

COLLABORATION IN THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY:

MODELS, EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES

Antonius Sad Budianto, C.M.

Foreword

from a [commencement address by Fr. James J. Maher, C.M.](#)

I was asked to visit the Province of Indonesia ... to view the works of the Vincentian community and family as well as the Church of Java, Indonesia. It was a phenomenal experience.

I was met and guided by the Provincial at the time, Father Sad Budianto, C.M. Throughout my time on the island of Java, I was never alone. Every site I visited found me accompanied by some person related to the Vincentians and the Church.

Upon departing Indonesia through the city of Surabaya, I was accompanied by Father Budianto. He drove me to the airport, walked me to the ticket counter, and escorted me through security and right to the gate from where my plane was departing.

At each point, I would say, "Budi, I am fine, I know you have other things to do." He would simply smile gently and say, **"I will accompany you."**

When we discussed it further, he told me, "Jim, in the Church of Indonesia, we believe deeply in the ministry of accompaniment. That is why we would never leave you alone."

The Beginning

- Vincentian Family was the theme of the CM General Assembly 1998.
- A new role was created: Delegate of the Superior General CM for the Vincentian Family.
- Also, letters would be signed by international heads of the branches of the Vincentian Family, usually on some theme of collaboration every year.

Themes of Collaboration

- The themes were very concrete like “Fight against Hunger”, “Fight against Malaria” etc.
- These concrete themes were expected to be the focus of collaboration of the VinFam in every continent and country.
- Since the themes were so concrete, not every country felt they were relevant in helping the poor in their own country, so some did not participate.
- Moreover, each branch is an independent institute/ organization, with their own plans relevant to their different needs and expectations.

Communications

- Apart from the theme, I noticed that communications among the branches of the VinFam on the international, regional (continental) and national level did not always happen.
- With communication being so poor, how could we have collaboration?
- As far as I know only 3 congregations (CM, DC, and RSV) and the 5 lay organizations (SSVP, AIC, JMV, Misevi, and AMM) explicitly joined the collaboration.

The Reality

Sr. Betty McNeil's research (2006) found out:

- 267 Societies of Apostolic Life and Institute of Consecrated life,
- 10 Anglican Congregations,
- 28 Lay Associations, belong to VinFam.

From the total of 305 institutes, about 183 are extant.

And the list still needs to be revised, since there are still institutes embracing Vincentian Spirituality that were not mentioned in the book. In Indonesia I found at least one (Daughter of Providence from Munster)

Expectations

- How could we have a collaboration in which most members of the family participate?
- What kind of collaboration would be most appealing and meaningful to most members of the family?
- What level of collaboration would be realistic?
- What would the challenges be?

Vincent, A Man of Collaboration

- Called by God to respond to the needs of the poor, Vincent did not act by himself. Instead he invited people to respond.
- They became his first group of collaborators (1617) in serving God in the poor, in loving God with an ever-ready hand and sweat on their brow.

Continued ...

- Then he founded the Congregation of the Mission (1625) as his second group of collaborators in following Christ to evangelize the poor.
- He also began the Tuesday Conferences (1633) as another group of collaborators in renewing the priesthood.
- The same year with Louise de Marillac he founded the Daughters of Charity, a group of simple peasant girls, as his collaborators in serving the poor totally with their whole life.

A new way of holiness

- In responding to the call of Providence, Vincent responded wholeheartedly and touched the hearts of others to collaborate with him.
- He did not use them as instruments to accomplish his mission (anyway it wasn't his mission, but God's mission).
- Instead, he formed them to be aware of God's calling for them, and assisted them to grow in holiness (read: union with God).

Following Jesus

- Actually Vincent just followed his Master.
- In fulfilling His mission Jesus did not work by himself, but called his apostles to live and work with Him; they became His group of collaborators.
- Some women also followed Him and became His collaborators, especially as financial sponsors (maybe political sponsors too).

Formed them in a new way of holiness

- By calling them to collaborate with Him in spreading the Kingdom of God, Jesus did not use them as instruments but loved them as friends, formed them, and made them grow in holiness by His teaching, training, and modeling.

The same model in each of our founders

- The same could be said of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Msgr. Rutten, Msgr. Zwijzen, Frs. Joseph Triest, Edward Michelis, Antonie van Heeren, Antonie van Erp and all the others.
- All of them gathered collaborators not just for work, but to form them to grow in holiness and wholeness as persons.

PURPOSE OF COLLABORATION

- The word collaboration came from the Latin words: co (together) – laborare (work). So collaboration means: working together. Normally we work together to accomplish one or some purpose(s).
- Now what is the purpose of Vincentian collaboration? To answer this, let us examine 2 kinds of collaboration.

Instrumental collaboration

- This collaboration is task-oriented. The collaborators work together to accomplish a task.
- Between them there is no need of personal relationship, all and each of them are only instruments for accomplishing the task.
- A good example of this collaboration would be factory workers in an assembly line.

Formative collaboration

- This collaboration is person-oriented. Similar to the first, they work together, but the main purpose of working together is for the growth of the persons who are collaborating.
- Both Jesus and Vincent have given us good examples of this.
- And I am convinced that this is the purpose of Vincentian collaboration: formation towards holiness (wholeness) of the person.

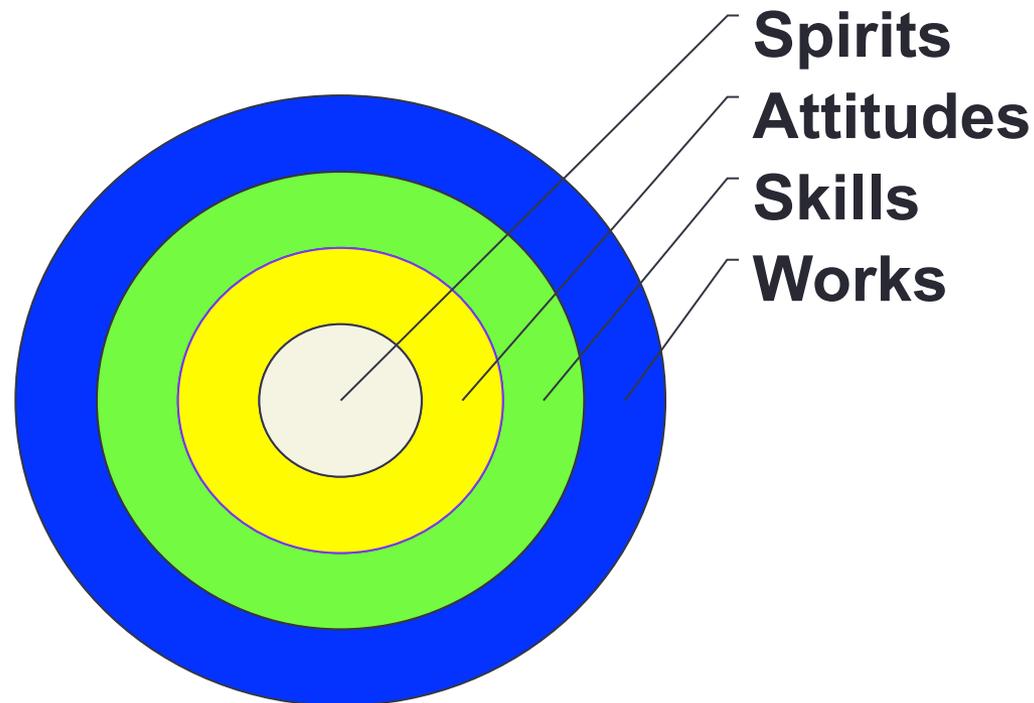
Ever aware of our primary purpose

- In reality these two types of collaborations can intermingle. Yet we must be ever aware of our primary purpose and orientation: formation of the person.
- If we keep this purpose in mind, sustainable accomplishment of the task will be its abundant fruit.
- Both Jesus and Vincent have done it, and their sustainable and abundant fruit are very convincing: Christianity for Jesus, we – the Vincentian family, for Vincent.

Jean Vanier:

- *“True growth comes as members of the community integrate into their hearts and minds **the vision and spirit of the community.***
- *In that way they choose the community as it is and become responsible for it.*
- *When people have not integrated the vision into themselves they tend to imitate others or ... just want a place where they can belong.*
- *This is dangerous and can prevent growth to wholeness.”*

LEVELS OF COLLABORATION



Collaboration in building spirits

- Spirit is the core of our being. Spirit gives energy and purpose to our life and works.
- Vincentian spirituality is based on Jesus Christ, missionary of the Father for evangelizing the poor.
- Examples: Seminars or workshops on Vincentian spirituality, Vincentian retreats, etc.

Collaboration in building attitudes (virtues)

- Attitudes or virtues are our habits in reacting to persons, things, situations. While virtues are built on spirit, they also help the spirit to grow by actualizing it.
- The 5 Vincentian virtues are built on the virtues of Jesus, missionary of the Father and evangelizer of the poor.
- Examples: Seminars and workshop on Vincentian virtues, more specific to certain apostolates like education, social work, etc.

Collaboration in building skills

- Skill is the ability to do our works/apostolate. The more skilled we are, the easier and the better we do our work.
- Skills in evangelization of the poor that enable us to teach or train them to be more thoughtful, skilled, and accountable, which hopefully will enhance their life.
- Examples: Systemic change seminars, training in building skills in agriculture, automotive repair etc.

Collaboration in building a specific work/ project

- Working together in accomplishing a project/work.
- Examples: Fight against Hunger, Fight against Malaria.

VINFAM COLLABORATION

- I got the impression that collaboration for a specific project (concrete work) internationally was not easy and got little participation.
- As I mentioned in the introduction, concrete needs in every part of the world are different.

VinFam collaboration in Asia Oceania

- I hope we can begin to work on it here with this seminar.
- We may begin by acknowledging one another, getting acquainted, giving our e-mail addresses so that we can communicate.
- No collaboration will happen without communication.
- If we communicate regularly, we will build a sense of family and friendship.
- And that sense will ease the way to collaboration.

KELUARGA VINSENSIAN INDONESIA (KEVIN)

- Vincentian Family in Indonesia was initiated by the Provincials of religious congregations who adopted Vincentian spirituality during the Congress of Indonesian Major Religious Superiors in 1995.
- Br. Jan Koppen, CMM provincial (inspired by VinFam in Holland and Germany) and Fr. F. Hardjodirono CM coordinated their short meeting.

The follow up

- They agreed to follow it up with Vincentian Study Days in Griya Samadi Vinsensius, Prigen, East Java Indonesia in 16-20 July 1996.
- Then in 1998 and 1999 they conducted a formation program for formators.

Growth

- Seminars and workshops centralized in one place would only be participated by a small number of members. From 2002-2007 KEVIN's Provincials agreed to have Vincentian study days by regions so that more members could participate.
- They held it twice a year in different regions: Pematang Siantar (North Sumatera), Yogyakarta (Central Java), Kupang (West Timor), Kediri (East Java).

Building a sense of family

- In every place Vincentian study days made the participants aware that they have one core spirituality (Vincentian), although each founder of their congregations concretized that spirituality according to their time and situation.
- This one spirituality also built a sense or spirit that we belong to one family.

Youth Gathering

- We thought also to spread that spirit among the youth. So in August 2002 we initiated Vincentian Youth Gathering at GSV, Prigen.
- We invited also members of KEVIN to join. They responded by sending some brothers and sisters. About 120 youth especially from our parishes, as far as Kalimantan, participated.
- This program continues annually. Some regions like Jakarta and Nanga pinoh, Kalimantan have successfully conducted a similar program.

Popular Mission

- We invited also members of the VinFam to participate in our annual popular mission. Some brothers, sisters, and MAVI have participated in the last few years.
- The more missionaries we have the better the popular mission, since usually it covers quite large areas. This was true especially when the bishop of Banjarmasin asked us to give popular missions in different areas in his diocese for 3 consecutive years.
- Every year more than 100 missionaries participate in these popular missions.

The Deepening

Besides spreading awareness of the Vincentian spirit and a sense of belonging to one family, we believe there is a need for deepening our spirit.

Preparation of (perpetual) Vincentian VOWS

- This program was actualized in 2005 and 2006, but only 2 congregations participated.
- Although the provincials had agreed to hold it, this did not automatically mean a commitment.
- We needed to socialize the program, so that the Provincials would be willing to send their members.

Improvements

- Before socialization, however, there was a need to conceptualize it better and find a really committed faculty.
- With the concept clarified and trusted faculty recruited, we sent the invitation by email.
- Realizing that email alone would not be effective we followed it up by visitation and phone. The result was amazing. When we did it in May 2009, there were 23 participants from 8 different congregations.

Realization

- There were 2 full time faculty, and other part-timers from different congregations.
- The program consists of: understanding Vincentian spirituality, social teaching of the church, live-in, social analyses, Vincentian community life, and retreat.
- The program consisted of group process (sharing of reflection, recreation, picnic, sports, and games) and individual spiritual direction.
- In the evaluation, all the participants expressed their satisfaction and gratefulness.

Workshop and Retreat for Vincentian Middle-Age group

- A program for the middle-aged group.
- Some relevant materials: Vincentian leadership, dealing with crisis, stages of life, finding one's own mission, growing to wholeness.

The Actualization

In order to actualize Vincentian spirituality today, we thought of working with each category of the apostolate.

Vincentian Education Forum

- Since most branches work in education, we started with this category. We (KEVIN) would gather a group of Vincentians specializing in spirituality and education to conceptualize a curriculum for Vincentian education.
- After dialogue with some members who worked in schools, we changed our plan. Providing a curriculum may not be applicable to our schools.
- It is better to start with a forum of KEVIN's members who work in schools. Then let them decide on the strategies that apply- Vincentian values/spirituality that would be relevant and would work for them.

Realization

- The first gathering initiated by KEVIN was held at GSV on August 14-16, 2009. Surprisingly we got 42 participants from 10 congregations.
- The process started by listening to what they already have in their schools.
- Then we gave them 2 inputs “Vincentian Education Catechism” which delineated basic concepts of Vincentian education, and “Vincentian Way,” mainly citations of Vincent’s words related to education and some models of how our (CM) schools applied the Vincentian spirit in the curriculum.
- All participants were very enthusiastic and agreed to establish the Forum. They elected some functionaries to organize the Forum.

Vincentian Social Forum: Systemic Change

- Maybe a bit surprising that social work was not dominant in KEVIN's Congregations. Some VinFam congregations have just recently started a foundation for social work.
- In my observation most congregations have not been very serious in supporting a foundation like that. The foundations' work varied from agriculture, labor union, to street children. Most of the staff work voluntarily with a small honorarium.
- We believe many things need to be done to support this apostolate. We thought of initiating a Vincentian Social Forum. Hopefully after this Formation Session we can establish this social forum.

Findings

- A sense of family and friendship, as the fruit and also the basis for more collaboration.
- Besides common study and workshop, it is very important to visit communities that belong to VinFam, especially their Mother houses.
- Personal relationship is the most effective way of developing any collaboration.

Composing a beautiful and colorful mosaic

- A richer and clearer understanding of Vincentian spirituality, since the founder of every branch has their own emphasis in actualizing the Vincentian spirituality. Sharing our spirituality is like composing a beautiful and colorful mosaic of Vincentian spirituality.

Challenges

- Since every branch is already very busy with their own agenda, offering KEVIN programs must be done with great patience and humility. Many times they did not pay any attention and did not give any response, other times they forgot, still other times they refused without trying to understand what we offered. We need to have “thick face and black heart” to communicate again and again, and to try to convince them of the importance of the program.

Only good for works?

- There is very little understanding of Vincentian spirituality among VinFam members.
- Many branches- either lay organizations or religious institutes - acknowledge St. Vincent as their patron only for their work, so that they need to gain spirituality from other sources.
- I believe there is a big homework to write on Vincentian spirituality, to show that Vincentian way is not only a way to work, but a way to God.

Very relevant today

- The Church in our secularized world today, more than ever needs a spirituality of involvement (not escaping), a spirituality of concern and responsiveness to the problems of humankind, a genuine spirituality of the gospel, like Vincentian spirituality.
- This was the very reason why St. Vincent insisted that all of his foundations remain secular, to distinguish his responsive spirituality from other great spiritualities.
- His spirituality attracted many people, his contemporaries, and after his death still millions belong to the Vincentian family and find it very relevant.

Between lay and religious

- There is very little collaboration between lay and religious Vincentians.
- Although lay Vincentian organizations are independent, they need spiritual support and guidance; otherwise they will be exhausted spiritually and neglect their Vincentian calling.
- Religious also will be regarded as a neutral person who can be a mediator whenever there are conflicts among them.
- Besides, if they have a religious as spiritual guide, usually they will get more trust and respect from hierarchy and other lay people, and have a greater chance to get more lay vocations.

By category

- Although it is almost impossible to have a very concrete project to collaborate nationally, there is still room for collaboration on the level of building attitudes and skills for apostolates belonging to the same category (education, social, formation etc.)