



**CONGREGAZIONE DELLA MISSIONE
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SUPERIORE GENERALE

Rome, 11 September 2020
Saint John Gabriel Perboyre



**FHA and post-COVID-19 opportunities and challenges
for the worldwide Vincentian Family
TOGETHER IN PRAYER, THOUGHT, AND ACTION**

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

The year 2020 had hardly begun when it brought us so many unexpected challenges, so much uncertainty, suffering, and death. Their common denominator: COVID-19.

As the virus spread from country to country to reach the whole world, the different branches of the Vincentian Family began work at alleviating the many harmful consequences that this virus inflicted on humanity. **On the international level, the Vincentian Family:**

- 1) **Sent a message of encouragement** with the promise of continuous prayer to all the members of each Congregation and Association, as well as to those who do not officially belong to a specific branch of the Family but are inspired by Saint Vincent de Paul's spirituality and charism and live them in their daily lives. In these difficult times, we ask the Lord's continued blessing on the many wonderful services and works of mercy for the poor of each branch. These works are shaped by the same spirit and charism and are truly signs that the "Kingdom of God is near" and is for the poor, a message that is more important than ever.

- 2) **Invited members of the Vincentian Family to pray through the intercession of Saint John Gabriel Perboyre, CM, China's first canonized saint, for healing for those suffering from COVID-19** and strength for all the medical, social, and religious workers, persons in public office, and all those who in every way possible are striving to relieve the suffering caused by the pandemic. This was in response to numerous suggestions because Saint John Gabriel was martyred by suffocation on a cross in 1840 in Wuhan, China, the city where the COVID-19 virus originated.

Recently, a prayer for the intercession of Saint John Gabriel Perboyre was composed by Father Andrzej Jarosiewicz, the pastor of the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Bolesławiec, Poland. After the discovery of Saint John Gabriel Perboyre's relics there just a few months ago, the reliquary was placed on the main altar where the relics can be seen and venerated daily. With the pastor, I would like to encourage the Vincentian Family to say this prayer and to diffuse it widely.

Prayer to Saint John Gabriel Perboyre, CM

Saint Jean Gabriel Perboyre, priest and martyr,
kindly answer the prayers of the Church, which you served all your life.
We ask you for the grace to be preserved from the coronavirus pandemic
that is ravaging humanity
and that has its origin in the place sanctified by your mission and your death as a martyr.
For the love of the Church, your family, we ask for healing for all the sick,
strength and patience for healthcare workers and all other persons who are helping,
the light of the Holy Spirit for those who govern
and are attempting to bring a halt to the pandemic,
and peace of heart to those who despair.
Obtain for those who have left this world because of the pandemic
the grace of endless happiness and comfort to their families.
May the offering of your martyrdom by strangulation
obtain from God the grace to free us from the pandemic
that has sown death, fear, and uncertainty in today's world.
In communion with you and with the Church,
which you loved to the end,
and following the example of the Savior,
we invoke the intercession of the Mother of the Church assumed into heaven,
and we say:
We fly to your patronage,
holy Mother of God;
despise not our petitions
in our necessities,
but deliver us from all evil,
O glorious and blessed Virgin!

- 3) **Organized a prayer meeting with the title: “The prayer of the Vincentian Family for a world in need”** for those suffering the terrible consequences of COVID-19, racism, and other pandemics that are damaging human dignity. We plan to repeat this prayer experience made possible through modern technology in the future.

In the midst of COVID-19, another tragedy occurred in Lebanon. The explosion in Beirut brought much human and material devastation: many people died or were injured, and over 300,000 families were left homeless.

Again, the Vincentian Family responded energetically to alleviate physical, psychological, and material suffering. Individual branches contacted their members in Lebanon to assist them in helping the many people who lost everything in a matter of minutes. The Vincentian Family Executive Committee (VFEC) also launched a campaign with the International Committee of the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) to help the hundreds of thousands of homeless in the Lebanese capital through the Vincentian Family National Council in Lebanon, coordinated by its national president, Father Ziad Haddad, CM.

This tragic event and so many others around the world - wars, earthquakes, floods, and other calamities - speak clearly of the importance of a model for **responding to such urgent needs quickly and in the most organized and effective way possible.** We wish to become more and more affective and effective tools in the hands of Jesus to demonstrate His mercy, compassion, and love wherever He wants us to go.

To strengthen current practices, **the model for the Vincentian Family worldwide is to keep growing in the concrete practice of acting and responding to the call of the poor together as a Family, as a Movement.** Every single branch, whether it is big or small, is an invaluable part of the wonderful mosaic that makes up the Vincentian Family. To this we add the members of the Vincentian Family in the larger sense of the word, and **together we become a force on which the world’s poor can count.**

For the first time, all the international representatives of the 160 branches of the Vincentian Family, Superiors General and International Presidents, were invited to Rome this past January to meet, share, listen to each other, make plans, and take concrete steps to move forward into the future. The theme was: “The Vincentian Family moving forward” at the beginning of the fifth century of our common spirituality and charism.



One of the topics was the **Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA)**, of which the **13 Houses campaign is a part**. Discussing this and other subjects, the participants emphasized **the need to continue developing collaboration and mutual support in a common response to the needs of the poor**. The Vincentian Family Executive Committee confirmed the reflection at that meeting that the **FHA with the 13 Houses campaign** is an initiative in the area of charity that brings the Vincentian Family together and, thus, **needs to be promoted wholeheartedly within the Vincentian Family to reach each member's heart so that everyone becomes an active part of our common initiative**.

Because the needs of the poor are never-ending, different ones receive priority in each country as the individual branches respond so wonderfully to these needs. However, **the Famvin Homeless Alliance is our unique common project**. Therefore, it needs to be promoted, extended, and introduced in all 156 countries where the Vincentian Family is present so that no Congregation or Association will remain outside it, but all will take an active part in the initiative in every corner of the world where we live and serve.

The FHA is presently three years old and already has shown wonderful results. Efforts need to be further developed, intensified, and expanded for the 1.2 billion homeless: people who live on the streets, refugees who are displaced from their homes, and people living in substandard housing. Their numbers are increasing drastically all around the world as a consequence of COVID-19.

I would like to return to certain points from last year's letter for the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul that I am convinced are the key for us to move forward so that the 160 branches pray, think, and act together. This year, we are especially invited as the Vincentian Family, as the Vincentian Movement, to further commit to the FHA because the message of Pope Francis for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which providentially will be celebrated 27 September 2020, speaks of one of the groups of persons whom we are helping through the FHA. **Therefore, this year's Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul becomes an extraordinary opportunity to reaffirm or make a commitment to active participation in the FHA as well as in the "13 Houses" project.**

The FHA provides unity within the Family in responding to the overwhelming needs of the homeless. The FHA international coordinators and board members, who bring together many years of expertise in the field of homelessness, are available to the whole

Vincentian Family for information and support. **We need to quickly come to the point when homelessness will not be tackled alone as an individual person or an individual branch, but together as a Family on the local, national, and international levels.** Each branch needs to bring its long history of service to the homeless, expertise, professionalism, and resources to face this challenge together. Indeed, Pope Francis stresses in his message, *“It is necessary to cooperate in order to build... We must commit ourselves to ensuring international cooperation, global solidarity and local commitment, leaving no one excluded.”*

To this end, I would like to invite all 160 branches of the Vincentian Family to become active collaborators in the Famvin Homeless Alliance initiative (FHA) by:

- a) Contacting, if you have not done so already, the FHA coordinating committee member Mrs. Yasmine Cajuste (pha.info@famvin.org) to receive information and materials. You also can visit the FHA website: vfhomelessalliance.org.
- b) Sharing and sending to Mrs. Cajuste the wealth of knowledge, expertise, and resources that each branch has acquired in the field of homelessness.
- c) Introducing this objective in the yearly plan of activities of the specific branch that has not yet become actively part of the FHA on the international, national, and local levels.
- d) Sharing information from the FHA with all its members so that everyone is aware of this initiative and impelled to become an active participant with the other branches in their areas of service.
- e) Encouraging the members to be active participants in the Vincentian Family National Councils in countries where these are formed. In countries where one does not yet exist, encouraging the leaders of the specific branches to come together with the distinct goal of engaging together in the FHA initiative.

The fight against homelessness is also a response to COVID-19. If a person does not have a place to live, all other efforts to bring an end to COVID-19 will not have the desired effect because preventative measures and medical treatments presuppose an adequate place for the person to live for them to be effective.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought us as individuals and as members of the worldwide Vincentian Family many opportunities as well as challenges. The same will be true in the post-COVID-19 period. Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us that the world, and we as individuals, cannot remain the same after COVID-19. We will become better, or we will take a step back and become worse. The same is true for our Vincentian Family, for our Vincentian Movement. So many wonderful steps, be they new forms of prayer gatherings, collaborative food distribution, or other initiatives, have already been taken in the pandemic period and will be taken in the so-called post-COVID-19 period, bringing the Family together more and more.

May the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul be an opportunity to make a common commitment, helping each other in the process, so that by next year's celebration we can announce with overwhelming joy that the objective of having all 160 branches of the

Vincentian Family actively participating in the FHA has become a reality, for the glory of Jesus and for the good of the poor!

I wish everyone a deep experience of Providence walking in front of us when we enter the post-COVID-19 time of opportunities and challenges.

May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, all the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family keep interceding for us and inspiring us on this path!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tomaž Mavrič, CM'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and a long horizontal stroke.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General