

Closing Remarks for the Symposium of the Three Vincentian Universities in the United States

St. John's University, New York

12 November 2016

It has been a great joy to be with you during these two days. Let me take a few moments to offer some reflections on this experience.

Saint Vincent once said, "Who could ever have imagined that this would reach its present state? If anyone had said that to me then, I would have thought he was making fun of me; yet that was the way God was pleased to give a beginning to what you now see." (CCD, XII, 8) He was, of course, speaking about the origin of the Congregation of the Mission, but I am sure you can appreciate those words as also applying to your institutions today. From small beginnings, the three Vincentian Universities together now educate some 50,000 students on both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The Congregation of the Mission is, understandably, grateful for and proud of its universities. In the United States, as elsewhere, education is clearly the single best way to lift someone permanently out of poverty. Everyone who works hard to support the work of these institutions is carrying on the work of Saint Vincent and is a "Vincentian" in the fullest sense of the word.

Your universities are filled with experts in the broadest possible range of human endeavors. In addition to teaching, faculty give themselves to research and to informing important areas of the world's activity. Whether in politics, business, the arts, media, healthcare, scientific discovery, social services, etc., your faculty are "experts-for-a-world-in-need," and I appreciate the work they do.

Our world is in terrible need. Poverty itself is not accidental, it is being driven by very clear and very large forces, such as wars, which are causing a large scale flight of refugees; economic disruption and corruption in government and business, which are eliminating jobs around the world; and the early effects of global warming, which is displacing peoples. The world needs universities to help the next generation see not only the poverty in our midst, but also its causes, and to be inspired by those who are working to find and implement solutions that actually work, either on a local scale or an international one.

Your students also deserve an education that equips them to keep their hearts alive for a lifetime. You teach them theology. You teach them philosophy. You introduce them to the most important insights from a broad range of human endeavors in the liberal arts. This too is a critical part of a Vincentian education. It is not enough to teach students job skills. They need to think about their Creator and the reason and purpose of a well lived life. They need to think about how the human community should organize itself so that everyone has access to basic necessities and basic human rights.

I am thankful too that these universities have high standards. It is not enough to give the poor a diploma; they need a first-rate-education. I know how expensive this is, and how hard it is for these colleges to provide high-level education for those who cannot afford an expensive one, and so I am especially grateful to all the donors, and all the administrators who – every day – strive to assure that these institutions survive financially. But I am MOST grateful to everyone that believes that the poor deserve not a "good-enough" education, but an excellent education.

I am also grateful that all three of these universities are respected in the United States for “service-learning.” Your universities encourage students to start serving the world’s needs as soon as they arrive as freshmen. You develop thousands of opportunities for them to serve the poor and serve local community organizations. This too is a “Vincentian Education,” for you are teaching students to see the world’s need, to develop caring hearts, and to cultivate a lifelong habit of volunteer service. You are forming the next generation of Vincentians and that is a beautiful thing.

This formation applies also to the members of the Congregation of the Mission. I am deeply grateful that the Universities have educated, free of charge, so many confreres from around the world all these many years. I know that they too appreciate the wonderful education they have received in your institutions.

Exactly 200 years ago, Saint Vincent’s work came to the United States and it has flourished in ways that no one could have predicted. My prayer is that these institutions will remain Vincentian for another 200 years, but that will only happen if it is intentional. Everyone – faculty, administrators, trustees, and donors – will have to work hard so that this Vincentian mission continues. This conference is a perfect example of that intention and that planning. I am most grateful – in the name of the world wide Congregation – that this planning and these discussions are being taken so seriously. Past generations of Vincentians brought us into this important mission and it is our turn to make certain that future generations will be blessed by it as well.

Yours is a voice that spoke loudly in society in the past, a voice that speaks loudly in society today, and a voice that can keep speaking loudly in society tomorrow. These three Catholic Universities, these three Vincentian Universities want to keep making a difference. This will be possible by being:

- a) Deeply rooted in the Gospel in its totality,
- b) Deeply committed to the Vincentian values,
- c) Deeply engaged in the highest possible standards in all the fields of education that are part of the three Universities.

During the two-day conference, one point that was mentioned was that, besides the three Vincentian Universities: Niagara, St. John’s, and DePaul in the USA, we have Adamson University in the Philippines and DePaul College in India.

I would like to invite reflection on a list of the universities and colleges, which are led by different religious orders that are part of the Vincentian Family. The different branches of the Vincentian Family in the USA and around the world that have universities and colleges should walk together along the path of collaboration, networking on a worldwide level, to help each other grow as Catholic Vincentian Institutions in order to make an ever greater impact on a global level.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, with all my heart, in the name of the worldwide Congregation of the Mission, all the confreres, members of the Vincentian Family, and others, who, from the beginning, from the foundation of each of the three Universities up to now, have made possible what we have in front of our eyes today.

In particular, I would like to thank the President of St. John’s University, Dr. Conrado Gempesaw; the President of Niagara University, Father James Maher, CM; the President of DePaul University, Father Dennis Holtschneider, CM; the Provincial of the Eastern Province of the USA, Father Michael Carroll, CM; the Provincial of the Western Province of the USA, Father Raymond van Dorpe, CM; the Board of

Trustees of each of the three Universities, the faculty, staff, students, spiritual and material benefactors, volunteers, alumni, and all who, in any way, are contributing to promoting the mission of these three Universities.

May Jesus keep guiding your path! May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal continue to intercede for you and may Saint Vincent de Paul and the rest of the Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family accompany you always!

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