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I. Predecessors in continuing formation

The idea of continuing formation for the Congregation began in the time of Saint Vincent himself. At the first assembly held in his lifetime, in October 1642, we read the following paragraph:

Next, the Assembly decided two things: (1) that henceforth there would be a second probation, which would take place at Saint-Lazare or wherever else the Superior General would indicate; that it would take place only six or seven years after the seminary, for an interval of one year, without, nevertheless, limiting the power of the Superior General, who can always either delay the six or seven years, or shorten the said year of probation, as he deems advisable for the good of the individual and the need of the Company. (XIII, 295)

Although this was his clear wish and the wish of the assembly, the time was not ripe for such a program. The assembly of 1668 spoke to the question, but the members had to admit that the time was still not ripe. The assembly of 1711, however, agreed that the time was then. Consequently, Father Jean Bonnet, superior general 1711-1735, decided with his council to begin the program on 15 August 1712, at Saint Charles, the former minor seminary on the Saint Lazare property. Ten confreres participated during nine weeks, and at the end, Bonnet reported, they were “very happy and edified,” as were the confreres at Saint Lazare. This “seminary of renewal,” or “seminary of recollection” as it was called, lasted for a few years, but difficult financial problems in France caused its suspension. It seems not to have been revived, although it was often called for even up to 1786.

It would take many generations and crises before the general assembly of 1992 decreed that such a program should begin again. Many times in the previous years, particularly during general assemblies, the need for ongoing formation had been mentioned. The topic, in general terms, forms part of the Constitutions and Statutes; as art. 81: The formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life. (Also Statute 42.) The result was that Father Maloney stated, at his election: “We will not discuss the question of a Formation Center any more, we will establish one.”

As a result, the general council determined the basic outlines of the program. By early 1993, the superior general recruited two confreres (John Rybolt, USA-Midwest, and Jean-Pierre Renouard, Toulouse) at first, and later a third (Luis Alfonso Sterling, Colombia). They would be given the responsibility, with a liaison from the general council, to do the initial planning. Because of the considerable financial outlay expected, the econome general also played a significant role in the work. Father Mendoza presented the general outlines of the project to the Visitors of Europe meeting in Salamanca, March 1993, and got their feedback.

Preliminary meetings by Rybolt and Renouard with the superior of the Motherhouse and the provincial began in April 1993, followed by some consultations in Rome.

The first meeting of three members of the team was held in Paris during the Vincentian Month, 4-11 August 1993, led by Ignacio Mendoza, vicar general.
This meeting, however, had been preceded by several discussions held by Rybolt, Renouard, and Sterling with the participants in the Vincentian Month of August 1993, also held in Paris. The purpose of these discussions was to uncover from the participants their major likes and dislikes. Access was helped by the fact that Rybolt was also secretary-general of SIEV, which was sponsoring the Vincentian Month, a post he held until resigning in 1994 out of concern for not confusing the SIEV and CIF programs. Out of those discussions, it became evident that there was general satisfaction with the personal interaction of the confreres, and in general with the surroundings. There was general dissatisfaction with the amount of time left for discussion among the participants and with the excessive length of the conferences, which seemed too abstract and removed from the real-life situation of the confreres.

II. Planning stage

The team held several meetings in Paris, and out of the discussions questions arose that the superior general and his council would need to resolve.

Among the first questions were several decided by the council on 10 November 1993: the name of the center, its location at the Maison Mère in Paris, and the general goals of its program as expressed in its first statutes:

an integral program of Vincentian formation, destined to help them to realize the goal of following Jesus Christ the Evangelizer of the poor. The program of the Center includes the following: academic disciplines, develop of the vocation and ministry of the members, liturgical celebrations, and an experience of community life.

The International Formation Center likewise attempts to encourage getting to know one another, the unity of the Congregation of the Mission, and interprovincial collaboration.

All of this was preceded by discussions between the superior general and the visitor of Paris, Yves Danjou with his council, and with the newly-appointed superior of the house, Raymond Facelina.

The next question was one of where in the Maison Mère to house the program and its participants. Renouard proposed having the seminarians move from the Saint Matthew and Saint Mark corridors, assigned for their use, to another part of the building. The director, Jean-François Desclaux accepted this, and the seminarians for the year beginning 1994 would live in Saint Augustin; planning was then begun to renovate other space for them on the third floor, above the two CIF corridors. The seminarians also left the Salle Pouget for the common room of the CIF program. One area on the Saint Mark corridor, however, the “Salle de Pastoral,” was transformed from the apartment used by Gaston Jennat into two individual rooms (108-109), which they had been many years before.

The question of the relationship between the program and the house was at the basis of many discussions. Not the least was the decision to share the main refectory with the members of the house.
Major discussions took place about the meeting room or rooms for the program. At first, Facelina proposed remaking the disused prayer hall on the first floor. This was still the case by December 1993. It quickly became evident that it was not suitable, being too large and filled with columns, and also too expensive for the results. Father Maloney remarked that with the money needed to renovate this hall, he could build a villa in Italy for the program. Consequently, the idea was abandoned by the beginning of March 1994. Instead, attention shifted to the former amphitheater, formerly used by the Vincentian seminarians as a classroom, and later as a television room by the university students living in the wing at 93, rue de Sèvres. It had originally been suggested that this room would be an all-purpose room, concentrating on library and study area, with place for small-group discussions.

Major construction then took place on what would later be called Salle Ozanam (named during the second session). The amphitheater risers were taken out and the rooms behind, formerly accessible from the kitchen, were opened up through already existing doors. A staircase leading to the kitchen was removed from what would be Salle Rosalie Rendu. The motors for the lift, which formerly brought up food for storage on that floor, were removed and two toilets were added as well as storage space. It was also determined that for the furnishing of the room nothing would be built in. Everything, in other words, would be movable. This precluded the installation of a projection screen, for example.

Fewer renovations were needed for Salle Pouget, but these involved putting in a toilet in a former closet space, as well as generally cleaning up the room. The corridor outside the room was also cleaned, and the science equipment formerly used in the laboratory of Father Pouget was removed and sold.

Three apartments for the directors were also prepared. Rooms 101 and 102 were rearranged and sanitary facilities were added, resulting in two rooms, an office, and a bedroom. Although not part of the CIF rooms, room 103 was also expanded into two rooms with facilities. Room 104 was already a double room, but the shower was replaced and a toilet was added, and the room was generally improved. For the third director, rooms 121 and 123 at the end of the Saint Mark corridor were also joined and facilities added. Room 123 had been the seminarians’ kitchen, and the equipment was moved and installed in Salle Pouget.

The finances of this construction work were arranged between the superior general and the province of Paris, and did not enter into the eventual budget of CIF. Mr. Paul Rodriguez, the business manager (intendant) of the Maison Mère supervised the work and the finances.

Two other important construction matters were also undertaken. The first was the replacement of the old and dangerous staircase joining the first and second floors on the north side. The staircase was extended to the ground floor with a connection to the kitchen. The second was the preparation of a laundry room for the CIF. The Center received one room at the end of the Saint Bernard corridor. This area had previously been a shower room. The room closest to the adjoining staircase was organized to hold the washing machines and dryers, and two student rooms were prepared from the rest of the showers. The decision to have the laundry came after it was determined that it would be better to have the participants do their own washing, rather than to give it to the commercial service already used by the house. The issue here was one of expense but also of self-sufficiency and awareness of the need to work.
It should be noted that at the same time, the kitchen of the Motherhouse was being renovated. This work was begun independently of the arrival of CIF, but it facilitated several other elements, principally the shift to a catering service and the installation of the self-service cafeteria line. The general curia had no financial participation in this kitchen renovation. The result was that the main kitchen was put into conformity with legal norms.

The issue of translation was one that arose early in the discussions. It was admitted that this was and would be one of the major difficulties of the entire project. On the basis of the Vincentian Month and of the experience with general assemblies, it was originally thought that confreres trained in the languages would be able to offer their services. If they were unavailable, then Daughters of Charity would be asked (as being close by and familiar with our specific language), then other priests or religious, and finally lay persons to be hired. After the first session, however, it became clear that the CIF would need to hire religious or translators. The team agreed that we would not regularly rely on the Daughters of Charity, inasmuch as they were already employed full-time in their work at the rue du Bac. The Mother General was generous in offering their help, refusing any payment, for example.

For the work of the translators, it was decided to install movable cabins at one side of Salle Pouget, and to furnish simultaneous translation equipment. The general council approved the purchase of a professional system. At first, two cabins were purchased; a third was added later, although it was rarely used. This was a large expense, paid for by the General Curia with help from Kirche in Not.

It was also decided early on to concentrate on two major languages at a time. Initial counting of language groups showed a preponderance of English speakers (as a first or second language), followed closely by Spanish and then French. These languages formed the main tier. A second tier was constituted by Polish, Italian and Portuguese, and a third by German and many other languages. Consideration of the number of translators to be secured quickly showed that the number of languages per session would have to be kept small, and in general that has been the case in the years since. As a result, English had to be the language for the course each session, with alternating sessions in Spanish and French. A third language would be added from time to time, but it became clear after some experience that the program would not be able to afford another regular translator for fewer than six participants needing that language. In practice, this has reduced the languages to two per session, with one translator able to move from each language to the other.

A question that took some time to decide was the length of the program. It had been originally envisioned as lasting four months and the general council kept insisting on it. However, it was evident to Rybolt even in late 1992 that, after examining the details, sixteen or seventeen weeks would be too long. The main problem was that it would be impossible to begin the program early enough to have the participants home for Christmas and New Year’s. It would be impossible to begin before about 1 September, given the fact that August is the vacation month in France. Counting forward, therefore, led to the inevitable conclusion that the fall session, at least, could be fourteen weeks at the most. The spring session could theoretically be longer, but it was decided to keep the sessions the same length. This decision was contested more than once by the general council, but it was finally left without comment as proposed by the directors.
Many other details of furnishing were discussed in the months before the program began. The CIF did not need to renovate the rooms for the participants, since this had taken place some time previously for the seminarians. Furniture was bought for Salle Pouget (tables, chairs), and other items were scavenged from the Maison Mère (side tables, refrigerator.) A television was purchased for the same room (later to be called Salle Slattery), with lounge type chairs. The same room also had glass-fronted cases used previously for science equipment, but later by the seminarians for a library. These, along with other book cases were adapted for CIF use.

The CIF planned to use the Oratory, sharing it with the confreres of the Motherhouse. Since the benches were uncomfortable, as Father McCullen often remarked, it was agreed to purchase individual chairs to replace them. These chairs were later given by the CIF to the Maison Mère at no cost.

The Maison Mère had received some school desks, then in storage in the prayer hall. The CIF was allowed to use them. Comfortable chairs were purchased as well as other furnishings for the two side rooms. Despite some opposition from the house, the CIF team insisted that the floors had to be carpeted, and that acoustic ceiling tiles be installed to reduce noise and to facilitate the work of the translators. Mr. Borgetto, the house artist and responsible for decoration, found paintings, statues and a large wooden crucifix to adorn the CIF areas.

For the laundry, originally one washing machine and one dryer were purchased. Mr. Rodriguez suggested the smallest possible machines, since he was certain that the participants would wash their own clothes in the sinks in the room and hang their items out to dry in their rooms. He was astonished that two washers and two dryers were envisaged. In fact, one each was ordered originally as a kind of test; the second set came a few months later. The laundry room was fitted up temporarily with a wall to assure privacy for CIF. The room was finished a couple of years later when the rest of Corridor St. Bernard was renovated.

The program also had the right to use an office on the second floor, in which office equipment and supplies were kept. Occasionally it was used for meetings by the CIF team. A bulletin board for CIF use was also installed outside the office. Then the task of buying supplies was organized: office supplies, paper, envelopes, mailing supplies, pencils, and pens, everything for an office and for helping the participants. Signs for individual rooms were made; also numerous rubber stamps for documents and personal use. Coded door locks were installed for Salles Pouget and Ozanam, to eliminate the problem of multiple and expensive keys and to guarantee better security with the possibility of changing the codes after each session.

Many other less tangible considerations had to be made as well. One was that the confreres who would come to the program should not be considered as seminarians or be called “students,” although that name was an accurate description at least in some languages. Instead, they would be generally called “participants,” and would have major input into the topics to be discussed. To help with these intangible elements, Sister Marie-Genevieve Roux, Daughter of Charity, was especially helpful. She had directed the renewal program for the Daughters for several years and knew many of the details that would prove helpful to our program. It was she who guided the group in Paris during the first few sessions until Rybolt took over the guiding. She also gave an overview of the culture and events of the seventeenth century in preparation for the visit to Versailles. This was eventually folded in to the first
week’s program on the life of Vincent. Lastly, she also suggested using the SAVAC bus company, which continued on in the program. The company generally assigned one driver to the CIF trips; in the later years it was almost always Artur Ribeiro, capable and imperturbable.

As originally understood, the topic would be “The Experience of Monsieur Vincent and Our Own.” By April 1994, it was realized that this fitted in well with the Constitutions and Statutes, and consequently it was agreed that the topics should be taken from the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission. This would have several advantages. First, it would help the Congregation in general to accept and implement its “new” Constitutions. Second, it would eliminate the problem of having so-called experts tell others how they should be good Vincentians. The team members often discussed the fact that, since the participants would be between 35 and 50 years of age, they would already have had significant experience as confreres in their apostolate and community life. Third, common reflection on the meaning and importance of the Constitutions for the Congregation in the future would allow the participants to be more than simple consumers of information but, instead, be actively involved in the process.

It was originally estimated that about 50 confreres per session would be a suitable number. Conversation with others involved in similar programs, both Vincentians and others, showed that this number was far too high. It was proposed that between 20 and 30 was the optimum figure. Despite initial opposition from the general council, the CIF has generally kept to that number, something that happened through no choice of its own, but only through the number of participants sent by their respective provinces. Besides, this initial insight proved to be the correct one, since more participants make for a much heavier workload and complicate arrangements for housing, since there are only 30 available rooms in the two CIF corridors.

To help in overall planning, Rybolt visited several other programs of ongoing formation. In Rome in April 1993, he and Father Maloney met with the superior general of the Christian Brothers concerning their program. Other programs visited were in the United States and in Ireland. Renouard also had experience with programs in France. In April 1994, the two of them also visited Florian Kapusciak, at the time one of the directors of the international Catholic aid agency, Kirche in Not, headquartered in Königstein, Germany, near Frankfurt. Kapusciak assured them that he would be available to help poor provinces secure funding when they could not find it elsewhere. Since the beginning, Kirche in Not has been a generous collaborator in the work of ongoing Vincentian formation.

The issue of funding the program was much discussed. It was determined that the program would be self-financing, in the sense that it would not be subsidized by the general council. It would prepare a budget, have it approved, and live within its means. It was originally thought that one of the responsibilities of the directors would be to secure funding for the provinces, particularly by travel to aid agencies and by presenting proposals. Experience soon showed that this was not possible. Instead, most provinces would pay for their own members. Others would apply to some aid agencies, generally through Kapusciak. Others, also, relied on the charity of provinces with more financial means.

In preparing the preliminary budget, all conceivable expenses were taken into account. Among those was that the members of the Team would pay room and board expenses, at least at the same rate as the participants. At the meeting of April 1994, Facelina
announced that the team would not be charged for the rooms, only the meals. By the time that the program started, however, he changed his mind and the members of the team always received the tickets of the local community; in effect, the house was paying those costs. The idea that he expressed, although it cannot be found in writing, was that it was compensation from the house to the General Curia for the costs that the Curia incurred in upgrading the facilities.

Some other items of equipment were purchased: a fax machine for the CIF office and a used photocopier, formerly belonging to the Paris province. This was refitted to allow for individual codes for each person using the machine. This saved a lot of money in “phantom” copies. Two computers were also acquired, one Mac and one IBM PC. The IBM came through De Paul University. At the beginning, those who wanted could use the Mac belonging to Renouard. These were at first kept in the CIF office; a Mac was later purchased for the use of our temporary accountant. It had been planned to keep the computers in Room 145, but it was too isolated to be usable. After much discussion with the general council, the CIF was authorized in early 1995 to purchase a car for its use. This was generally thanks to the recommendations of Yves Danjou, at the time visitor of Paris. The funds came from the CIF account directly.

With the advice of the Paris province, the CIF opened its bank account at Société Générale under the legal umbrella of the province. The CIF is, therefore, regarded as a work of the province, and the provincial econome has his name officially on the bank authorizations. The team members have bank cards for the use of the program. Various account representatives have resolved small difficulties concerning the accounts.

Rybolt purchased small flags of individual nations to try to liven up the Salle Pouget and to give the participants a sense of being recognized. As some flags disappeared over the years, these have been replaced and the nations expanded as needed.

Rybalt and Sterling arrived formally in June and spent some weeks in Vichy to study French.

III. Implementation: General Themes

The first program opened on 4 September 1994, with exactly 30 participants. In this case, every day was a new one, since the team members had little experience of what might happen. To provide for input, it had been decided to invite outside speakers well-versed in the materials to make the week-long presentations. The first was José María Román, who came faithfully until his death in 2002. For translators, two confreres from the session helped at the beginning, to be followed in a few weeks by John Kennedy and Arthur Kolinsky, both bilingual in English and Spanish. Others had been invited but for various reasons they declined, such as Luis Huerga, fully employed in Ireland.

The participants knew that they would be setting the standards for their successors, and they took their responsibilities seriously. Much of what was tried was done so as an experiment, such as a weekly supper together in Salle Pouget on Thursday night.

The general outline of the program has been followed since it was arranged during the planning period. That is: each week with a different topic, treated by a speaker expert in the field; followed by small group discussions, divided into language groups, and then large
group discussions in common, with the participants of each group presenting the reports of their work to the others. In addition, other speakers were invited at different points, generally at the end of the program, for other insights and topics. With this, there were visits to Vincentian sites along with a retreat at the Berceau. To end the program, the participants were invited to work on a project of their own choosing that would bring together the fruits of their work during the CIF program so that they could have something practical for their future work.

To help the speakers, some guidelines were drawn up which emphasized that they were expected to introduce the topic and to point to the main issues raised in the Constitutions. They were asked to review the development of the thought behind the matter, beginning with Vincent de Paul and continuing through the history of the congregation, if at all possible.

At the beginning, the plan was to alternate sessions of presentations by the speaker with reading and study sessions. The speakers, however, were not convinced and consequently this loose structure was tightened up, as outlined above.

A proposal was made to the superior general to make a visit whenever possible to each session. This visit has become a regular feature of the calendar for each session and it is highly appreciated.

The question of liturgy, celebration and participation, has never been an easy one to resolve. In general, the participants took part by linguistic groups. In the case of French-speakers, they normally assisted with the local community. Finding places for different groups resolved itself into using the Oratory (first floor), the Salon Vert (ground floor), and the Miraculous Medal chapel (second floor, room 144, with an annex as sacristy in Room 142). Gradually, it was decided to provide some written materials to help the groups decide when and how to organize their liturgical prayer life. One issue often involved the multiplicity of rites: Syro-Malabar from India, Geez from Eritrea, and Maronite from Lebanon. Occasionally, the participants would either celebrate entirely in their own rite, or, more often, they would use one or other portion of their own liturgy as part of the Roman rite (blessings, gospel procession, formula for consecration.) The Eritreans persuaded the others to join them in a traditional liturgical dance. They did this at Pouy, session VII. The pastor might have been surprised had he come in during this, but nothing happened.

It often happened that there were two or three Brothers in the program. The other members tried to involve them in the liturgical celebrations as they wished. Some groups had homilies at the Eucharist daily. Others incorporated Morning Prayer into the Eucharist, although most did not. Many groups needed some help in proper celebration, since their training had not been very thorough. This more formal help might happen in the future.

In each of the sessions, the team members have invited the speaker out to a meal with them. The purpose has been to get to know the speakers better and to get their input about the program. Besides, a fraternal atmosphere built up good relations among the team members.

IV. Implementation: Sessions
In Session I (9-12, 1994), the hours were 9:30 and 16:00 for the sessions, with group study (reading, research, etc.), after each input session. Wednesday afternoon was kept free for personal use. It was also decided not to make major changes for the first cycle of two sessions (that is, involving one Spanish-English group and one French-English group). There were no extra invited speakers in the first session, apart from the regular presenters. Two non-Vincentian speakers had been invited, however, Father J. Catalan, S.J., a member of the theology faculty at Centre Sèvres, and Dr. Cotinaud. Both had been well received at the previous Vincentian Month, and spoke basically on psychological topics (Catalan on vows and Cotinaud on community life.) They repeated their presentations during the second session, but not afterwards, partly because having them necessitated an extra translator, since they spoke only in French.

One element that continued with the program was an invitation to join the confreres in San Sebastian, Spain, for a meal at the closing of the retreat. This happened because one of the confreres of that house was a participant in the session, and he and his superior agreed. The custom has become part of the community plan of the San Sebastian house, and it is supported by the province of Zaragoza.

For this session, a calendar was published, but the information was tentative and provisional, since many changes took place as we gained experience.

Other elements were begun here: regular written evaluations (at first only at the middle and at the end of the session); individual photos of the confreres, made up into a color photocopy given to each one at the end; certificates in the form of diplomas attesting to the participation of each person; comments from each one at the last day of the program which were then summarized and given to the superior general and his council.

Renouard realized that the main hall had no name, unlike Salle Pouget, and the team decided to name it after Frédéric Ozanam. Renouard secured a copy of a painting of Ozanam and it was installed in the hall. The room was “inaugurated” with members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. The idea was extended to the small rear room, given the name of Rosalie Rendu. Borgetto had already hung a large original painting of M. Etienne inaugurating the Children of Mary in Paris.

Beginning in this session, the participants regularly took part in the cleaning and maintenance of the spaces allotted to them: corridors and stairwells, the common CIF areas, the laundry, etc. Later, brief job descriptions would be written. There were several purposes: to give them a chance to work for each other, to contribute a little to the cost of the maintenance of the motherhouse, to build a community spirit.

One of the jobs was that of photographer. At Renouard’s urging, the photos taken during the session were collected into an album. The procedure has been continued, although there are no photos from a couple of early sessions.

During the retreat, the Americans realized that the Thanksgiving Day holiday would be celebrated. Regrettably, the food at the Berceau was strange, with predictable bad feelings on the part of the kitchen and the participants. In later sessions, more attention has been paid to various local holidays, but they were not always successfully celebrated.
For the tours, the group relied on Sister Marie-Genevieve for Paris, on Father Renouard for the Berceau and other sites, along with André Silvestre for the Perboyre sites (beginning, in fact, at Notre-Dame de Grâce, and continuing to Montauban, then to Cahors and Montgesty.) This situation changed as Rybolt became more aware of these and other sites.

Fathers Maloney and Griffin came to Paris to evaluate the session at its conclusion.

Session II (2-5, 1995) saw some regularization of what was tentatively adopted in the previous session. For example, in the first session some themes lasted for more than one week; others had speakers on specific topics. There was also much changing and adaptation of trips given the need to arrive on time for meals and to respect the hours for the bus driver. Besides, problems arose with accommodations, and this led us to begin planning one and two years in advance, despite our reluctance to lock ourselves in too early to a formula of times and places.

In the schedule, the morning session were changed to begin at 9:00 instead of 9:30. One week was added on priestly spirituality, principally the idea of Sterling. However, the result was not well received and the topic was dropped, particularly because it was not specifically based on the Constitutions and Statutes, and also because the Congregation has brothers as well as priests as members. This is one example of where evaluations helped.

The translator was Sister Jean-Baptiste Rome, an elderly French sister of Saint Joseph, living with her community in Clermont-Ferrand. She came to the house almost by accident and was hired. She decided to live in the motherhouse instead of anywhere else. She had taught English for some years and had translated for other groups, even in England. She took an active part in the life of the new group, even adding her comments to the translation.

During the session, on free afternoons, Rybolt proposed brief walking tour visits of Vincentian sites. These were optional visits. They did not continue beyond this session, probably since the time periods were less available in subsequent sessions.

Members of the general council criticized the rhythm of the week and its schedule, and asked that the participants be given more to do and to spend more time in the sessions, with more time each day and more time each week at work. The reaction of the team was negative as was the nearly universal reaction of the participants. Despite these conflicts in opinion, the schedule stayed as it was, at least for the time being until other contradictory data became evident. The team felt that its experience was more valid than ideas introduced from outside.

Another question raised during this same period was the existence of a free week during the session. This had been planned from the beginning and the participants received it very well. The idea had come from the other directors, who proposed it and said that it had been very important in their own programs. Some opposition on this topic came from the general council, however, partly from the felt need to make the participants work harder and longer, and partly from a couple of bad experiences. At a session with the visitors in Salamanca in 1996, one of the visitors came up to Rybolt and asked him to justify how confreres from his province could spend their time going to a bullfight in Spain. The
response was that it was impossible to justify stupidity, but that free time, however spent, was a good idea. The opposition did not resurface.

Serious work began on gathering books for the CIF library. It was hoped that someday a better Vincentian library would be available in the house and that the CIF collection could be made part of it. This did not happen, although Facelina proposed often that the disused prayer hall might become a Vincentian library and “documentation center.” Books came from different sources, in particular from the former library of the “seminaire” at the Rue du Bac. The Province of Madrid donated others from its stock of duplicates, as did the Midwest Province.

Occasional requests for a “historian” of the session—someone to record the events in a sort of log—were made to the participants, but with limited results. Instead, many photos of each session were kept for future use (with the exception of two early ones). Later, these photos would be made available on CDs for those wishing to have them.

Another development in this session was beginning the morning sessions with the prayer for Saint Vincent’s spirit that the Congregation had mandated after the General Assembly of 1668. It would be translated, thanks to the attention of the participants, at first into the three principal languages, and later into as many languages used in the Congregation as possible. At first, the texts were printed on holy cards of Saint Vincent. With the development of other texts, these were all printed together on pages for the entire group.

In February, the participants inaugurated Salle Ozanam, with Salle Rosalie Rendu, together with members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Renouard led the festivities.

In March, the team took delivery of a used car, a Renault 5. Renouard already had a car but decided not to bring it to Paris. It was thanks to Yves Danjou that the request for a vehicle was approved by the general council, which had originally denied it. A reason given for the denial was that the members of the Council never needed a car when they were in Paris, which, anyhow, had excellent transportation. The response that having a car for emergencies as well as for the mental health of the team being able to get outside of Paris was also important. In any case, the car helped Rybolt later to develop materials for his guide to Vincentian France.

At the end of the retreat at the Berceau, the participants were invited to renew their vows. This renewal took various forms, but it has been regularly done. After some time, the session normally celebrates the closing mass at the church in Pouy, and the renewal takes place around the baptismal font.

Before the following session, the superior general was regularly asked to write a personal letter to each participant, to welcome them to the session, etc. This seemed to have had some small good effects, but it didn’t seem worth continuing after some time.

During Session III (9-12, 1995) the weekly speakers were limited to four periods each. Previously, they were free to fill the allotted time or to use it for individual reading and study. It was clear that for some cultural traditions a magisterial lecture was what was expected, although these were often not appreciated since they were overly theoretical. Other cultural groups wanted a less directive approach, more interactive. To bridge the gap between these two perspectives, the team tried to balance the amount of time given to a
lecturer, plus to remind the lecturer to be open to interact with the group. Two speakers in particular have followed this method closely, José Antonio Ubillús and John Prager, beginning in Session V. Both would begin desde el pueblo, or from the participants as the source of experience. The participants generally approved of their methods. During this session, too, group study and discussion took place during three periods, Tuesday afternoon, and morning and afternoon of Thursday.

Rybolt arrived late because of an operation for prostate cancer. It took a while to get back to full health. Although the general council did not countenance return to one’s home more than once a year, it began here because of Rybolt’s need to see his doctor’s for check-up and treatment.

To replace the topic of Priestly Spirituality a week on Social Action was introduced. The purpose here was to speak about the commitment of the Congregation to social action, and various means by which it was accomplished. Two other topic were added, inasmuch as the final weeks of the program, after the return from the retreat, were regarded as too light. The first were “Testimonies,” meaning personal input from Vincentians and others about their Vincentian work. This topic later developed into a more systematic discussion of the Vincentian Family. The second topic was a series of conferences on Ongoing Formation. This was later dropped, however, as it never had the desired effect and was not well received. More generally, it should be noted that participants occasionally asked for more input on either general theological topics or on specific ministerial questions: how to recruit vocations, methods of formation, how to give missions, and the like. The response was that the CIF would try to stick to the basics of the Constitutions and Statutes, particularly since the other issues to very specific to individual countries and provinces. However, there is enough interaction among the participants to guarantee that good ideas are shared on these topics informally.

Rather than invite the same speakers back each session, or at least every two sessions, it was decided to develop a larger group who could speak. Besides, this would allow flexibility in case individual speakers could not come for the proposed week. In addition, the team members agreed to develop their materials to be used in case other speakers could not come from outside.

The translator for this session and part of the next one was Alexandra Eshuis. Dutch-born, she had lived in Mexico and consequently knew Spanish well, which was what was needed in the session. Her English was also very good. She probably came through an introduction from Mrs. Mary Ann Nobile, who ran a translation service. She was a parishioner of Saint Joseph’s in Paris, and the priests there recommended her to Rybolt. She had looked for others, but Alexandra proved to be the one who was needed. She continued in the following session, but had to leave in the middle, after two months or so.

During the visits to the Vincentian sites, it became evident that the participants would appreciate having written information as well as an oral presentation. This led to Rybolt preparing a guide, and later to his much more extensive research on Vincentian sites in France in general. The eventual purpose would be to publish the information for the use of the CIF participants as well as of others who might share an interest.

During this session, the first visit was made to the sanctuary of Loyola. It happened because the group arrived too early in San Sebastian, and the superior, Julio Suescun,
suggested a visit to Loyola. The visit has been kept in subsequent sessions. The participants appreciated the comparison between his shrine and Vincent’s.

**Session IV** (2-5, 1996) marked something of a turning point. The principal reason was that a couple of the participants were troubled by various points of the program and, because of their personal style, caused some dissatisfaction among the others. One of these confreres came to see Rybolt, insisting that the entire program would have to be redone, from top to bottom, following ideas that he had sketched out. The reply was that this may be necessary, but that this was the first time that anyone had proposed this. Nevertheless, the confrere was invited to give his ideas in writing and then they would be discussed and acted on as appeared proper. He never followed through, and then left the program early. He later left the Congregation as well. Despite this, some suggestions were made that were adopted in future sessions; these will be noted below.

The team agreed that it would be good gradually to invite the members of the general council to speak for a week. The vicar general was regularly invited to open the program and others came as they could be scheduled (Victor Bieler in this session, and Lauro Palù in Session II, for example). This idea gradually died away as the need was no longer present.

During this session, speakers generally had five periods, although some had four. The topic of Ongoing Formation continued, but was dropped after this session. Occasionally, other individuals were invited to address the group for an hour or so before the evening meal, such as Maurice Vansteenkiste speaking on M. Portal. This worked only when translation could be provided, which ultimately meant that the idea was not continued in this form. However, visiting confreres have been often invited to the Thursday night supper to speak briefly about their ministry: Archbishop Franc Rodé, Pedro Opeka, Bishop Jorge Ávila as well as other confreres visiting the house, or former CIF participants.

In the first week, Facelina was asked to offer some input on proper liturgical celebration, since the styles from different places was not uniform or even well planned. This initiative, however, was not continued since it did not accomplish anything. Also in the first week, Sr. Marie Geneviève was asked to present in a lecture some information on 17th century France, as an introduction to the program and as a preparation for the visit to Versailles. This was continued for a couple of years but eventually dropped since it was covered in other ways.

Robert Kelly came to help with translation toward the middle of the session; he was suggested by Mme. Nobile. A native of Scotland, Kelly had been a seminarian in Spain and his Spanish remained good. He and his family lived in Paris. At the end of the session he agreed to continue for the next session in Spanish, but during the summer he changed his mind since he had another job.

In general, the trips and visits included the following: Paris (in two sections), Clichy, the Daughter of Charity and Vincentian archives and museum, mass at the rue du Bac with the Daughters, a visit to Versailles (which began in this session) with an emphasis on the Vincentian presence there; Gannes and Folleville, with a brief visit to Amiens; the tomb of Frederic Ozanam; Châtillon with other associated sites (Taizé, Cluny, Mâcon, Pérouges, Lyons, Fain-les-Moutiers); Richelieu, Château-l’Évêque, the Berceau, Dax, Buglose, Pouy, Lourdes, Tarbes, Toulouse, the Perboyre sites (Catus, where the confreres had a house at the time, Le Puech, and Montgesty), and Rocamadour. These have remained part of the CIF
experience. Some years had other experiments, such as Sarlat, and Angers. Montdidier was visited in this session, but it had little to offer and it was not repeated. In general, the team tried various possibilities, studied maps, visited in person, and often attempted other routes until good ones were finally decided on. This was helped at times by previous experience as well as by the experience of traveling with other, non-CIF, groups. Besides, it made the trips more interesting for the team members.

The question of lodging was somewhat chancy, particularly at the beginning. The team relied on the Daughters of Charity at Château-l’Évêque and the Berceau, and gradually found other places. Lodging at Toulouse was often difficult, since the seminary was barely suitable and often under repair. The Centre Cultural de la Dombes was somewhat rough, but it eventually went bankrupt and the group shifted to Ars.

The question of meals has continued to be somewhat difficult to resolve. It was always necessary to arrange for meals, and gradually the team became more adept at choosing menus, finding economical but suitable places, and having meals served in a timely manner. After the visit to Folleville, the group found a farmhouse that had place for groups and offered meals. They closed, but recommended another lady in a near-by town. She stopped after a couple of years, and a recommendation from Daniel Lamerand and some friends led to another restaurant. The price was a little too high and the superior at Amiens offered his facilities for the group. A similar development followed in other places.

Lourdes was a part of the CIF program from the beginning, although it had nothing to do with Saint Vincent. The reason was our experience with other groups that did not have Lourdes as part of the visits. The confreres were constantly expressing their desire to go to Lourdes, and even left other programs for a long weekend there. Besides, some had received money from their parishes or their parents for a side trip. As a result, Lourdes was and remains a stop. Originally we stayed at a hotel, then with the Daughters of Charity until they left their house. A small hotel followed, but it became difficult since the owners insisted on putting two men to a room, despite assurances that they would not do so. We moved to the large house of the Sisters of the Assumption, overlooking the sanctuary area. The food was not as good, and they didn’t have a bar, but the situation was better.

The Perboyre sites proved to be interesting, although occasionally it was impossible to visit the original Perboyre house since the owner, a nurse and mother, sometimes had to work. Seeing the outside was at least good enough.

Among the participants were members of the Vincentian Congregation (VC) from India. They participated well in the program and broadened the perspectives of the CM participants. Two more would come in Session VI, but none afterwards, despite some commitments to send others.

Jean-Pierre Renouard left at the end of this session to return to his province. His place was taken by Casimir Stelmach, a Polish confrere working in the Roman province. Stelmach had already lived briefly in Paris and had a good working knowledge of French as well as some English and a little Spanish. It was never really clear if or why Renouard asked to be reassigned. In any case, the original statutes of CIF proposed three-year terms renewable once, together with the understanding that the members of the team would be replaced on a rotating basis.
Rybolt went to the visitors’ meeting in Salamanca to meet the visitors and to present an evaluation of the first four sessions. The talk was printed in *Vincentiana*. During the session serious discussions took place with the visitors of Poland and Slovakia, but they firmly declined to participate in the program, but for different reasons: the Poles because they had too many confreres and it would be too expensive for them; and the Slovaks because they had too few confreres and were spending their limited funds for buildings.

To prepare for **Session V** (9-12, 1996), it was decided to make some adjustments, as discussed during the previous session. For one thing, evaluations were made weekly, with special ones at the mid-point and then at the end of the session. The purpose was to track more closely the opinions of the confreres. Another was to prepare information on each week in advance, so as to alert the participants. For this, a weekly page is prepared in the various languages giving the topic of the week, a brief biography of the speaker, some reflection questions, and suggested bibliography. Despite the importance of this information, it appears to have had little effect or impact.

Another important change was the addition of a series of lectures on the history of the Congregation of the Mission. Rybolt developed these talks and the materials to accompany them. The topic was well received and has been continued for that reason, as well as from the conviction of the team members of its importance.

The topic of Ongoing Formation had been dropped and in its place more time was given for invited speakers on individual topic. These regularly included a presentation by the Mother General, the Director General of the Daughters of Charity, representatives from the branches of the Vincentian Family, Sr. Elisabeth Charpy speaking on Louise de Marillac; and Father Antoine Moussali on the topic of Christian-Islamic relations. A visit to Valfleury was added this session. During the visit to Toulouse, a first visit was made to the Collège de Foix. It had previously been supposed that this institution no longer existed, but the Sisters who use it as their motherhouse were happy to receive the Vincentian pilgrims.

We found Mme. Christine de Maistre, a young married woman with a child. She lived close by. Her Spanish was good as was her English. Because Italian was also a language of the session, we hired Sonia Pizzamiglio, who had French and Italian, and some English. When Sonia could not come for some reason, such as trips to Italy, she had Carla Bertana come in her place. This would be the beginning of long service by Carla.

On the opening day of the program, one of the participants, Fr. Giudice, from Peru, stumbled on the stairs and dislocated his shoulder. This helped the team to focus on several matters, principally the health issues of the participants as they were entering middle age. Giudice spent several weeks in an arm sling and did some weeks of therapy. Others at different times suffered from malaria attacks, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart and lung problems, and even dental emergencies. The staff of the Centre Médicalisé was always prompt and helpful in handling emergencies as well as facilitating ongoing consultations, laboratory work and x-rays.

Raúl Garza, from the Southern Province, USA, managed to get locked out of the building, since he returned after the main gates were closed. He spent the entire night outside. This led the team to use his case as a constant reminder to the participants to return on time or at least to borrow a key from a team member to open a side door.
Luis Alfonso Sterling left the program to return to Colombia at the end of the session. Although it was useful to have a third team member at the beginning of the program, it became evident that the work could be easily managed by two confreres. Consequently, Sterling was not replaced.

During this period, the team proposed that a sharper distinction be made between the CIF as an entity and its program or programs. Father Maloney decided on the name **Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program**.

It became clear also that there were more available confreres for the English-Spanish sessions than for the English-French ones. The simple fact of the numbers of native speakers made this increasingly evident.

During the long trip in this session, French roads were blocked by striking truckers. We had some difficulty moving around, and were also worried about getting enough fuel for the bus to return to Paris. As it happened, we found a service station with enough diesel and we were able to circumvent the blocked portions of the roads, particularly near Cahors.

**Session VI** (2-5, 1997) saw another important topic added to the program, namely a week on the Saints of the Vincentian Family. These persons had been covered loosely and indirectly, mainly through site visits. A more formal presentation was called for, as evidence in the evaluations, and a week was added. Time for this was gathered by reducing the amount of time available at the end of the program for the personal projects, and by adjusting the time slots for the invited speakers.

A visit to the house of Catherine Labouré in Reuilly was added also. This involved a visit to the house and museum plus Eucharist in the sisters’ chapel.

The session was something of an experiment since we offered the program also in Polish. In fact, there was only one confrere from Poland who needed the translation; the others were missionaries in Congo or Madagascar who knew French. In any case, we hired Marguerite Wysocki, a doctoral student in international law in Paris, for translation into and from Polish. Carla Bertana alternated with Christine De Maistre for English-French, partly because Christine was expecting her second child and could not always be present. At the end of the session, Carla expressed her willingness to continue, especially since Christine would have to move with her husband to Bordeaux.

Our acting liaison with the Curia, Pat Griffin, kept urging us to have the speakers also evaluate the session. This, however, produced little in the way of good information and was eventually dropped, partly since several of them returned for subsequent sessions and objected to filling out the forms.

For our visit to Notre-Dame de Grâce, we decided to add to our celebration of Mass a renewal of priestly commitment. A formula was developed by Giorgio Bontempi and translations were made in different languages. One of the purposes was to continue to stress the spiritual nature of our visits, not just the tourism aspect.

During **Session VII** (9-12, 1997), no major changes were implemented. The total number was 35 participants, the overflow being lodged on the third floor, in rooms unused by the seminarians. However, a new one-day trip was added, going to Joigny, Montmirail and
Troyes. The idea was good but it would take some time to get the timing correct. Also, a visit to the hospice of Beaune appeared for the first time on the calendar, although it may have been made in previous sessions. The purpose of this latter visit was to give an idea of hospital care in the time of Vincent and Louise.

The translation this session was complicated since it involved German. As with the Polish confreres, there were only two who really needed help with understanding either French or English, but we hired Christopher Edwards. His family lived in Strasbourg, where he and his father were employed as translators in the European parliament.

The time of Session VIII (2-5, 1998) was also marked by few changes. The visitor of Paris was invited to celebrate the opening Eucharist, partly since the vicar general was unable to come. The vicar general had often come to inaugurate the program, thereby giving greater importance to it. One special invitee was Dominique Iyolo Iyombe, a confrere from Zaire (Congo); the purpose was to break out of the mold of the older white male, often from Europe or North America. Beginning in this session, invitations were more commonly made, where possible, to others outside that narrow range.

A visit to Fontainebleau was added on to the end of the trip to Châtillon, but it was eventually dropped since it took too much time and caused the bus driver to go beyond the legal limits of hours for him to drive.

Session IX (9-12, 1998) likewise saw few changes in the program. The trip to Joigny and Montmirail dropped Troyes in favor of Frenneville. Troyes was just too far away and not too interesting. Frenneville, however, was closer, and was added since Rybolt had visited it for his research on the guide to Vincentian France. The small chapel was available for the celebration of Mass by the group.

For the speakers, in keeping with the attempt to broaden the base to become more inclusive, confreres were invited from Latin America (Palú, Ubillú), with Latin American experience (Schwane); also a Daughter of Charity (B. MacMahon).

In September, a three-year written evaluation was held, coming out of the General Assembly. The returns (a little more than half came in) were encouraging. A report was presented to the Superior General and his council. Also, initial plans were made for an internet site as part of the Vincentian Family site.

Probably around this time a new telephone system was installed in the house, giving the possibility of voice-mail and direct dialing. It took a long time to work out problems associated with billing, however. These difficulties did not leave a good taste in everyone’s mouth relative to the efficiency of the business manager’s operations.

In Session X (2-5, 1999), few changes were made. The major event, however, was the arrival of Florian Kapuscik, to replace Casimir Stelmach who was returning to teaching in the seminary at Piacenza and possibly to work with priest-students at the Leonine College in Rome. Kapuscik had worked since leaving office as assistant general for Kirche in Not, as mentioned above. Some months before leaving, however, he suffered a small stroke that only slightly affected his speech and movement. He had been announced as Stelmach’s replacement for the previous session, but he had to remain at his post until the end of the calendar year.
Stelmach’s replacement was necessary partly through his perceived negligence in financial and other matters of administrative detail. It was discovered that the CIF program was, unfortunately, nearly 500,000 francs in debt, largely due to uncollected income. Bills had not been sent to provinces and those that had not paid were not reminded of their obligation. His skills lay elsewhere, particularly in good human interaction. What was needed, however, was someone else.

Kapusciak had a difficulty adjusting to a changed life-style, from an important position with major responsibilities in Germany, to an associate role in a quiet program in France. He gradually experienced the onslaught of depression and, in conversations with the superior general, expressed his reservations. Father Maloney immediately told him to get some help for his health, and Kapusciak went to live in mid-March with his brother Karol, a pastor at a Polish mission in Saint-Etienne. His place in Paris was taken by another brother, Józef, assistant general in Rome; he arrived in late April. Florian died, probably of a massive stroke, in Saint-Etienne, May 26. Although in Paris only a short time, he was greatly missed.

Rybolt submitted revised statutes for the program, given that conditions had changed and we had more experience. They were approved more or less as written.

In Session XI (9-12, 1999), Juan Julián Díez Catalán came to replace Kapusciak. The first weeks were spent in getting used to the program after being taken from his doctoral studies in Church history in Rome. Elmer Bauer also replaced Pat Griffin as econome general this year.

We needed a translator in Italian, arranged at the last minute by finding two women, part-time, to translate English-Spanish, with Carla Bertana doing Italian. The two were Lisa Gardner, American, and Andrea Beyhaut, French.

No major changes were made in the program, but the name Bétharram appears for the first time in the calendar, a site on the way to Lourdes. This site had a brief connection with Vincent de Paul, and the sanctuary conserves its old appearance. Besides, the trip there through the mountains is much more interesting than the quick road to Lourdes.

To help the participants and to avoid the lengthy problem of photocopying materials at the last minute, it was decided to prepare an individual binder for each person, with at least some of the materials prepared in advance. They demanded more planning, but it proved to be a good solution. The materials included general information about the program, preparatory materials for each week, the pages on CM history done by Rybolt, the weekly evaluation forms, and the materials describing the places to be visited. The big problem was to get all the materials translated correctly. Díaz began by translating the material on the guide to the menu, which turned out to be a complex undertaking. Photocopying and assembly of the material before the program was time-consuming, but occasionally early arrivals would help.

In planning for Session XII (2-5, 2000), the two directors were alarmed at the small number of possible participants. This necessitated much discussion and advice. A general question was whether to hold the program or not, given the small numbers. It was finally agreed that there should be six confreres as a minimum to guarantee the integrity of the program. As it happened, nine arrived. These numbers forced some other changes, such as
the number of topics each week (two instead of one), and the time given to small group and large group discussions. The result was that the program was shortened by a few days, but the main elements remained. The participants also agreed not to have a preached retreat but to be content with quiet time and sharing among themselves.

The two directors decided to forego the rental of the SAVAC bus in favor of renting two cars or vans for transporting the participants to the Vincentian sites. This meant more work for the directors, but it allowed the group to see more places and to be more spontaneous than was possible with a large bus. In any case, the project was not repeated principally because of the work and complications involved (taking delivery, returning on time, etc.), the danger of accidents, and the small difference in total cost between the bus company and the rental car agency.

A small irritation between the program and the Maison Mère kitchen was eliminated by arranging picnic lunches (for the trips to Chatillon and at Richelieu) ourselves. Previously, we had relied on the kitchen, sometimes with unsatisfactory results: items omitted, forgotten, insufficient in quantity or quality. The finances were the same, although the work demanded more time and effort.

During the session, Bro. Mark Elder, a trained artist, developed a logo for CIF; the goal is to use it on our publications and presentations. He also donated a slide projector to the program.

One major reason for not making changes was the beginning of a new program, to be called the Vincentian Heritage program. This program began out of the need expressed often by confreres in various provinces who were above the age-50 limit. This was repeated during the general assembly of 1998, at which Rybolt and Stelmach made presentations about the program. The assembly went on record supporting the CIF program, but also asked that another one be added. At all events, the planning went forward for a first session to begin in June of 2000, to be called Vincentian Heritage Session I (6, 2000).

The planning for this involved a certain change of perspective. It was determined not to make the session an “Ongoing Formation Lite,” that is, the same program as for the younger confreres, but somehow less. To have an integral program for one month, it was determined that the participants themselves should take a larger part in the discussions on the Constitutions and Statutes. The schedule was set up so that less time would be given to each topic, but that small groups would continue it—the confreres in attendance having as much experience as needed. They did not need new input; rather, they needed the chance to share their life and to validate their experience as Vincentians.

Another essential point was the decision to schedule the presentations and conferences on-site, during the various trips. This would have the advantage of making the process less tiring for those least equipped to handle long days. In general, days were divided into two: one part for talks, the other part for visits. Good community experiences were also essential, especially around good meals and a warm, congenial atmosphere for sharing. This was helped by adding a night and day in Spain, staying overnight in Pamplona, with visits to Zaragoza (also a Vincentian site.)

The Heritage session did not have a retreat scheduled at the Berceau, since the time spent there would be shortened from the Ongoing Formation Program.
In general, the same trips and visits to Vincentian sites were planned, with slight changes. One change involved a visit to Angers at the end of the long trip to the Berceau.

To help the confreres in this short session, the team members decided to prepare a very complex binder with all the possible materials needed for the program. In addition to the materials already made available in binders in the three languages of the participants in the Ongoing Formation program, the Vincentian Heritage program binder would have a clear schedule for each day, plus copies of articles on each of the topics from the Constitutions and Statutes. Besides the topics already existing, the team decided to add a final one, on the Future of the Congregation of the Mission. The purpose of this was to help the confreres to focus with the help of each other on the future, often unsettling in different provinces in North America and Europe.

The evaluations of this pioneering session were very positive, but the team members experienced a great deal of fatigue, probably because they had to be more present to the confreres and more intensely than they were with the participants of the longer program.

During Session XIII (9-12, 2000) there were no major changes made. The numbers or participants were larger and the earlier program was reinstated. However, many unpleasant financial discussions took place with the house. Another small problem was the format for the Vespers celebrated at the opening of each session. Previously, Rybolt had helped by preparing copies on paper of materials in other languages than French to aid the participants. However, the director in the house often had objections to one or other item, so it was decided to let him do everything since he was the expert. The result, however, was more work for Díaz and none for Rybolt.

At the end of the session, each participant who wanted received a CD with photos and documents of various sorts from one of the confreres who had significant experience with computers. Although not intended to be permanent, each session has continued this practice. In general, however, the quality of the pictures has not been very good.

In the spring of the year, we had two further groups of Vincentian Heritage: Heritage II (3-4, 2001), and Heritage III (4-5, 2001). Heritage II was offered in French and Heritage III in Spanish. Both programs followed the same general program as that of Heritage I, and the results from both were positive. One effect of the new programs, however, was that we would not have the need for a translator during several months, that is, from December 2000 to September 2001. In Heritage II, all the members were French speakers, although half the group (5 of 10) were not native speakers. At the suggestion of one of the members, a brother from the Congregation of Our Mother of Mercy, a Belgian foundation with Vincentian roots, the group added a new venue on our trip to Château-l’Évêque, namely Oradour-sur-Glane. This site, where an extermination of the French population took place under the Nazis, is the antithesis of the charity and mercy that Vincent taught. As such, it was worth the visit. We also went to Dardilly, birthplace of Jean-Marie Vianney. It was interesting enough, but not worth the extra time since it is not very close to Ars. The Spanish group profited from an extension of our time in Spain, adding one night to Pamplona, and going more leisurely through the area, visiting, besides, Javier and surrounding sites. These were optional visits, meaning that the participants could go or stay at their choice.
For Session XIV (9-12, 2001), some changes occurred. A new one-day trip was worked up, including Orsigny, Port-Royal and Villepreux, with the possibility of visiting Saint Germain en Laye (which, in fact, did not take place.) The purpose was to follow Vincent through the countryside around Paris.

We invited Benjamin Romo to speak about the Vincentian Family; the idea came from Díaz. The plan was that Romo, as the representative of the Congregation to the various groups of the Vincentian Family, would be able to explain better the Congregation’s relationship to all these groups. For this reason, we no longer invited individual members of these groups.

Nevertheless, there were still invitations to other speakers on individual topics as before: Mother Elizondo, Sr. Charpy, Frs. Moussali and Quintano.

We were surprised to find a charge on our bill at the Berceau for “culte,” that is a payment for celebrating the Eucharist in Ranquines. We paid the bill but complained. The next session, the sister in charge still billed us but changed the name. More complaints followed, along with a refusal to pay the charge until the basis for it was clearly explained (i.e., a one-time charge for the group, or a per-person charge, etc.) By Session XVI, the charge was dropped.

At the request of our translator Carla Bertana, in Session XV (2-5, 2002), changes in the weekly were introduced for a term of one year. The purpose was to enable her, theoretically, to have the weekends free (beginning Thursday evening or Friday morning) for other translating work. She proposed changing the time for the small group discussions from Thursday morning, or even Thursday morning and afternoon to Wednesday afternoon. The large group sessions would therefore be moved from Friday to Thursday. Fridays would be available for whatever the team decided. After much discussion, the team accepted the proposal. The small group sessions, however, were scheduled to begin at 15:00 on Wednesdays, with no finishing time, thus allowing enough time for discussion.

For Fridays, we moved several items from regularly scheduled other days, notably Saturdays. We also moved added visits that had been scheduled occasionally, and then added a few more. These were generally visits to Paris sites that were worth a visit but which could not easily be fitted in during the previous schedule.

To help some provinces which began to ask for dates beyond the original time frame going up to the end of 2004, the general council approved another group of dates and languages through 2009. This second set simply copied the order of the previous five years. The major problem was always to work around the dates for Easter. Another problem was the lack of participation of confreres from Poland. Some pressure was put on the province by the superior general in the hopes that confreres would be present for the sessions to be offered with Polish translation.

At the closing of the session, the group congratulated Carla on the upcoming birth of her daughter in Italy.

During and after the session, a professional cleaning company came at to clean the chairs in Salle Ozanam, and later the floor covering.
For **Session XVI** (9-12, 2002), few changes were introduced. Several on-going issues remained, such as Carla’s future. With a baby daughter, who made occasional visits with her mother during sessions, and whom the group blessed in a small ceremony after one session, the question arose of where she would live, in Italy with the father, or in Paris with her mother, or both. Another issue was the naming of a successor for Rybolt. Father Maloney promised action on the issue, made originally in the spirit of long-range planning for the program. A related issue was that Díaz was among the candidates for visitor of his province.

The group was small and quiet. Although it had been advertised for English, French and Italian, only one Italian showed up, and he had some knowledge of French. For the others, however, there was no native speaker of the two languages. This made communication more difficult. Besides, two of the participants were of other rites, so celebration of the Eucharist was rendered more complex, along with the fact that three out of the total were Brothers.

One small addition to the program was time explicitly set aside for reading. This happened mainly because the large-group discussions on Thursday lasted only during the mornings. The same spot was also used for other things, notably a time for community work, mainly cleaning and arranging (the laundry, the library, Salle Ozanam.) This included cleaning the large drapes in Salle Ozanam and the smaller curtains in Salle Pouget, both untouched for at least nine years.

After examining the question of costs for lodging, we realized that the accommodations at Ars were the most expensive. This prompted several searches for alternate places in the same area.

During the period between this session and the next, Díaz was able to study English at De Paul University. At the same time, planning was underway to get a replacement for Rybolt, after nine years directing the program. The choice fell at last on Hugh O’Donnell.

For **Session V** (3-4, 2003) of Vincentian Heritage, given in English, not many changes were made. We were still looking for a replacement for Ars. We had to alter our plans somewhat because of lack of accommodations at the Berceau, but it was nothing major. We added a brief visit to Espelette, birthplace of Armand David, the naturalist. It was worth a quick visit between the Berceau and Saint Jean de Luz, probably only for the Vincentian Heritage program. We learned of the death of one of our regular speakers, Antoine Moussali, who had given many lectures to the various groups on Christian-Islamic relations.

**V. Recurring issues**

**A. Nature of the program.** From the beginning, the team members were convinced of the need to clarify for the visitors that the CIF was not going to offer programs that were therapeutic in nature. That meant that the visitors should send only those confreres “able to profit from the program,” in the phrase repeated often in reports. However, there have been some cases of alcoholics. Their disease managed to cloud a lot of otherwise good discussion in the groups. A couple of others had psychological problems, not very grave ones, but ones that occupied a lot of emotional energy of others, participants and team members. One confrere was, sadly, trying to figure out what to do with the rest of his life now that he had recently begotten a child. Another was coming to terms with AIDS, which was soon to claim
his life. In none of these cases, it should be noted, did the visitors inform the team that the confreres were problematic.

B. Evaluations. The program profited from regular evaluations. The team members conducted written evaluations regularly, and gathered regular anecdotal evidence, particularly when a new speaker arrived. Results of these evaluations were presented to the liaison with the general council. At this beginning, it was planned that this person would be one of the assistants. However, because of language problems and difficulty in communications with the vicar general, for the first several sessions the econome general served as a liaison. This was helpful since many of the issues in the beginning were financial. Later, another assistant was named, but his frequent absences on official visits has not allowed frequent communication. Early in the program, the liaison wanted the speakers to also fill out written evaluations. This was done for a while but was quietly dropped, particularly since many of the speakers were the same and they did not see any need to do further evaluation. Of course, the regular visits from the superior general also enabled regular evaluations.

C. Finances. The finances of CIF have undergone a long and sometimes painful development. At the beginning, Renouard handled the books. Receipts and billing (from the program to the provinces) was only loosely handled. At the end of the first calendar year, 1994, the provincial econome of Paris closed the books. The same process was followed in the second year. For a few months at the end of 1995, the program hired an assistant bookkeeper, Marie-Christine Mahé. She kept the books with the help of a computer, but the system was not successful. She left to take up full-time employment after her trial period. Since that time, and with the help of Marie-Hélène Garce, working part-time for CIF and part-time for the Miraculous Medal Association, the accounts have been professionalized. Eric Pipet, a certified public accountant (Expert Comptable) audited the books yearly, beginning with 1996. We could have a more thorough audit, one required for large companies, but it was not judged necessary because of our size. We arranged to pay a percentage of Marie-Hélène’s actual salary, based on the amount of time she worked for us.

After Renouard’s departure, Stelmach handled the books, but his lack of success prompted a search for other possibilities. Rybolt took over the books and managed to clear out the enormous deficit. In the last few months of 1997, Jerzy Fluderski, a Polish confrere working in Madagascar, and its former provincial econome, helped the team with its financial systems and offered his advice for the future. He was gravely ill at the time, as he admitted. He died at the infirmary, 28 March 1998.

Kapuscianiak helped briefly with the books, but Rybolt handled the billing and most payments for the program since then.

Because the expenses were nearly always the same each year, and because we could never count on a fix number of participants for each session, it was decided not to insist on a yearly budget. Instead, any extraordinary expenses would have to be approved, particularly for large purchases.

The Curia regularly assigns funds to support poor provinces who cannot find other ways to pay for the session. Eventually, this money was transferred to the CIF accounts as a depository account, with information to be sent yearly to the Econome General on how it was disbursed.
The team drew up a various stages a list of what we pay to various people: such as the month allotment for the team members, per-hour salaries for translators, gifts to the speakers in addition to their travel expenses, etc.

With the help of the Maison-Mère, the team began making bulk purchases for the program at wholesale prices, at Metro. Savings are considerable, but there sometimes is a lot of hassle in simply going and coming through Parisian traffic.

D. Contract with Maison-Mère. In view of Facelina’s quixotic temperament, it became increasingly necessary to get financial and other decisions concerning the relationship between the Maison Mère and the CIF in writing. This led to various draft versions of a contract between the parties, approved at the end by the superior general. The purpose was to put down in as clear terms as possible all the financial arrangements between the two parties. In general, this has proven to be a good move. Its one-year time span left ample time for both parties to discuss its provisions regularly. The first version covered the year 1997, and was not to be changed during the year, particularly by raising the prices unilaterally and without consultation.

The problems, however, came from the application of the terms of the contract in its various yearly versions. The arrival of a new business manager (intendant), the son of the previous one, began well enough. His personality, however, was difficult and alienating. Insults and name-calling managed to close many doors between himself and the two team members. Because Facelina abdicated many of his responsibilities to Rodriguez, relations were further strained.

The first issue to be resolved was the cost of the rooms for the participants. At the beginning, the CIF paid a monthly rate. This was based in general on what the seminarians were paying. The inequalities in this monthly rate for CIF became evident when some confreres arrived late or left early, but the CIF was being charged the same amount. It was determined after much energetic discussion to apply the monthly rate on a daily basis. The CIF would therefore pay just for the days that the rooms were occupied.

This led to a second major discussion. It did not seem to the team members to be just that the participants were forced to pay for full use of the rooms while they were absent on trips, at least for ten successive days. Besides, Facelina in the preliminary discussions had decided that the CIF would pay only for the days they were actually present. This was later overlooked and not brought up since it had been forgotten on both sides. If the house had need of the rooms in that period, they could use them, but this theoretical possibility never happened in fact. Again, after strenuous and strained discussions, the matter was left unresolved by Facelina, who was finishing his term of office. The CIF refused to pay, while the house refused to reduce the rate. One of the first things that happened when Jean Landousies arrived, Facelina’s successor, was to reassure the CIF team that the program was appreciated and that he would do his best to resolve outstanding issues. This has happened in large part.

E. Pricing. The question of pricing and of financial goals often came up in discussion. At the beginning, for the first session, the price was 30,000 francs, or about $5,700. This proved to be somewhat high, so the price was reduced to 29,000 francs, or about $5,500 for the next session. The financial goals of the program are to break even each year. This, in practice,
meant paying outstanding bills and putting enough in the bank to fund the depreciation of large capital items. As a goal, it has generally been accomplished.

With the arrival of the Euro, it became necessary to price the session in the new currency. This change also allowed a rise in the price, particularly since the price of the session was left unchanged for a few years. At the same time, the cost of other items was rising: supplies, the cost of the trips (bus, food, lodging), and the payment to the translators were the main items. The result was a decision by the general council to authorize a price of 5000 Euros (with 1500 for the Vincentian Heritage program).

To manage the funds better, some money was transferred to a dollar account in the Midwest Province, where it has performed quite well, better than the small amount of interested gained from the purchase of bank shares in Paris. A further refinement was the opening of a US dollar account. The idea was to save on the significant bank charges from those who paid in dollars. In fact, the results have not been overwhelming, mainly since the majority of bills are paid in Euros.

F. Translators. The provision of translators was difficult at the beginning. With time, however, and with the help of Divine Providence, the program enjoyed the skills of Carla Bertana. She began to work temporarily in Session V (1996), and continued in the next session (1997). Since that time, she has continued to develop her skills. The program has increased her salary appropriately.

G. Speakers. The selection of speakers, too, has been complicated. It was agreed early on that experts in the various fields should be selected. However, these same persons would also have the time to come (one week), one of the two languages of the current session, and the ability to communicate well. Further, the team members agreed that they should not regularly rely on the same group of presenters. The reason was to spread the word of CIF around to the various provinces through the presenters, as well as to prepare several confreres capable of offering the topics. When the speakers were not available, particularly at the beginning, one of the team members would take the topic and present it. For the retreat at the Berceau, the obvious solution of the two languages represented in the group was to have two simultaneous retreats and speakers.

One further issue was the need to gradually involve former CIF participants as speakers, as well as involving non-CMs, (generally Daughters of Charity.) This has not proved easy to do, but it is a point for future development.

H. Equipment. Gradually the CIF team has managed to upgrade the equipment available to the participants. This has included replacing the computers (except the MAC, which is rarely used), the television service (originally antennas, then cable, then satellite reception), and the replacement of the photocopier. The rest of the equipment proved to be solid and lasted longer than expected. Two video recorders were bought as well; occasionally films are rented for the group, or individuals bring with them materials from and about their own countries or provinces.

To help in recreational issues, the program got a guitar as a gift, and then purchased a replacement when the original one disappeared. Some games and equipment were bought. A former CIF participant arranged for the purchase of an electronic music keyboard (2001), installed in Salle Pouget. A bicycle was also acquired (2002). In the fall of 2002, an ADSL
line was connected for the two directors and for Salle Pouget. This enabled the participants to have much easier access to the Internet. A cable was also brought in to the CIF office, but it was not activated. The participants often helped each other set up e-mail accounts and generally learn how to manage the computer.

I. Relations with confères of Maison-Mère. Less tangible is the network of relationships with the members of the Maison Mère. As its numbers have diminished over the years, so the presence of outsiders has played a more important role. Among these groups is CIF. Significant cultural differences exist between the French confères and others, leading foreigners to regard the French as cold, distant, uncaring and stingy. As with any generalization, these are not applicable to each confère of the house. Nevertheless, the opinion that many CIF participants take with them when they leave is not altogether positive. As a new superior, Landousies has gone out of his way to welcome the participants and to be present. Improving relationships has proven to be a long process, one far from completely satisfactory. The question of communication across languages is the single largest deterrent, as everyone recognizes.

J. Spirituality. Some insights have come from the various groups concerning their cultures, spirituality and liturgical preferences. The CIF team has tried to be culturally aware, but there are always surprises. In terms of spirituality, it has been interesting to note how rarely Marian devotion plays a significant role. There were, of course, references to her, with attendance at the Miraculous Medal chapel. However, in the discussions her role is generally absent. The team worked hard at the beginning of the planning stages to investigate the possibility of confessors and spiritual directors in various languages. This has rarely or ever been needed, particularly since spiritual direction is a long-term relationship, and needs to be built up over time. Finally, like many males, the participants have been very identified with their work and often fret about who is doing their job for them at home.

V. Issues for the future

A serious issue is a succession plans for the directors. Under the first statutes of the Center, the maximum number of years for a team member was six years. The new statutes say only that the term can be renewed. Some planning should be occurring for future directors, with discussion about qualifications and expectations.

Despite the lack of succession planning, dates for new programs were approved in March 2002 for programs up through 2009. At the same time, close calculations about the number of confères in the age group 35-50 who have not yet participated in the program show that there are more than 1000. If these are spread out, statistically, over 15 years, and even if only 500 were to come, the total expected is about 30 per year.

At the same time that the Vincentian Heritage program was announced, a third program also appeared, one for training Vincentian specialists. No one has volunteered for this work, despite its inauguration after consultation by the superior general with the visitors.

A significant problem arises with some countries concerning their visas. Many French embassies give only three month visas, or 90 days. Since the program is longer, some confères, generally from poorer countries, have to pay to have their visas extended. The team discussed many possible solutions, such as getting a longer visa from another Schengen
country, and operating through the visitors of provinces historically connected with the
countries (Madrid with India, for example).

Possible expansions of the program are always under discussion, such as opening the
program up to non-CMs, even Daughters of Charity. The normal response is that since the
program is based on the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission, it
would difficult under the present organization to admit others. Some non-CMs have been
admitted, namely members from the Vincentian Congregation in India. The same
observation can be made about moving the program elsewhere, even temporarily. The great
advantage of Paris is that it was the center of Vincent’s life and work. Also, a central
location facilitates the interconnection of confreres from many provinces. This would be lost
by concentrating on one area only, such as Poland.

At some point it will be important to examine the furnishing of the kitchenette in Salle
Pouget. The present equipment is old and temporary at best. Storage is difficult.

It will likewise be necessary to examine other possible modalities for running the
program. One such is to double the number of themes offered per week and then to put the
material on CM history into a week by itself. Other ways are possible.

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