



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CONGREGATION
OF THE RELIGIOUS OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL**

To Reverend Father Yvon Laroche

Superior General of the Congregation of the Religious of St Vincent de Paul

1. On the occasion of the General Chapter of your Congregation, I desire to assure you of my prayers for your new mandate to serve the dynamism and communion of your religious family. I also want to express my gratitude to you for your institute's missionary zeal in the world of work and among youth. I hope that the General Chapter which you concluded may increase and strengthen the bonds of unity, so that with fraternal and apostolic charity, your institute may draw its activity from fidelity to its founding charism and to the Church, without avoiding the new challenges of evangelization; the Holy Spirit is calling you to put out into the deep. Guided by apostolic daring and the witness of charity that motivated St Vincent de Paul and your founder, Jean-Léon Le Prévost, open up new paths to communicate Christ's tenderness to children, young people, workers, to life's injured and to all who need his love to start again in hope!

2. During the 150th anniversary of your foundation, you had the chance to give thanks for the work accomplished and to reread your history, to discover God's calls, to evaluate the relevance of your Congregation's response to him in the past two centuries. Your missionary venture was born of the experience of your founder and his companions who, through the Conferences of St Vincent de Paul of Bl. Frédéric Ozanam, discovered the sad state of workers' families, deprived of dignity and excluded from social life. The contemplation of the face of Christ in the faces of the poor of the time brought forth their desire to leave everything to bring the Gospel into the world, disfigured by the industrial revolution, by all kinds of instability and by the rejection of God and the Church, especially among young workers and those in training. Your predecessors showed that charitable deeds strongly support charitable words, as they participated in the rise of the Church's social teaching that Pope Louis XIII formulated in his Encyclical *Rerum novarum*.

Today, from France to Brazil, from Canada to Africa, this same missionary zeal, motivated by Christ's love, must continue to animate your lives as religious and priests. Economic upheavals, the collapse of human solidarity, the breakup of families, continuously create new forms of instability among the younger generations. These frequently prompt them to give in to the temptation of despair or tragically to experiment with poverty, drugs or violence. I encourage you to find responses that meet the deep longings of today's young people. Indeed, it is essential that they see in you true educators who, without being hardened, enable them to acquire the human, moral and spiritual values they need for their integral development. Driven by the love of Christ who patiently awaits all things, help them find that the risen Lord is the secret of your lives and that he wants to be the salt of their lives and the light that brightens their future, for he alone can fully answer their thirst for love, dignity and truth! They will be able to join together in building a world that is more fraternal and open to solidarity. It would also be good to foster a vocation recruitment, that enables the young people who want to follow Christ more radically in the priesthood or in consecrated life, to find in properly trained persons the human and spiritual guidance that will help them to discern their vocation. To do this, the help of other formation centres, in dioceses or religious congregations, is very useful and necessary, since it gives your future religious a chance to meet other young people who are preparing for lifelong service in the Church.

3. The formation of lay collaborators who share in the spirituality and mission of your institute should receive constant attention. It is important that the generosity of the faithful be nourished by a life of intimacy with Christ so that with an informed conscience they may work to build the Kingdom of God in the Church, collaborating confidently with the bishops and the local Catholic communities. May the example of your community life and the educational methods that you employ be authentic sources of sanctification and witness, that make you ready to listen together to the Father's will in order to respond to the call that he directs from the world of children and of the poor! Faithful to your motto *Omni modo Christus annuncietur* (Let Christ be announced in every way), and living Christ's love among yourselves, you will boldly take part in the new "creativity of charity" which I called for at the beginning of the new millennium (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 50).

4. In this month of May, I entrust you to the motherly care of the Virgin Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, and I wholeheartedly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, which I extend to all the Religious of St Vincent de Paul, to their collaborators, and to the young people and families that benefit from their educational service.

From the Vatican, 17 May 2002.

JOHN PAUL II

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