings people into dialogue on several levels: work and community relationships, private life and social realities, faith and action. It enables people to think critically, take responsibility for their decisions and reclaim power over their lives.

After some initial preparation, the building of BECs in San José, Occidental Mindoro went through 5 Phases:

Preparation

- After three months of visiting families and communities in the countryside, the women religious directing the process met with the parish priest and his assistants. Their meeting had the following important goals:
- to share their experience and the information they had gathered regarding the communities
- to come to a common understanding of what BECs are, and to plan the BEC Program in accord with the perceived needs of the people
- to clarify the various roles in the implementation of the Program (the role of the parish priest as animator is always underlined as vital; it cannot be substituted for, even by the Sisters heading up the project)
- to agree on the processes and methods to be used, and for the Sisters to act as BEC pastoral workers during the initial phase
- to confirm the decision to start from the periphery rather than at the center of the parish
- to confirm the choice of "pilot areas", and to review the criteria for making the choice, i.e. population, openness to change, geographical accessibility, and presence of potential leaders.

Phase 1: Organizing *(5 months to one year)*

The BEC pastoral workers received training while, at almost the same time, they began to visit homes in the villages regularly. Their training enriched the visits, and vice-versa. Going into the community enabled the BEC workers to acquire a better knowledge of the life of the people, make friends, get familiar with their homes, spot possible leaders, organize the village into clusters of 10 – 15 families, accustom the people to community meetings, guide them in making community decisions and encourage them to take the first steps to become a Basic Ecclesial Community. Toward the end of this phase, a Basic Orientation Seminar was offered that culminated in the election of Community Leaders.

Phase 2: Maintenance – ***after the eighth month, and then in an ongoing way***

A crucial phase of the process of BEC building focused on formation in and internalization of the faith, values, knowledge and skills upon which a typical community is built. Through regular weekly and monthly community meetings, formation sessions and dialogue, the community, especially the leaders, began to understand the vision, mission, processes and structures of a Basic Ecclesial Community.

Regular activities that are characteristic of a Basic Ecclesial Community also began during this phase: Bible and faith sharing, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, including the reception of Communion, at services led by lay ministers when there were no priests available for the Mass, community meetings, and dialogues led by the community president to resolve conflicts or plan activities.

This phase was characterized by deepening community relationships, a commitment to the Church and her mission, praying, worshipping, and taking more active participation in the life and activities of the village. All this involvement led to a deep sense of belonging to community, a willingness to take

on responsibility, a strong leadership team, and the capacity to speak for themselves and make decisions – which indicated the community's readiness to move on to the next phase. The activities of this second phase continued as the community progressed to the third phase.

Phase 3: Integration – ***after the first year and then in an ongoing way***

In this phase, the community identified its social, political, economic, cultural and ecological needs through participatory research and community-reflection sessions. From among their many concerns, they prioritized what they most wanted and were ready to address. Programs were designed to respond to those needs. These included income-generating programs, cooperatives, loan assistance, agricultural programs and a community-based health program. Leaders were chosen for these programs from among the villagers and were trained in their new responsibilities.

The move to this phase required more regular ongoing formation, not only in the vision and the values upon which a BEC stands but also in the skills and knowledge needed for earning a living, addressing socio-economic concerns and health issues, and designing other programs. A core group of leaders also emerged, composed of the BEC President, the Lay Minister, Treasurer, Cluster Leaders, and Program Representatives (farmers, young people, health workers, and others). This phase was characterized by greater autonomy on the part of both leaders and the community. Pastoral workers continued to accompany them, but more and more the animation and the direction of the community were left to the core group of leaders.

Phase 4: Coordinating – *after the third year, and then in an ongoing way*

Characteristic of this phase was the community's readiness to "look outward". Communities began to share their resources, both human and material, with other BECs and with the parish. BECs that were more developed offered to assist in formation programs in nearby villages that wanted to become Basic Ecclesial Communities. They also began to form networks with governmental and non-governmental agencies as they expanded their socio-economic, ecological, and health programs.

Phase 5: Evaluating – *after the first year, and then in an ongoing way*

Evaluation was and continues to be done regularly by each BEC and also on the inter-BEC level.

C. Components in the Actual Implementation of the Program

1. **Community-Organizing**
   The community-organizing component of the program helped form the participants into a cohesive whole. The work of organizing began when the BEC team first entered into the life of the community and started regular home visits, meetings, and formation sessions. The goal was to create structures by which the community would be self-governing. This component was particularly crucial during the first phase of program implementation.

2. **Formation**
   Formation is an indispensable component of the BEC; without it, a community will not last. Directed towards faith formation, social consciousness, growth in commu-

nity spirit and the sustainability of other programs, the formation component in Occidental Mindoro addressed the total life of the community and took into consideration its context and culture. At the start of the program, formation was the task of the BEC coordinators and pastoral workers, but a Community Formation Team eventually took over this work. The Formation program included topics like spirituality, leadership, the Bible, human formation and ecology, and offered special seminars on new trends in agriculture, cooperatives, and voter education. Special training was given to lay ministers to prepare them for their role as leaders in the community celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. Courses in leadership and communication skills were offered to BEC presidents and other leaders. Ongoing formation for all other members of the community was also a must.

This component was the focus of Phase 2 and was considered a major priority through all the subsequent phases.

3. **Agricultural Component**
   This component directly addressed the needs of farmers and offered them information and skills related to current farming trends and to technology that would ordinarily have been beyond their reach. It also encouraged them

to look into new, alternative ways of farming. Training courses that were offered included farm management, plant propagation, soil sampling and analysis, and hog raising; other initiatives were introduced, such as alternative forms of pest control that could be used instead of commercial pesticides, communal farming and the formation of farmers' associations and cooperatives.

4. **Income Generating Projects (IGP)**
   This component led the members to focus on the socio-economic aspect of the life of the Christian community. By choosing to engage in income-generating projects, they moved in a concrete way toward self-reliance as a community. The IGPs were undertaken either by clusters or by whole communities rather than by individuals, so that the process itself fostered co-responsibility, shared decision-making, and solidarity. Inter-BEC meetings, along with ongoing formation sessions, enabled the members to share techniques, strategies, experiences, and invaluable advice.

5. **Cooperatives**
   This component too focused on enabling the members of the community to grow in economic self-reliance by working together. Training seminars on cooperatives were offered, and the IGPs of the community were further strengthened. Since BEC cooperatives are instruments both of socio-economic improvement and political empowerment, they did advocacy work with governmental and non-governmental agencies on behalf of communities and individuals oppressed by unjust loan systems.

6. **Health Projects**
   This component focused on the family and on loving relationships that promote well-being. It trained couples as leaders for the family life apostolate. Volunteers for healthcare work, who generally came from among

the women of the community, were trained in basic health intervention, the promotion of sanitation, herbal medicine, and reflexology.

The components that focused on agriculture, income-generating projects, cooperatives, and health were part of Phases 3 and 4.

D. The Struggle to BECOME ...

Active involvement of the people in the BEC Program was a crucial element in the whole process. The people of the countryside are well known for their warmth and hospitality, but their initial reserve about the program stemmed from previous experiences in which their trust had been betrayed by unscrupulous groups who used them for their own purposes. Once the people understood what the program was, they opened their homes and their lives to the pastoral workers without reservation. During the organization phase, they joined with the pastoral workers and accompanied them during their home visits, providing valuable information about their villages, the people and their way of life. They were very effective in convincing their fellow villagers to participate.

Their response to formation during the maintenance phase (Phase 2) was tremendous. They learned about their faith, about social realities affecting their lives and about many other new issues, with a depth that was both inspiring and challenging. They were very open to the ARFA process (See-Judge-Act) since it enabled them to look at their situation and reflect

on it from a faith-perspective. This enabled them to find meaning in their struggles, and they began to face old difficulties with new responses.

Two examples:

1. One community needed a basketball court that would serve a double purpose: first, as a place for games and community social events, and second, as cemented surface on which to dry grains of rice and corn. At election time, a politician offered to build the basketball court. After sober reflection and a long discussion, the community decided not to accept any donations that had political strings attached to them. They saved money to build their own basketball court. Today the community uses this court with freedom, pride and integrity.

2. Another community heard that the local municipal council had decided to use part of their land as a garbage dump. After informing the whole community of this "disaster", they started to gather more information about how this would affect their land and health; they mobilized other BECs to support their appeal; they approached influential people and presented their case. The municipal decision was never acted upon. The members of the community have remained farmers who live simple and often hard lives, but today they walk with confidence, knowing that they are capable of speaking up and defending their rights.

The move to the **integration phase** (Phase 3) put the communities to the test, not only because of the demands of the formation program, but also because of the relationships of trust and partnership they needed to be developed. The struggle to balance personal and family needs with communal concerns was highlighted in this phase. This often tested leaders' trust in Providence, their families' generosity and the community's understanding.

Two experiences:

1. It was Christmas morning and a lay minister in a BEC got sick. The community sent word to the lay minister of a nearby BEC to come and celebrate the Liturgy of the Word with them and give them Holy Communion. The Lay Minister was torn between staying with his wife, who was about to give birth to a child, or going to minister to the neighboring community on Christmas morning. The women of the community stepped in and assured him they would take care of his wife and assist her in her labor, while the men would keep up a continual supply of hot water. They also assured him that God would see to it that he would make it to his first-born's birth. He rushed to the nearby community, celebrated the Christmas Liturgy of the Word with them, and their prayers and good wishes accompanied him back. He returned home just in time to see his son born.

2. Planting and harvesting seasons are always hard on the pockets of poor farmers. They need extra hands to help them finish planting and harvesting their fields; that means finding money and food for the extra workers. In the past, it was "each man for himself," with a great deal of competition among them. After they organized as community, the men planned a strategy that enabled them to get the work done quickly and save money at the same time. They set up a schedule of planting for every farm, so that everyone could go to help everyone else, asking only for food and drink at the end of the day. They found out that this not only meant that the work got done, but it also strengthened their relationships. As they waited for the harvest season, they found themselves visiting each other's farms. Because of the ever-present threat of typhoons, they offered each other suggestions on how to keep their rice crops secure.

In their reflections on these experiences, they realized that there was concrete proof that they had indeed become a community.

An indicator of a "maturing" BEC is its capacity to share its human and material resources to help other BECs and to participate more actively in the life of the parish. This happened concretely during the coordination phase. The BEC Presidents represented their communities in the Parish Pastoral Council; the lay ministers not only served their own communities but made themselves available for other communities that could not be reached by other ministers; the BEC officers coordinated events with the parish priest and sat down with him to plan their patron saints' feast days. In the past, the officers would have asked the pastoral workers to accompany and speak for them, but they now went on their own to governmental and non-governmental agencies to inquire about new trends and practices in agriculture, new guidelines for agricultural loans, training programs for cooperatives, etc.

Periodically, with the assistance of the BEC coordinator and pastoral workers, they performed a self-evaluation.

E. Partners in BEC Building

Many persons and groups have been involved in varying degrees in the overall implementation of the program and its components:

- The Apostolic Vicariate of San José: the bishop and the priests of the Parish of San José
- The Finance Office of the Vicariate
- The Daughters of Charity
- Louise de Marillac Foundation, Inc. of the DC Philippine Province
- Fr. Paul Krutak, SVD
- Vincentian Cooperatives led by Fr. Mario Castillo, CM
- Government agencies, including the Cooperative Development Authority, Technological Education Services and Development Authority, Department of Trade and Industry, Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Office of the Mayor.

F. Formation of Leaders

Two years of intensive community formation were needed for leaders to emerge. Weekly formation programs used modules that followed the ARFA (See-Judge-Act) method. The leaders received the following formation:

- A BEC Basic Orientation Seminar
- Basic Leadership Training
- Advanced Leadership Training
- Community Organizing
- Project Management
- Formation Module Training
- Community Formators' Training.

Sessions for reflecting on their experience and integrating the various things they had learned always followed each module. Inter-BEC and General BEC assemblies provided leaders with hands-on experience in planning, mobilizing communities, facilitating meetings and evaluating activities.

G. Financing the Program

1. For the first 3 years (1993-1996), a group from Holland, named Adviescommissie Missionnaire Activiteiten (AMA), supported the Program. In 2001, the local parish provided money (4,300 Philippine pesos or roughly $85 US) for leadership formation on the parish level. All other expenses are now shouldered by the communities themselves through their Community Resource Mobilization.

   Chapels were built on donated land, using community contributions of bamboo, nipa shingles, wood for benches and nails. The men alternated work as carpenters with their work in the fields. They negotiated with the local priests, so that some of the mass collections were added to their community fund, and they also organized several fundraising activities so that they could send their leaders for training.

   During training sessions and inter-BEC meetings, the members brought food (rice, vegetables, noodles, fruit, root crops, and other products) that they cooked and ate together.

2. Raising capital for the cooperatives: The initial capital came from the members' Savings Mobilization funds, while additional capital was secured from the Louise de Marillac Foundation Inc. (LMFI) of the Daughters of Charity.

3. Small income-generating projects received capital from the members' Savings Mobilization funds.

4. The BEC Alternative Learning System was fully financed by a donation from an SVD priest, Fr. Paul Krutak. The communities' contribution to this project was the establishment of a local Learning Center.

5. The BEC Scholarship Program also benefited from a donation by Fr. Krutak. The children's parents provide for other needs that are not included in the grant.

H. The BECs of San José Parish: "participation in life"

Today, 13 years after the BEC Program was initiated, the eight Basic Ecclesial Communities have moved "… from a complex of human inferiority to … participation in life," and their journey continues. Indicators show that they have become active and responsible "agents of their own promotion." Some of these indicators are:

As People of God:

- They witness to a faith that is vibrant; they are aware that they are a community of disciples and that they are the Church of the Poor.

- Their lay ministers continue to celebrate the Sunday liturgies and serve their communities as volunteers, aware that their gifts come from God.

- On the community level, they have 21 core groups of leaders and 15 community organizers. They assume responsibility for governing themselves in union with their parish priests; they resolve conflicts through dialogue and nonviolence; they have concrete development plans and clear organizational structures.

- Three of their representatives have been elected to key positions on the parish Pastoral Council; they have gained both influence and credibility in parish governance; and they have a strong and respected voice in the communities, particularly in political education. They participate actively in the political life of their towns, volunteering for poll watching and speaking against vote-buying during elections.

In their life as a community:

- They are guided by a community decision-making process, and they have responsible leaders who were formed within the community and whom they support.

- In their socio-economic and cultural situation:

- While they remain tenants on the land that they farm, they now have strong bargaining power with their landlords. Alternative economic projects like cooperatives and small IGPs minimize their vulnerability to political manipulation and exploitation.

- They also operate several alternative business projects. The BEC Multi-Purpose Cooperative, with fixed assets of 130,000 pesos, has been managed by BEC members since 2004 as an officially registered cooperative and is legally certified as a business entity. The Imbarasan Community Store is run as a cooperative and was financed by the members' savings program.

The **BEC Alternative Learning System** has two learning centers with five learning groups, 81 learners, two instructional managers and one overall coordinator. All come from the communities. The BEC Scholarship Program supports 38 elementary students from the eight BEC communities.

The Alternative Learning System is a special educational program for adults and out-of-school youth who are unable to take part in the traditional educational system. Sessions are held in community chapels and learning centers. This has made education available to wives and mothers, farmers and young people who work. Its curriculum is experienced-based and is offered in short modules that they finish in their own homes. All the communities now have farm-to-market roads. Some of the trained health workers in the communities have been hired by the Department of Health as barrio health workers because they were technically prepared for the job. In some communities, the BEC Advocacy for Ecology program has resulted in a complete halt in illegal logging; trees have been planted on riverbanks and around water sources to increase the water supply, especially during the summer months.

Endings and New Beginnings

In 2005, the Daughters of Charity turned over to the Apostolic Vicariate of San José the Basic Ecclesial Communities Program that had been in their care for 12 years. At that point, they celebrated with a formal rite a "journey ended and a journey begun." For the Sisters who were graced with moments of life and service among the farmers and their families in San José, the friendships built over the years remained. The lessons we have learned from them – a deep abiding love for God, fortitude in trial, generosity in the midst of poverty, a commitment that does not count the cost, a wisdom gained through perseverance, a courage learned by taking risks - have made us better Daughters of Charity, better servants. For this, we shall be forever grateful.

Sr. Malou Baaco has been a Daughter of Charity for the past 14 years. She spent several years organizing Basic Ecclesial Communities in San José, Mindoro. Having successfully turned over the program to the parish, she is presently serving among indigenous people in a mountainous area in Calintaan, Mindoro, where she is putting to good use her university studies in agricultural education and her formation in pastoral ministry. She is also animator of her local community.

Strategies for Systemic Change

Co-responsibility, Networking and Political Action Strategies

By Patricia P. de Nava

So far we have dealt with three groups of strategies: those that focus on mission and supply motivation and direction to projects; those that focus on the poor themselves and see them as the most important agents in transforming their own lives and the communities in which they live; and those that focus on tasks like analysis, organization, institutionalization, and evaluation. This chapter will deal with strategies that focus on networking and political action as means for guaranteeing that projects have a transformative effect within society. In a world in which the poor are often forgotten, it is imperative that all interested parties work together.

On several occasions, St. Vincent had to intervene in political issues in order to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. He became a public figure with great influence. During his lifetime he was in contact with kings, queens, ministers, public authorities, noblemen, members of the church hierarchy, as well as other national and international figures. He called upon the powerful to help the poorest. He knew that decisions made by the great affect the small.

Vincent worked relentlessly for peace and justice. He trained his followers to do the same. Not only did he pray for peace, he acted to bring it about. When we look at his actions, we see that:

- He did not take sides in political rivalries, but did intervene in the political process when he judged it imperative.

- When justice, charity and compassion for the sufferings of the poor demanded it, "his personal vocation of evangelization of the poor, and nothing else, made him intervene in affairs of a political nature", according to his biographer, Fr. Jaime Corera[1].

- He tackled causes that produced poverty.

- His practice of charity flowed from a strong social conscience.

As in St. Vincent's time, genuine charity today must be social, opt for justice, and operate within economic, political and cultural structures within society. Vincent labored to raise the consciousness of the authorities of his time to their responsibility for charitable works. He made politicians aware of their moral duty to come to the aid of the poor. In this way he was able to found and operate hospitals with public monies. He often used the expression "public good" when referring to the works of the groups he founded, since he was concerned for the well-being of social groups like prisoners, children, war refugees, etc. But in the 17th century, people regarded socio-political structures as practically untouchable. Today, on the other hand, we recognize that we have the opportunity to establish another socio-political order in which the social empowerment of the poor and the defense of their rights become realities.

The strategies proposed in this fourth grouping are very important, if not indispensable, for producing a real change in the lives of the poor. They are:

- Promote social co-responsibility and networking, sensitizing society at all levels – local, national and international – about changing the unjust conditions that affect the lives of the poor.

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[1] Jaime Corera, Vida del Señor Vicente de Paúl (Salamanca:CEME, 1995) 132-34.

- Construct a shared vision with diverse stakeholders: poor communities, interested individuals, donors, churches, governments, the private sector, unions, the media, international organizations and networks, and more.

- Struggle to transform unjust situations and to have a positive impact, through political action, on public policy and laws.

- Have a prophetic attitude: announce, denounce, and, by networking with others, engage in actions that exert pressure for bringing about change.

The first strategy in this grouping, to **"Promote social co-responsibility and networking, sensitizing society at all levels – local, national and international – about changing the unjust conditions that affect the lives of the poor,"** is not only a strategy that the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change found to be present in all the stories recounted in this book. It also expresses a fundamental conviction of the Vincentian Family; namely, that we must not only meet the individual needs of the poor, but also try to reform unjust social structures, which often hide and perpetuate the causes of poverty. In other words, we should have both a charitable heart and a social conscience.

In *The Way of Vincent de Paul*, Fr. Robert Maloney emphasizes the importance of forming a social conscience as an indispensable element for systemic change:

> *Give witness through the language of works: performing the works of justice and mercy which are a sign that the kingdom of God is really alive among us: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, helping to find the causes of their hunger and thirst and the ways of alleviating it; through the language of words: announcing with deep conviction the Lord's presence , his love, his offer of forgiveness and acceptance to all; through the language of relationships: being with the poor, working with them, forming a community that shows the Lord's love for all.*

In order to respond to the different needs of the poor, we must network with organizations that have the same objectives. Projects will have a greater impact if we collaborate with the many groups that work for the eradication of poverty, particularly with the other branches of the Vincentian Family, our natural network.

This is further underlined and broadened in the second strategy: **"Construct a shared vision with diverse stakeholders: poor communities, interested individuals, donors, churches, governments, the private sector, unions, the media, international organizations and networks, etc".** A shared vision must direct our efforts toward change, so that we formulate future possibilities together with all stakeholders. When we desire transformation, we need bold strategies to achieve bold objectives. St. Vincent de Paul had a vision that aimed high. He wanted to extend mercy toward all so that no one in need would go unaided. It is easy to see how this vision incited others to action. The Vincentian Family is filled with people who share it.

Without good communication, our shared vision will not be transmitted to or adopted by others. Both St. Vincent and St. Louise effectively communicated their vision to the men and women whom they worked with, as well as to many others. "Vincent communicated his vision directly through conferences, letters and notes to those who lived nearby and far away," Sr. Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., states. "It is estimated that during his life he wrote at least 30,000 letters. He also printed accounts of the desolated provinces touched by the Thirty Years War, and even developed a periodical newspaper 'Le magasin charitable'". His writings, which have now been published in many languages, have transmitted the Vincentian charism to countless people over the centuries. By communicating his vision to people of different ranks in society, Vincent had a powerful impact on the lives of many poor people. Today the worldwide church considers him the "Father of the Poor". It is imperative that his followers continue to communicate his vision so that it will have an increasing impact on the eradication of poverty.

The fundamental model for the Vincentian mission is collaborative, involving teamwork, networking and shared goals. This approach is clearly illustrated in the story of The Passage: "We try to play our part in attacking the root causes of homelessness by accepting money from various sources, including governmental, and being part of national and local strategies. This brings us to the political arenas where we can try to influence policy. We try to use our experience and hard evidence in this way, bridging the gap between grant makers, donors and practitioners." Sister Ellen Flynn, D.C., and the team at The Passage expanded the circle of solidarity as they communicated their vision of the project to others.

Another example of widening collaboration is the network created by the Daughters of Charity and the Community of Sant'Egidio in Project DREAM.:

> *In mid-December 2005, the Daughters and Sant'Egidio entered into a new collaborative relationship with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which, through a consortium of partners called AIDS Relief, is now providing anti-retroviral therapy in nine countries under a grant from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The first country to benefit from this new partnership is Nigeria, where in May 2006 a DREAM Center for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission opened in Abuja at a hospital of the Daughters. From there, in 2007 and 2008, a network of centers, located at hospitals and clinics which the Daughters staff, will extend outward into various parts of the country.*

DREAM promotes collaborative partnerships among various sectors of society: the needy themselves as the principal agents, local and national governments, the private sector (NGOs, businesses), churches and interested individuals.

The third strategy clearly expresses a commitment to political action: **"Struggle to transform unjust situations and to have a positive impact, through political action, on public policy and laws."** In order to help bring about systemic change, many of the branches of the Vincentian Family have, in recent documents, committed themselves to stand at the side of the poor in their struggle for justice and engage in political action with them.

Sin corrupts not just individuals, but social structures, laws, economic policies and many other societal realities. Faced with societal injustice, Frederick Ozanam wrote on April 31, 1848: "Charity is not sufficient. It treats wounds, but it does not stop the blows that cause them ... There is an immense poor class which does not wants alms, but institutions." He encouraged the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to join the poor in their quest to change unjust social structures. He founded a newspaper, called *The New Era*, which aimed at speaking the truth impartially, without adherence to any particular political party, and to promote social justice for the poor and working class.

Today the Vincentian mission at the United Nations, in which various branches of the Family are taking part, aims at assisting the poor in their struggle for justice, particularly through the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals and through advocacy on behalf of human rights.

This strategy is also exemplified in the story of The Passage:

> *Serving poverty in the first world is constantly blocked by policy and legislation and so The Passage openly takes government money and sits at the political table in order to have influence. It interfaces with the local public to educate and promote awareness, builds bridges between sectors and works in partnership with other voluntary agencies. In this way The Passage seeks to challenge and transform the immediate society in which it operates as well as the individual lives of people who are poor.*

The final strategy in this group states: **"Have a prophetic attitude: announce, denounce, and, by networking with others, engage in actions that exert pressure for bringing about change."**

Being a prophet, announcing and denouncing injustice, is a duty for followers of Christ. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, and proclaiming Good News for the poor, Jesus announces the pattern for his ministry (Luke 4:18): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." In the Gospels he repeatedly challenges civil authorities and religious authorities, calling them to focus on the truth (cf. Luke 12:1ff.).

Vincent did not speak of human rights, since it was not a term used in his time, but he showed deep concern for justice. As mentioned before, he turned the Church upside down, putting the poor in the first place and calling his followers to be servants, evangelizing the poor and being evangelized by them. Constant attention to creating a just society requires solidarity with the poor, a central Vincentian value. Fr. Robert Maloney speaks very clearly about St. Vincent and St. Louise's option for the poor:

> *St. Vincent holds out an alternative world to us and he asks us to enter into it. It is a world where the poor are the masters and where we are their servants… It is a world where the last are first, and the first are last. It is a world which, in some ways is upside down. St. Louise had a lovely way of putting it: "the poor person is first in the church. He is the prince and master, being a kind of incarnation of the poor Christ. We must therefore serve them with respect, no matter what his character is like, no matter what his defects. And we must love him"* (J. Calvet, *Louise de Marillac par elle-même*).

Fr. Maloney emphasizes the need not only to understand Vincent and Louise in the context of their time but also to translate their teachings for today.[2] In our stories of systemic change, there are several examples of contemporary political action. Fr. Norberto Carcellar tells us about steps taken by the Homeless Peoples Federation in the Philippines:

[2]For more information, see Robert P. Maloney, *The Way of Vincent de Paul*. (New York: New City Press, 1992).

> *Advocacy for such policies at the city level aims at pressuring local governments to carry out the mandate to provide socialized housing contained in the UDHA, the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, and the Comprehensive and Integrated Shelter Finance Act (CISFA) of 1994. Taken together, these legal documents provide a basis for communities to claim their rights and to demand quality participation in governance structures. Another advocacy goal of the federation is to have structures for resettlement set up. This is utterly necessary because most local governments do not have guidelines for working our tenure-related issues, such as eviction, demolition, and socialized housing – despite the presence of pro-poor laws like the Urban Development and Housing Act. Drafts of City Action Plans have been formulated and presented. There is still, however, a need for intensive follow-up action to ensure that cities implement these plans through legislation.*

All the strategies for systemic change that we have been explaining require a strong belief in human potential and also a strong confidence in Providence. For this reason, it is fitting to conclude this chapter with the words of Fr. Pedro Opeka:

> *Material progress never completely satisfies the longing in people's hearts. Our spirits are restless as we seek a sense of purpose in life. The spark of God resides in all and moves the human heart to go beyond our limited daily horizons. In Akamasoa, we recognize that we must help people to experience life's surprises. When we explore the mystery of the covenant between God and humanity, when we develop the gifts of compassion, mercy, and sharing, we move beyond the limits of human justice and begin to spread a charity that has no bounds. In this way, we live in joy and peace because we love deeply. To that end, we attempt to return continually to the source of the Good News and open our hearts to it. If we do that faithfully, then, in the footsteps of Christ, we ourselves will be Good News.*

Vincentian Mission and the United Nations

By Joseph Foley, C.M.

Introduction

Two thirds of the world lives in poverty. Twenty-eight thousand people die every day of malnutrition; millions more are undernourished. Vast percentages of populations are infected with (and affected by) HIV and AIDS. In the world today, most people have no access to adequate medical attention, education and potable water. These statements from an article in the *Ratio Missionum*, a document of the Congregation of the Mission, aptly describe some key elements affecting the global context of mission. The members of the Congregation of the Mission, and indeed the whole Vincentian Family, are keenly aware that underneath this staggering description of the current global situation are individuals and families that suffer.

However, the *Ratio Missionum* also points to signs of hope in the present situation. There is a growing awareness worldwide of the dignity of the human person. In many countries, one can see the steady formation of groups promoting human rights, civil liberties, and political participation. Whole populations are endeavoring to create economic and political structures which are just and permit the development of the human person. *These are all signs of a new world struggling to emerge.*

The stories told in this book are stories of human suffering. But more than that, they are stories about how, in many cases, needless human suffering has been overcome. Each author has demonstrated that change is possible, that new and better structures and systems can be created, and that people can live in such a way that they are free from want and fear in circumstances where their dignity is recognized and respected. In that

sense, each story offers yet another sign of hope, another sign that this new world is slowly emerging.

At the same time, the chapters in this volume lead to the conclusion that both the well-being of people and the realization of the common good depend on systemic change on the local, national and international levels. This final chapter explores the congruence between the vision of the Congregation of the Mission, specifically in its orientation towards systemic change, and the vision of the United Nations as expressed in the U.N. Charter. It also reiterates the willingness of the Congregation to be a civil society partner with the United Nations in formulating global policy; and a partner, too, in promoting policies and programs that lead to the integral development of the human person.

The Congregation of the Mission

Since its foundation in 1625, the Congregation of the Mission has ministered to and accompanied countless poor communities, caring for their human and spiritual needs with compassion and competence. Today, the incorporated members of the Congregation number more than 3,300 and work in 79 countries. Sometimes the care they offer is as simple as listening to a person's worries, organizing a food pantry or accompanying migrant workers as they travel along a crop-harvesting corridor. Sometimes the care given is as challenging as building and staffing a school to respond to a need for quality education for the children in a particular community.

Stories of Origin

The stories of origin that nourish the Congregation of the Mission (the Vincentians) are mainly stories of its founder, Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). Vincent was gifted with an extraordinary compassion for people, with inventiveness and with an outstanding organizational ability. Vincent worked all

his life with people whose lives were crippled by poverty. The circumstances of his life brought him into contact with convicts in the galleys, the abandoned, the ignored – with those who were socially excluded. *He recognized the intrinsic worth of every human being and he saw clearly when a person's human dignity was being violated.* Vincent also worked tirelessly with those who had the power to change the situation of those who were impoverished, abandoned and excluded. While serving as a parish priest near Paris, he established organizations and projects in poor communities to care for abandoned children, to nurse the sick, and to find work for the unemployed. To meet these human and spiritual needs in an effective and sustainable way, Vincent founded both lay and religious communities. By 1617, he had founded a lay association of women to come to the assistance of poor families. Vincent called them the "Charities." Today, this worldwide organization is known as the International Association of Charities. In 1625, he founded the Congregation of Priests and Brothers of the Mission

(Lazarists/Vincentians). And in 1633, with Louise de Marillac, he co-founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity.

Vincent de Paul was not primarily a social worker or a philanthropist. He was first and foremost a person of deep religious faith. In everything he did, Vincent's desire was to follow the pattern of Jesus' life: loving God and loving the neighbor. It was clear to Vincent de Paul that the structures of society, be they religious, political, economic, social or cultural, bypass the poor. For him it had to be different. *For him, the poor person would come first*. In Vincent's community everything had to be considered and organized around the needs of the poor. It was very important to Vincent that the "needs" come from the people themselves and be carried out *with* the people, not simply *for them*. Failing this, they would always be the forgotten ones of history.[1]

Such was the impact of Vincent's life that many who came to know him found in him a kindred spirit. Today, as many as 286 institutes trace their origin to the influence of Vincent's spirit. Of these, one of the most significant is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in 1833 in Paris by Frederic Ozanam. Today, the Society numbers more than 500,000 members, spread among 46,000 confraternities in 130 countries. In recent years, a number of these institutes have come together in what has become known as the Vincentian Family, the purpose of which is the more effective implementation of the Vincentian mission.

While the works of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family have necessarily varied with time, need and culture, they will always be characterized by (1) a personal knowledge of people who live in poverty, (2) a deep respect for the dignity of the human person, (3) a love, expressed in service and justice, and (4) carried out with care, compassion and competence.

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[1] Christian Sens, C.M., "St. Vincent and Globalization," in Echoes of the Company, 5 (2004) 376.

The Vincentian Community, then:

- gives effective witness to Gospel love;
- stands with those who live in poverty;
- seeks to understand the causes of and the solutions to poverty and violence
- addresses unjust structures.

Vincentians in the 21st Century

At the start of the new millennium, Fr. Robert Maloney, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, invited the Vincentian Family to reflect on the text from the Gospel of Luke that St. Vincent chose as a motto for our Community:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore
God has anointed me.
God has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives,
the recovery of sight to the blind,
and release to prisoners,
to announce a year of favor from the Lord.

Fr. Maloney invited the followers of Vincent to pray, asking God for eyes that are capable of searching the horizon and that can see beyond it with far-reaching vision:

- a vision that loves the fullness of life and knows how to promote it,
- a vision that creates unity and peace among disparate women and men,
- a vision that breaks down the barriers of division,
- a vision that helps eradicate the crippling causes of poverty.

Vincentian mission in a global context

As a religious community in a global church, the Congregation of the Mission has been global in its outlook almost from the beginning. In 1999, in order to bring the Vincentian vision to the United Nations, the Congregation of the Mission applied for and received accreditation as a non-governmental organization (NGO) associated with the U.N. In taking this action, the intention of the Congregation was to be a genuine partner in the work of poverty eradication and integral human development. This partnership extends to conflict prevention and peacemaking, as well as reconciliation efforts and the care of people affected by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. As an NGO associated with the UN, the Congregation of the Mission does not to seek to usurp the decision-making role of governments. Its aim is to help identify the root causes of poverty and violence and to work toward both short-term and long-term solutions to these problems. It also aims to have the voice of the poor heard clearly in a global forum. To this end, the Congregation works to influence global social policy in areas where it has experience and expertise.

There is a deep resonance between the vision articulated by Fr. Maloney and the powerful words of the United Nations Charter, signed by 50 countries assembled in San Francisco in June, 1945:

We the people of the United Nations...
Determined
- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war…
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small,
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for....international law can be maintained, to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...

through the economic and social advancement of all peoples,
Have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these ends.

The United Nations

Since its foundation, the United Nations has striven to protect the human rights of all people, promote peace and security and foster economic and social development. It is a world-class forum for international dialogue aimed at creating global consensus and action around a host of pressing issues such as poverty eradication, human rights, development, environmental protection, trafficking in human beings, HIV/AIDS, genocide and the welfare of economic and political refugees. At the same time, the United Nations monitors and attempts to influence the process of globalization in such a way that the negative effects of globalization on the world's poor are minimized. Today, the United Nations is recognized as a *universal symbol* of the aspirations of people who struggle for freedom from want and fear so that they can live in dignity and build sustainable communities for themselves and their families.

Even at its best, the United Nations by itself could not hope to be the *universal solution* to the problems that afflict the world community. Those solutions require a division of labor. To achieve its goals, the United Nations needs the assistance of many stakeholders, including NGOs such as the Congregation of the Mission, not only to help create consensus around what

needs to be done but also to help carry out agreed-upon resolutions. A Congregation that accompanies people living with crushing poverty certainly knows the impact of global and national policies on local efforts to make a better life and create a sustainable human community. Governments can create resolutions, but often a change of heart and mind is required if resolutions are to be anything more than empty promises. The Congregation of the Mission and all the members of the Vincentian Family can play an important role in this regard.

The World Today

The world today is one of awesome accomplishments. It is also a world deeply divided, often marked by acts of terror that provoke equally dangerous reactions. It is a world of countless savage wars and it is a world where genocide is widely observed but left largely unchecked by any international force. The familiar and bitter divisions in the world – between north and south, east and west, rich and poor (both among and within countries) – are all mirrored in the United Nations itself.

Several years ago, at the dawn of the new millennium, the world and the United Nations looked like a more hopeful place. It seemed that member states were willing to look beyond their national interests and attend to the unconscionable poverty in the global community. Member states acknowledged that:

- Nearly half of the world's six billion people live in poverty.
- 1.2 billion people live on less than $1 a day.
- 790 million are malnourished or starving.
- 880 million do not have even basic health services
- 900 million cannot read or write.
- 42 million people are infected by the HIV/AIDS virus.
- 1.3 billion people cannot get clean water.
- 3 billion have no sanitation
- 2 billion live without electricity.
- Of every 5 children born, one dies before her or his 5th birthday.

Those overwhelming numbers do not tell the whole story. While people die needlessly from hunger, the world is awash in weapons. The manufacture and sale of arms is a trillion-dollar industry; a trillion not available to fight poverty, hunger and disease. Further, the richest countries trade in arms that find their way to terrorist networks and drug traffickers. Surely such a world situation would stir the heart and move the will of Vincent de Paul!

Extreme poverty can be seen and responded to from many perspectives. One response to global poverty is an initiative known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs represent an *emergency response* to poverty, and are a broad commitment by U.N. member states to a "reasonable plan" to end the most extreme poverty in this generation. A second perspective is based on the perception that poverty is a violation of human rights. A third reflects the perception that much of the deep poverty in the world today is a consequence of the present form of globalization.

A few words about each:

A. Millennium Development Goals

In the year 2000, in the face of merciless poverty, 191 of the member states of the United Nations committed to addressing global poverty by a set of time-bound goals and targets that have come to be known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals seek to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
- Achieve universal primary education.
- Promote gender equality and empower women.
- Reduce child mortality.
- Improve maternal health.
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
- Ensure environmental sustainability.
- Develop global partnerships for development.

Meeting these goals is an absolute necessity, and it is achievable since, for the first time in history, the world possesses the resources and the expertise to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Furthermore, meeting the MDGs can be accomplished within the political and economic system as it currently exists. No systemic change is required. Unfortunately, the global commitment to achieving these goals and targets has been severely weakened by the attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 and by the war in Iraq. The Millennium Development Goals, once thought to be an excellent contemporary expression of the "option for the poor" may become, at least in part, a casualty of a divided world and a divided United Nations.

B. Human Rights and Poverty

In *Blueprint for Social Justice,* Sr. Jane Remson, O.Carm., writes that poverty is a violation of human rights. She notes that 1.3 billion people in the world live in extreme poverty. Poverty exists not only in the developing countries; it is also a dramatic and hidden reality in industrialized nations.[2] And economic poverty is not the only kind of poverty that impoverishes human lives. For example, growth rates of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) are higher in many non-democratic countries than in some democratic ones, but politically unfree citizens, whether economically rich or poor, are deprived of a basic ingredient of peaceful living. The same applies to social deprivations such as illiteracy, inadequate health care and unequal attention to the elementary needs of women and of young girls.

Quoting Mats Karlsson, Vice President for External Affairs and UN Affairs at the World Bank, Sr. Jane observes, "Poverty reduction is a multi-dimensional process. The World Bank alone is unable to address poverty issues and develop a poverty reduction agenda; it needs to join multiple development actors." Poverty eradication is not an automatic consequence of

[2] Jane Remson, O. Carm., "The Path to Global Solidarity: The Roles of the UN and NGOs," in Blueprint for Social Justice, LIV, No.3 (2000).

economic growth; it requires purposeful action to redistribute wealth and land, to construct a safety net and to provide universal free access to education.[3]

The fulfillment and protection of human rights is threatened by numerous challenges. The increasing economic gaps and the unprecedented increase in poverty that are the result of the existing world economic order constitute the greatest and most unjust violation of human rights. Today, we are witnessing many other violations, including the use of food as a weapon in armed conflicts and civil wars. Unequal economic development between countries promotes forced migration to developed countries. The human rights of these economic migrants, especially those labeled as alien or undocumented, are systemically violated without consideration of their significant contribution to those countries' economies.

Human rights will not be truly universal unless they are realized for all, including neglected or excluded groups and those most at risk, notably children, youth, older persons, women, minorities, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, immigrants, the disabled, the mentally ill, the unemployed, the homeless and those subject to discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, place of birth, language, age, nationality, sexual orientation or other grounds.

As far back as 1999, Gallup International conducted a Millennium Survey of 57,000 adults in 60 countries. This was the world's largest-ever public opinion poll survey. The survey asked: What matters most in life? People everywhere valued good health and a happy family life more highly than anything else. Where economic performance was poor, they also stressed jobs. The survey also showed that most people around the globe consider the protection of human rights to be the most

[3] Mats Karlsson, Vice President for External Affairs and United Nations Affairs, World Bank, in a speech titled "Best Practices: Advancing Our Shared Agenda," August 28, 2000.

important task for the United Nations. The younger the respondents, the greater the importance assigned to this goal.[4]

C. Globalization and Poverty

In a speech to the members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Pope John Paul II stated that globalization must be made to work for the benefit of all people. He emphasized that special interests and the demands of the market frequently predominate over concern for the common good, leaving the weaker members of society without adequate protection and forcing entire peoples and cultures into a formidable struggle for survival. Moreover, it is disturbing to witness a globalization that exacerbates the conditions of the needy, that does not sufficiently contribute to resolving situations of hunger, poverty and social inequality, and that fails to safeguard the natural environment. These aspects of globalization can give rise to extreme reactions, leading to excessive nationalism, religious fanaticism and even acts of terrorism.

All of this is far removed from the concept of an ethically responsible globalization capable of treating all peoples as equal partners and not as passive instruments. There can be little doubt of the need for guidelines that will place globalization firmly at the service of authentic human development — the development of every person and of the whole person — in full respect of the rights and dignity of all.

Pope John Paul II concluded by saying that globalization, in itself, is not the problem. Rather, difficulties arise from the lack of effective mechanisms for giving it proper direction. Globalization needs to be inserted into the larger context of a political and economic program that seeks the authentic progress of all mankind. In this way, it will serve the whole human family, no longer bringing benefit merely to a privileged few but advancing the common good of all. Thus, the true suc-

[4] Cf. Remson, op. cit.

cess of globalization will be measured by the extent to which it enables every person to enjoy the basic goods of food and housing, of education and employment, of peace and social progress, and of economic development and justice. This goal cannot be achieved without guidance from the international community and adequate regulation on the part of the worldwide political establishment.[5]

These perspectives on overcoming poverty complement one another and each has a role to play in the context of particular NGO working groups. Our participation in the NGO Committee on Migration offers a good example.

Alone or Together: the Struggle for Migrants' Rights

Background

People have always moved from place to place in search of a better life for themselves and their families. The right to move was globally recognized over 60 years ago in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Article 13 states, "Everyone has the right to the freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state" and "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

Again, in 1994, a United Nations international conference on population and development stated that orderly international migration can have a beneficial impact on the community of origin and the community of destination. Migration has the potential to facilitate the transfer of skills and contribute to cultural enrichment.

Various aspects of migration are addressed within the United Nations system. For example, the United Nations

[5] Address of John Paul II to the Members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Friday, 2 May 2003.

Secretariat focuses on the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on the levels, trends and national policies of international migration. Other parts of the United Nations system are concerned with issues such as human rights, internally displaced persons, family reunification, undocumented migrants, trafficking and the social and economic integration of migrants. In addition, specialized agencies address issues related to their expertise, such as refugees, asylum seekers, labor flows, and the amount of revenue refugees send home to their countries of origin.

It is estimated that there are 191 million migrants in the world today. That means that approximately one in every thirty-five persons in the world is a migrant. More than half of all migrants are girls and women. In developed countries, female migrants are more numerous than male. Nearly 60% of all migrants live in high-income countries. In 2005, international migrants sent an estimated $232 billion in remittances to their home countries.

The reasons for migration are numerous: poverty, the lack of employment opportunities in the country of origin, or the inability of a country's crops or manufactured products to compete on the international market. Migrants leave home because of natural disasters, conflicts, or to escape threats to individual safety, or because of poor political prospects. At the present time, the growth rate of migration is about 2.9%. With communication and travel easier than ever before and with international business depending on free trade and free capital mobility, a work force that is mobile and flexible has come to be considered a necessity.

In the last few years, the increasing number of international migrants has made the issue of migration a major concern in many countries. Most recently, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, some countries have significantly tightened their policies towards immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

In response to this growing concern, the U.N. General Assembly, in July 2006, conducted "informal hearings" with representatives of civil society, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. These hearings underscored the fact that international migration, development and human rights were intrinsically connected. Participants emphasized that respect for the human rights of all migrants, regardless of status, be viewed as the cornerstone of any policy related to the international movement of people. Particularly crucial is respect for the human rights of vulnerable people: children, women, indigenous people and migrants in irregular situations. It was noted that female migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, often becoming victims of human traffickers. Respect for and protection of the human rights of migrants was seen as essential for the integration of migrants into receiving countries. Policies formulated within a human rights framework would also insure the best possible outcomes from migration labor. Also noted was the ability of migrant labor to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

In September, 2006, The U.N. High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development focused attention on several areas: (1) the effects of international migration on economic and social development, (2) the need to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of all migrants, and to prevent and combat the smuggling of migrants and the trafficking of persons, (3) the multi-dimensional aspect of migration (including remittances), and (4) the promotion of partnerships and capacity-building, and the sharing of good practices at all levels for the benefit of countries and migrants alike.

NGO Committee on Migration

In order to influence the process on behalf of migrant workers, and because so many religious and humanitarian non-governmental organizations work in countries that both send and receive migrants, 35 NGO representatives organized an NGO Committee on Migration. These individuals represent organizations that are already committed to poverty eradication and social and economic development; human rights; international trade; and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The first task of the newly formed Committee was to petition the Conference of NGOs for formal recognition as an NGO Committee on Migration. With bylaws, a statement of purpose and a work plan in hand, the Committee contacted each of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations to communicate the existence of the Committee on Migration, its purpose and its readiness to work in cooperative partnership. In part, the introductory letter stated, "Our purpose is to encourage the promotion and protection of migrants and their human rights, in accordance with the United Nations Charter by:

- facilitating cooperation among our member organizations in areas of mutual interest in the exercise of the consultative function and in activities supportive of migration-related United Nations objectives;
- acting as a forum to receive and share information on migration norms and standards and raise awareness of migration in a human rights framework;
- encouraging UN bodies and agencies to include migration policies and issues in their planning and social policy considerations;
- cooperating with UN Departments, bodies, organizations and agencies to raise public awareness about the frameworks on migration in order to protect, promote, and defend the human rights of migrants; and
- recommending appropriate policies for migration issues, in cooperation and consistent with UN frameworks.

The Committee asked to be informed, consulted and included in present and future discussions so that it could truly fulfill its consultative function as a CONGO Committee.

The active participation of the Congregation of the Mission in the Committee on Migration is particularly helpful because of its academic and professional competence and because the Congregation is located in 79 countries, many of which are "migrant sending" or "migrant receiving" countries, or both. Our experience inclines us to support the view that migration is a global issue and it needs to be seen and managed globally The Congregation would be quick to recognize and protect the intrinsic dignity of the human person and the right of migrant workers to be treated as more than simply production units in a production chain. The Congregation could always be counted on to stand for fairness to employers and workers alike and a decent wage for decent work.

In this example, it is easy to appreciate the value of the contribution of the Congregation of the Mission to the formulation of global policies to improve the situation of international migrant in every country. One can also appreciate the contribution of the NGO Committee on Migration to the situation of migrants because of the different perspectives that Committee members bring to the task.

Conclusion

At certain times the struggle for security, development and human rights or the struggle against poverty and hunger require emergency action. More often, effectively addressing these unmet human needs require working to change the way given systems operate. Because we live in poor communities, NGOs like the Congregation of the Mission (and, more broadly, members of the Vincentian Family) are often among the first to recognize emergencies, and are often among the first to see the impact of systems on the people we serve. NGOs frequently serve as an early warning system for the international community.

What might the world's poor ask of the Congregation of the Mission? They might ask that:

- we renew our commitment to our own mission and to the victims of poverty.
- we hold up for all to see the suffering of people who are socially and economically disadvantaged or excluded.
- we choose to work on projects based on their potential to effect systemic change.
- we remind governments that belonging to the United Nations carries with it the responsibility to adhere to the terms of the Charter of the United Nations.
- we serve as a voice of conscience, calling governments to live up to agreed upon commitments.
- we contribute our experience, and the expertise available to us, to help find and implement solutions to the problem of poverty through sharing best practices and best strategies.
- we contribute to the formulation of policies that promote the common good.
- we work to ensure that global agreements become national or regional policy for the benefit of the poor.
- we promote alternative values and structures to help create a more just society.
- we look for opportunities to network with institutions working for greater justice in the world.

Nelson Mandela once wrote, "Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is a human creation and it can be overcome and eradicated by actions of human beings."

Fr. Joseph Foley, C.M., was born in Sligo, Ireland. He is currently a member of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change and the NGO Representative of the Congregation of the Mission to the United Nations. Fr. Foley was previously a campus minister at St. John's University, New York, and taught English and Religious Studies at St. Thomas More High School in Philadelphia. He was also a member of Social Justice Committees for his Province, for the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), and for the New York State Catholic Bishops' Committee

Epilogue

By Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

This book has presented nine stories and twenty strategies. We offer them as seeds of hope for those who work among the poor.

It is easy to become discouraged as millions of children die from malnutrition and preventable diseases like malaria, or as the HIV/AIDS virus runs rampant through sub-Saharan Africa. Only hope rescues us as such problems grow rather than diminish.

Occasionally, people comment to the authors of the stories in this book, "Your project is huge. It would be very difficult for us to recreate something like that." The authors are unanimous in responding: "Start small. Sow tiny seeds. Work with others to nourish them, so that they grow." To this they add: "And while starting small, think systemically. Examine how the parts of the problem fit together and determine where it is crucial to intervene." As the reader has seen in these stories, intervention points varied. Akamasoa focused first on work, San José de Ocoa on water, the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines on micro-credit, and Project DREAM on healthcare. But in all cases, small steps forward gave people hope.

As Pope Benedict XVI has continually proclaimed, we are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). Without it, we despair. Hope is a tiny seed that contains the germ of life. When watered, it sprouts up and generates sturdy plants, beautiful flowers, fruit, bushes and trees.

The poets have much to say about hope. Emily Dickenson depicts it as a ceaselessly singing bird:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune—without the words—
And never stops at all.

So many of life's events try to beat hope down! But perched in the soul of believers, hope chants its tune persistently.

Hope resists the temptation to quit. It sings a song that cannot be silenced. There is a lovely image of hope that tradition attributes to Augustine: "Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are Anger and Courage: anger at the way things are, and courage to labor so that they don't stay that way." Many who serve the poor have often felt Anger, Hope's first daughter. Anger recoils in the face of evil; she perceives that unjust structures are depriving the poor of life and of the social, economic and personal freedom that human dignity demands. But at the same time, the second daughter, Courage, standing at Anger's side, sings out persistently and searches for ways "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield", as Tennyson put it.

Earth's most persistent nighttime singers are the mockingbird in North America and the nightingale in Europe. They sing on and on with remarkable beauty and endurance. Keats immortalized the hope proclaimed by the latter.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown.

Latin American theologians speak of *la esperanza transformadora*, transforming hope. Without it, life falls into pessimism; little movement toward change occurs. But transforming hope

generates energy and initiates action. Such hope, perched in the soul, sings its tune persistently. It cannot be dissuaded.

Christian hope is both realistic and optimistic. It is realistic because it recognizes life's tragedies: sickness, sin, infidelity, suffering, natural calamities, violence, war, death. But it is optimistic because it envisions a new heaven and a new earth where sin and death are vanquished. It trusts that the energies of the Kingdom of God are already at work in the world in the lives and deeds of believers.

In the midst of one of his country's most difficult times, Václav Havel stated: "Either we have hope within us or we don't. It is a dimension of the soul… Hope in this deep and powerful sense is the ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed… It is this hope, above all, that gives us the strength to live and continually to try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do here and now." That kind of hope is unconquerable.

We hope that the systemic change projects described in this book will be a source of hope for readers, and we offer the strategies that we have discerned in those projects as essential tools to help bring about lasting change in the lives of the poor.

As we work toward systemic change, the final word of hope belongs to the Book of Revelations:

> *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away."*

COMMISSION FOR PROMOTING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

In 2006, with the help of a foundation, the Vincentian Family set up a Commission for Promoting Systemic Change and gave it the following mandate:

Goal

To help bring about systemic change through the works of the members of the Vincentian Family, especially through projects among the oppressed poor.

Means

The foundation asked the members of the Commission to study available material concerning systemic change, to discuss their own involvement in it, to formulate a list of effective strategies for helping the poor emerge from poverty, and to share that list with the members of the Vincentian Family.

The Commission was also asked to propose how the strategies might best be disseminated; e.g.

a) through publishing a book in various languages and distributing it among the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world for use in ongoing-education programs;

b) through giving workshops and seminars on all the continents about systemic change, and training others to give similar workshops.

The Commission, in its discussions over the past two years, has placed particular emphasis on self-help and self-sustaining programs so that the poor will be active participants in the planning and implementation of the projects envisioned. The members of the Commission are also recommending ways of addressing the root causes of poverty and of promoting good money management in projects among the poor.

The members of the Commission

Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M. - *Coordinator*
Former Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity and now Coordinator of the joint work of the Daughters of Charity and the Community of Sant'Egidio in Project Dream, a collaborative program for combating AIDS in Africa

Fr. Norberto Carcellar, C.M.
Founder of the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines and subsequent housing and micro-lending projects, and Executive Director of the Philippine Action for Community-led Shelter Initiatives

Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C.
Chief Executive of The Passage, a multi-faceted program for helping to rehabilitate homeless people in London

Fr. Joseph Foley, C.M.
NGO representative of the Congregation of the Mission at the United Nations

Mrs. Patricia Nava (AIC)
Former International President of AIC and now the representative of AIC for relationships with the international Vincentian Family

Fr. Pedro Opeka, C.M.
Founder of Akamasoa ("Good Friends") which has built 17 villages for those formerly living in a garbage dump in Madagascar

Rev. Mr. Gene Smith (SSVP)
Former USA National President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Executive Director of Seton Institute in Daly City, California