

Report to the XV General Cenacle Systemic Change

The following is taken from the Acts of the XIV General Cenacle:

Systemic Change

Whereas:

The traditional way Missionary Servants have approached mission among the poor and abandoned has been to supply personnel and significant financial resources in direct service to the poor and abandoned; and whereas direct service has proved to be of significant assistance to those in need, even though over the long term such help has limited effect in establishing a just and more peaceful society and over the long term can even instill a sense of dependence; and whereas these limitations invite us as a congregation to consider new ways of doing mission; and whereas we have no desire to eliminate a direct service dimension in our mission but to be more intentional at our efforts in community empowerment and systemic change; and

Whereas:

The international Vincentian Family has directed major efforts in the past years to the issue of systemic change in working among those living in poverty, defining their efforts as aiming "beyond providing food, clothing and shelter to alleviate immediate needs, and enable(ing) people themselves to engage in the identification of the root causes of their poverty and to create strategies to changes those structures which keep them in poverty, (which) also requires changing attitudes that have caused the problem;" (See Daughters of Charity Web site) and whereas a number of our confreres through the years have effectively engaged in this type of systemic approach to the various needs of the communities where they have served; and

Whereas:

This approach is in keeping with our desire "to think with the Church" since the Church in recent years has insisted on the need for this type of systemic approach to the question of human suffering: "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;" (Bl. John Paul II, New York , 1979); and

Whereas:

There are national and internationally recognized individuals and programs such as Catholic Relief Services that have been effective in helping communities and individuals identify and respond systemically to oppressive structures and situations, and the opportunity exists to collaborate and learn from such groups;

Therefore, be it resolved that:

1. As Phase I, we will initiate educational process of familiarizing ourselves with the "best practices" in effecting systemic change, through regional workshops and other means, utilizing the experience and expertise of others who have had success in promoting systemic change. This would be part of a continuing education process attended especially by all pastors, custodians and directors of programs. It would also be a part of the formation of our professed members.
 2. As Phase II, we will engage the local communities where we serve in a needs assessment process. This would identify specific systemic issues that need to be addressed in their particular communities or missions and would propose possible programs or projects that could provide a solution.
 3. As Phase III, the congregation will review the funding of seed projects as pilot programs in missions served by the Missionary Servants in various countries. We would authorize seed monies of up to \$25,000 for projects of human, social and economic development identified by these local communities, with the possible renewal for three years at a diminishing level. Direct and ongoing involvement of the community served by the project would be required, including reporting to the funding source. The projects must address the systemic change desired, be concrete, contain detailed budgets, implementation plans, and evaluation standards.
 4. A small committee composed of confreres and other experienced religious and laity will be formed by the next administration to manage, plan, operate and evaluate the program.
 5. In the development of the proposals, there needs to be close involvement with the Mission Procure Office, which will provide technical and professional support in seeking grants from foundations and other potential donors.
 6. At the next General Cenacle, a full report will be presented detailing the success or failure of each project, the amount of monies expended, results, etc., giving that General Cenacle the opportunity of either renewing or ending the program.
-

What follows is an account of what has taken place since the XIV General Cenacle:

1. Fr. John Edmunds placed the work of systemic change under the guidance of the Mission Committee and it's liaison, John Skrodinsky.
2. The first step taken was a Youtube video sent out to the congregation by Fr. John.
3. The video was followed up by several attempts to educate as many of the confreres on systemic change as possible.
 - a. An email was sent out to all confreres in the beginning of 2013. The email gave all confreres access to some basic information about systemic change and a link to the Vincentian Family website – which gave substantial examples and information on systemic change.

- b. Next, a packet on systemic change was sent out to the confreres for the Spring regional meetings in 2013. Each region was to use the contents of the packet to guide them in an educational/discussion session on the theme. Afterwards, each region was to report on the regional meeting and questions were provided to assist in the process.
 - c. A few months later, we began another regional effort to educate ourselves on systemic change. This time, members of the Vincentian Family came to personally give us a 1-day session on systemic change. We tried to reach as many confreres as possible, but the costs of carrying out the workshops made that difficult. In all, 6 workshops took place in California, Holy Trinity, Mexico, Colombia (1 in Guamal, 1 in Post-Noviate), and Puerto Rico.
4. After this, in April of 2014, the Council sent out an email to the congregation stating that with at least some of the education having already taken place, confreres could move on to phases II and III of the systemic change resolution found in the Acts. A call therefore, was put out for systemic change projects where feasible and appropriate.
5. Two projects officially came to the Council table. One was a small project that was proposed by Steve Vesely for doing stain glass work in Iztapalapa and training an apprentice who would be able to sustain his own work and train others as well. The project was a success and the apprentice continues to work and train others. The second proposal was for a Tractor in the town of La Empresa, Colombia made by a committee that had been formed there. Approval was given after Steve Vesely and John Skrodinsky worked with the committee to set up structural and administrative organization. The project has completed it's first year and continues to be a work in progress. Much work has been done and many things have been learned about the running the project in collaboration with the needs of the local farming community. (As an aside, a project in Guamal that had been in place prior to our venture into systemic change has continued with some financial assistance from the congregation and other outside sources. The idea is to try to convert this effort into more of a systemic change project).
6. It is necessary for us to continue undertaking systemic change projects. Time and time again we see the importance of helping people on our missions achieve self-sustainability and gain the leadership skills that come throughout the process. We are often reminded by bishops that we create dangerous situations when we come to our missions with money and how this cannot be sustained when we leave. In short, we do no favors for the people using this type of ministerial style. Furthermore, some of our own men have been placed in danger because people know that the money comes regularly from the USA to the mission. Of course, we need to learn much more about systemic change and how we can best put it to use on our missions, as well as how to let it impact our own way of living. For a congregation that is called to be among the poor and abandoned as well as live a simply lifestyle ourselves, following systemic change is a needed step in the right direction.