COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission

No. 37 **SPRING 1998**

Contents

Editorial

The theme of this edition of Colloque is taken from the title of Kieran Magovern's article; Goings and Comings. There has been a great deal of movement in the Irish Province of late; we have withdrawn from a number of houses and works and opened others. In the past months, the mission in Nigeria has become a vice-province. Confreres, Joseph Loftus and Myles Rearden, have gone on the international missions. A number of confreres have attended the C.I.F. (Centre International de Formation) course at the Maison-Mère in Paris. Others have been on sabbaticals of various lengths. Some confreres have left the Congregation or the active ordained priesthood. I thought it would be of use to reflect on some of these issues.

Myles Rearden, writing from Tanzania, reflects on the significance of Vincent's own going and coming; the story of the captivity in Tunis. Fergus Kelly reflects on his travels during his sabbatical while a number of those who did the C.I.F. course give their reactions to their time in Paris. John Concannon shares something of the journey of preparation that was part of his withdrawal from the ministry in Carstairs. Jay Shanahan and Maureen Treanor share the journeys of the Mission Team in Ireland, both across the island and in terms of its own development and changing emphases. Christine Crump tells of the goings and comings involved in the emergence of the A.I.C. in Britain. Paddy McCrohan shares something of the journey that led him to the Vincentians and, later, to marriage and Kieran Magovern shares his own journey. We remember, as always, those of our confreres who have made the final journey; returning to the heavenly homeland. The obituary for Fr. Frank Maher had not been received at the time of going to press.

It is not intended that every reader will agree with all that is written here; there will, doubtless, be articles the reader will disagree with, contentions that the reader will oppose. What is intended is that Colloque is a forum in which such thoughts can be expressed and shared; there will be place too for opposing views. In general, the editorial board makes nothing other than minor corrections to a text. We take responsibility for opting to publish articles, 'though the views expressed in them may not necessarily be our own.

There are other stories of goings and comings still to be told. The editorial board invites any of the readers to use Colloque as a place in which those stories can be set down.

Those Two Years

Myles Rearden CM

Formation and the truth

The forthcoming publication of J-M Román's life of St. Vincent de Paul will give those who teach Vincentian studies a very valuable resource. It can reasonably be put on the same level as the three main previous biographies by Abelly, Collet and Coste. As well as that, readers who have come to enjoy the high standards of modern biographies will be delighted with Roman's book. Still, there is one point on which Roman sides with his three predecessors and is at odds with most other present-day writers on St. Vincent; the slavery in Tunis. Roman defends its historicity, while Dodin, Mezzadri, Poole and Chalurneau are among those who do not. Roman bases his position on weaknesses in the arguments against the Tunis episode which writers in the present century have produced. They began appearing not long after Coste's biography, when a French government official in North Africa devoted two volumes of a ten volume work to demolishing Vincent's own account of the slavery. Roman answers them one by one, and in the end adopts the position that Vincent's statements in his two letters on the subject should be allowed to stand. For a non-specialist who likes Roman's book, that should be the end of the matter.

There is one kind of non-specialist who cannot afford to ignore the controversy, however; those who have the job of introducing St. Vincent to a new generation of his followers. They – and the group includes me – need to know what kind of person Vincent was in his late twenties, that is, around the age of the people they are teaching. An agnostic position on the Tunis slavery is not very helpful to formators, and even less so to those in formation. To put it bluntly, it matters a great deal whether the young – actually, the mature – Vincent was something of a dodger, or simply a decent person whose difficulties in getting started in the priesthood led him into trouble. Not the trouble of being enslaved, but that of writing false letters saying that he was enslaved. Do young Africans not have a right to know whether the person they venerate as their model, after Christ himself, reached that level from being someone more or less like themselves, or from being worse than themselves? That may look like overstating the matter, but imagine whether you would advise accepting into the CM today anyone who was believed to have written a serious letter as false as most people think Vincent's first letter on the Tunis slavery was. "Does that mean St Vincent was a liar?", asked by a

twenty-something for whom truthfulness is a fundamental moral value, is a delicate question.

I think the question can be satisfactorily answered, but only in a way that leads young people to a more secure appreciation of their own moral principles, and their superiority to those of past times or other places. That is an important educational benefit in itself. It is one of the drawbacks of Roman's simple acceptance of the letters to M. de Comet that it eliminates that educational opportunity. At the same time, if Roman was right, then the opportunity would have to be done without.

Impressive but uncorroborated

Is he right? There are peculiarities about Roman's position that raise some doubts. One is that it leads him to postulate a falling-out with the former Vice-Legate of Avignon, for which there is no other evidence. Everyone accepts that the Vice-Legate who Vincent says reconciled the converted renegade friar to the Church and took him and Vincent back to Rome was Archbishop Montorio, though Vincent never names him. Archbishop Montorio's three-year term as Vice-Legate of Avignon (a papal possession within France) expired in 1607, around the time of Vincent's letter dealing with the slavery. He himself lived until 1643, but not only did he fail to do anything for Vincent's promotion in the priesthood but, apart from Vincent's letter, there is no record of any contact between them ever. To explain that, Román assumes a falling-out. So Roman cannot be content with breaking down objections to the slavery episode: he has to make an uncorroborated assumption himself. This lack of corroboration is one example of the deafening silence from all other sources regarding the slavery episode.

In this connection, there is a curious contrast between the way Roman can make a good case for saying that Vincent studied for a short time in Saragossa, Spain, and yet provide no corroboration for his spending two years in Tunis. There was a tradition mentioned by the biographers that Vincent had been to Spain as a student, though he never says so himself. Roman is able to construct what seems a strong argument in favour of the tradition on of a number of remarks by Vincent in his letters and conferences. The curious contrast is between the total absence of such remarks for the slavery, which was (if it happened) a more recent, a longer and a more significant episode. Granted, Roman can point to several actual events in Vincent's early life which he never refers to. It is normal to find blanks in the early history of famous people; Edmund Burke for instance, between the ages of 23 and 27. Still, a crumb of corroboration would be very welcome. Its total absence compels me to accept Dodin's judgement that the letter is an "Arabian night's tale".

I have been reliably told that Fr. Raymond Chalumeau, a former archivist of the CM, who did not accept the story of the slavery, suspected that Vincent might have been in prison at Marseilles during 1605-1607. He checked the records of the Marseilles Prison, and found that those for the relevant years were missing. I do not know what weight to attach to this though it certainly does not actually prove anything. Still, it is a crumb of corroboration for Chalumeau's suspicions.

A hagiographical assumption

In assessing Román's position, it is worth recalling that he has a clear hagiographical aim in his book. That is not, in itself, a problem. It is why the book will be valuable to formators. Fr. Frederick Jones' life of St. Alphonsus is another example of how hagiography can be a very satisfying historical read. But Roman adopts a particular position in relation to Vincent's progress towards sanctity. He emphasises the attraction of sanctity for Vincent especially in his relationship to Francis de Sales, and the attraction of Vincent's own sanctity during his time as parish priest of Châtillon-les-Dombes. And he locates the first stirrings of his attraction to sanctity during the visit to Rome which Vincent made in 1601. He describes this visit in a letter written 30 years later to Francis du Coudray whom he had just sent there on CM business:

> You are now at Rome, the residence of the visible head of the church militant, and the resting place of the bodies of St Peter and St Paul and many other martyrs and holy people, who in former times gave their blood and often their whole lives for Jesus Christ. 0 sir, how fortunate you are to walk the same ground as so many great and holy people! When I was in Rome thirty years ago, I was so deeply moved that, although I was weighed down with sins, I was, as it seems now, in a constant state of tenderness, even to the point of tears. I think, sir, that it was this same consideration that strengthened you and preserved you the night you reached Rome, when, after a difficult journey of 30 miles on foot, you were obliged to sleep on the ground and spend the whole of the next day under the blazing sun trying to get admission to the city. This will have been extremely meritorious for you.

This is certainly evidence that the recently ordained Vincent was good-hearted and a person of faith. A visit to Rome can, today as much as in the seventeenth century, be an occasion of real spiritual experience. The idea of Rome being the scene of the first movement towards sanctity for one of the great figures of Tridentine Christianity is attractive. It would

not be invalidated by taking liberties with the truth six years later. But those liberties would give his spirituality a distinct ambivalence. Perhaps the old image of Vincent as 'senex a puero' in the phrase from his litany, 'wise from his youth', had some influence on Roman's attitude to the slavery letter.

Intriguingly, the very letter used by Roman to argue for an early turning towards holiness on Vincent's part does not put him in a particularly good light at the time he wrote it. He is writing to someone only a few years younger than him, and presuming that his own feelings at twenty will resemble those of Francis du Coudray at forty-five. Today we would consider such a presumption by a superior or spiritual director to be quite unprofessional. The contrast with Vincent's tactful direction of St. Louise at around the same time is striking. Perhaps, on the whole, Vincent's spiritual growth should be seen as a matter of progress followed by regression. In that case, a notable lapse at twenty-six would not be surprising.

What kind of lapse?

Vincent had his education under the sponsorship of a lawyer, M. de Comet, senior, had a degree in law, and excelled as a composer of rules for spiritual and apostolic societies (at one point Roman calls him a "legislator"). It would not be surprising if his most notable faults were signs of a legalistic mentality rather than a cavalier attitude to law or moral principles. Even his uncanonical age at ordination seems to have been justifiable in terms of canonical and pastoral practice of his day. So whatever was wrong with his letter on the slavery in Tunis, he will probably have been able to justify it to himself; and what will be wrong with him will be precisely how easily he could do that. How might he have argued?

The letter which he was to call "that miserable letter" when it turned up fifty years after he wrote it, was addressed to the person who was perhaps closer to Vincent than anybody else: the brother and successor of his deceased sponsor or patron. As regards his professional life, M. de Comet would have been closer to him than his own mother, since he had been educated out of his family-setting under the care of the Comets. The letter, like the follow-up he wrote eight months later, was a private one within a personal relationship. If, as seems likely, it was largely fictitious, it is to be expected that the legalist in Vincent will have tried to keep it within the bounds of Catholic teaching on truth-telling. In other words, he will have tried to formulate it as a "broad mental reservation', not either a 'strict mental reservation', in which there is no clue given that what is being said is false, and still less as a downright lie. A broad

mental reservation is, at it were, accompanied by a wink.

The letter does not contain any inherent implausibility: capture by Arab traders was quite common. Cervantes, of Don Quixote fame, experienced it and wrote it in Don Quixote and two plays (though not as straight reporting). Neither is there any incoherence in the narrative. It passes muster as a work whether of reporting or of fiction: a lame story would not have been a good sign of Vincent's abilities. He certainly did not want his patron to form a poor impression of them. But nevertheless, he gives what looks like a clear clue that the document is not to be taken at its face value. Vincent gives the precise date of his arrival back at Aigues Mortes with his convert companion. It is almost the only precise fact in the whole account, apart from the date of the letter itself. He says he arrived in Aigues Mortes on June 28th and the letter is dated July 24th. In between, Vincent and his companion travelled to Avignon: the journey would have taken a day or two, but they could hardly have left immediately after completing a six or seven hundred mile voyage in a small boat. Then, the procedure for reconciling his renegade (and himself) to the Church had to be gone through. Now this was not an easy matter. As Fr. Luigi Chierotti puts it in his articles on the question of the slavery in the Genoa publication Cooperzazione Vincenziana:

> For me the most difficult thing of all is to accept that after reaching Aigues-Mortes on June 23th, barely a month later Vincent and the renegade could have been restored to their functions, Vincent to the priesthood [which was suspended by enslavement] and the renegade (to membership of the Church) by abjuring [Islam]. … Some historians state that the latter required six months of penance first. (n.77,p.2)

The Comets were lawyers, and this obvious impossibility would be the first thing to strike them. In the context of their relationship with Vincent, it would mean that they were not to believe the story, and that they were not to enquire any further. The letter as a whole would have been a request for the relationship between them and Vincent to continue, but for Vincent to be allowed to keep his secrets. What I am suggesting is that M. de Comet was not taken in for a moment, but accepted Vincent's request: this he showed by performing the services Vincent asked of him, forwarding copies of his degree and ordination certificates.

In the case of readers like ourselves, the obvious impossibility that M. de Comet saw means that we should not believe the story either. Roman does not consider this objection. There the matter would have ended with a shrug of M. de Comet's shoulders if the letter had not come to light two years before Vincent's death. It was then that he called it a

"wretched letter" and tried to get hold of it, certainly with the intention of destroying it. Brother Ducourneau and others made sure this did not happen. Román remarks that though he called the letter "wretched" he did not say it was not true, and suggests that its appearance was inopportune because it would make the condition of slaves in Barbary seem comfortable enough at the very time Vincent was trying to raise money to help them. It is at least as likely, perhaps, that the letter was wretched because nobody except the person it was addressed to would have known how to interpret it, especially in the light of Vincent's later eminence in the Church and on the national stage.

Economy of truth

Does all this make Vincent a dodger in his mid-twenties? My suggestion is that whatever about the real merits of the case, this is precisely the charge Vincent was trying to avoid by trying to make the letter qualify as a "broad mental reservation'. People who are uncomfortable with any liberties regarding the truth, that is, most people nowadays, will not be very impressed with those efforts of his, any more than with Luther's view that lying could be justified by a good intention. Interestingly, it looks as if this could have been a life-long personal problem for Vincent. When he left the De Gondi household at the start of 1617 he gave it to be understood that he was going on a short journey, though he was really going to take up the parish of Châtillon-les-Dombes (where he was to acquire a reputation for sanctity.) Then, at the end of his life, he thought of destroying his early letter rather than explaining to his colleagues what had happened.

Vincent certainly believed in what Edmund Burke called, in a phrase which has acquired unfortunate connotations, 'the economy of truth'. What Burke said was this:

> Falsehood and delusion are allowed in no case whatever: but, as in the exercise of all the virtues, there is an economy of truth. It is a sort of temperance, by which a man speaks truth with measure, that he may speak it the longer… (quoted in O'Brien, *The Great Melody,* p. 559)

What Vincent says in the Common Rules is that "we should speak and behave with discretion. We ought to keep quiet about matters which should not be made known, especially if they are unsuitable or unlawful. When we are discussing things which it is good and proper to talk about, we should hold back any details which would not be for God's glory, or which could harm some other person, or which would make us foolishly

smug." (11,5) This is a greatly refined form of the evasiveness he was prepared to use as a young priest. But the anxiety, which he showed in trying to get hold of the letter at the end of his life, suggests that he may never have quite conquered his need to keep up appearances.

Continuous conversion and ongoing formation

In that case the moral of the story will be not just that Vincent had to be converted early in his life, but that he had to keep on being converted up to the very end, and did not always succeed in the most impressive way. Coming to terms with the Tunis slavery, as I believe the latest biography of Vincent does not, could be a crucial point of growth for all Vincent's followers, one in which we are called, of all things, to surpass the master as well as previous generations of his followers.

In doing that, is there any way the story of the slavery can be retrieved? Does it have to be torn up? I think it has an important value. It was, I have suggested, not the product of complete badness, but rather of a dubious moral strategy regarding the truth. Apart from that, it was written in good faith. It gives a clear impression of the mind and character of its author. Roman is right when he says that the letter on the slavery shows a personal security and a certainty that God has directed his every step. That is why it makes good reading. It tells a human, vivid and exciting story. It shows convincing reactions to challenging situations: being involved in a sea battle, being sold in a slave-market, being a farmer's son who cannot cope with a fisherman's life, a fascination with the embryonic science of the Arab world, warmth and delicacy in responding to a woman who found him very attractive, a firm commitment to his faith, and, ultimately, to his priesthood as he worked for the renegade's conversion. Vincent put himself into the story as he saw himself to be. It could be a false self-portrait, but the rest of Vincent's life shows that it is not. If the letter is, as seems likely, the only piece of imaginative fiction in the Vincentian canon, it has, like the books of Ruth, Tobit, Esther and Judith in the Bible, the merit of being interesting and inspiring. Wherever Vincent spent those two years, they were not wasted.

Toujours Seminariste?

Paddy McCrohan

I joined the Vincentians on September 3, 1962, with Mark Noonan, Fergus Kelly, Kieran Magovern, Paddy Joyce, Charlie Brehoon and Aidan Faughey. Aidan left two weeks later, Charlie after a year, and Paddy Joyce after about five years.
I left on March 9, 1990.
This is the story of the time between and the time after those dates.

Vincentian Values

The title I have chosen for this reflection is an exhortatory phrase, whose provenance I do not know, but which was suggested to me as an ideal by Tom O'Flynn (R.I.P) one day in confession. Being of a somewhat idealistic, even scrupulous temperament, I embraced this urgetur pretty literally – for a few years anyway. But I remember it still, and believe something of its value has stayed with me.

I joined the Vins because I wanted to be a priest, and the Vins were the priests I knew and liked and felt safe with. The spirit that attracted me was one of warmth, down-to-earthness, humour, ordinariness, courtesy. My instincts were, I believe, sound, for those were the qualities and characteristics that I continued to meet in my twenty-eight years in the Community, they have enriched my own life, and I still find them in the friends I have kept down the years.

I never did see a lot of whatever it was that St. Vincent meant by 'Mortification' or 'Zeal for Souls'. The former, perhaps, I experienced in the rather grim regime of the Seminaire, in the years before Des McGinley as Director and James Cahalan as Provincial. Maybe the terminology was what put me – and others?? – off both 'Mortification' and 'Zeal for Souls'. Somehow they smack of dourness and a hint of fanaticism. But the other virtues were there in glorious abundance, and 60% is an Honours mark in any setting! It was certainly good enough for me.

Be all that as it may, I retain of my twenty-eight years in the Little Company nothing but gratitude, affection and a thousand memories and anecdotes of colourful, delightful, intelligent, often gently idiosyncratic men.

The Vins provided me with a fine, broad education, opportunities to develop as a teacher, preacher and spiritual guide, and the cultural and

spiritual influence of outstandingly good people. I include in this latter category so many Daughters of Charity. It was my sense of belonging, not only to the Vincentians, but to the Double Family, that gave me such a sense of having been enriched. To leave all that behind was a hugely painful and difficult choice.

Student Days and After

After Blackrock and UCD, I was in Glenart from 1966-68. These were perhaps the two happiest years of my life with the Vincentians, and probably the two most formative. Something of the oppressive narrowness of Blackrock in the late Ancien Régime seemed to just fall away in a world of genuine learning, beautiful countryside, camaraderie and a sort of craggy independence of mind and spirit. (One particularly vivid, negative memory I have was my sense of shock and incomprehension on February 4, 1967, hearing Frank Murphy announce, during afternoon 'corporals', that Charles Davis had left the Priesthood.)

I hated the demise of that world and the return to Blackrock in 1968. I did not enjoy the spirit or teaching of Clonliffe, and found it something to be endured. I find I don't remember a great deal of those last two years apart from a sort of rumbling dissatisfaction and a lot of drinking of coffee and murmurings of rebellion, in solidarity with the students of Europe generally! It must have been a hellish time for our then Superior, James H. Murphy, a man who loved the good order and predictability of the traditional Sulpician seminary.

I was ordained on May 28, 1970; I spent four years in Castleknock, doing my H. Dip, teaching Irish and RE, training the Under-12 rugby team, and doing the various chaplaincies for the DCs in Glenmaroon, Clonsilla and Cabra. Castleknock, from my point of view, was a good experience outside the hours of 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. It was better at weekends and came into its own at half-term, Christmas, Easter and summer. The actual community was great, but teaching adolescents was not a font of inspiration for me.

From 1974 to '78 I was on the Retreat Team in Blackrock with Charlie Synnott and Brian Magee, and from '78 to '84 I was on the Retreat Team in Damascus House. I would again have to say that the day-to-day work was something I endured, whereas the work I loved was adult retreats, parish missions, DC retreats, Marriage Encounter, and almost everything other than what I was formally appointed to do. (I recognise, in hindsight, that a process of 'burnout' had already started, and was to continue until I left the Vins.)

From 1984 to '86 I was at the Institut Catholique in Paris, studying for a Master's in Theology, and then went on, with Fergus Kelly, to set

up what we intended to be an experimental Inner City Mission, based in Grenfell Rd., Tooting. While my personal theology of this mission was based on the approach of Charles de Foucauld, and was incarnational and contemplative in aspiration, I somehow became very restless and activist, impatient to justify the new mission with visible and measurable signs of 'success'. And there weren't too many of those. What was good was the community life with Fergus, and later with John Concannon and Stan Brindley, and the sense of working together towards the unknown.

Into the Unknown

I had always regarded myself as a priest for life. It simply never occurred to me that I would ever leave. While the departure of Charles Davis in 1967 was incomprehensible and a shock, I soon became more or less accustomed to the fact that some priests – including Vincentians – did leave. Some surprised and saddened me more than others, but somehow I never considered anybody else's decision as a threat to my own security in my vocation. The paradox of all this is that I can now see that the unconscious process that led to my own leaving was at work from the early eighties.

Probably the best way I can express what was happening is to say that, while I believed in the value and intrinsic necessity of friendships with women, and while I had many such uncomplicated friendships, I also found that some of my relationships became very complicated. Eventually I felt the strain of this to be too much, and I can recall on the Feast of Pentecost, 1988, that I was 'thinking the unthinkable', and considering whether marriage might not be my vocation rather than celibacy.

I spent most of 1989 in Heronbrook House, near Solihull, wrestling with my own inner contradictions and unconscious. Heronbrook House was a therapeutic community for priests and sisters struggling with questions of vocation. It was the most ghastly year of my life. There was no escape from the unrelenting confrontation with my Self and God. I was full of anxiety and felt deeply and desperately unhappy. Eventually some sort of clarity emerged from the fog, and I found that I had some inner peace and some sort of foundation on which to come to a decision.

My decision came in the course of an eight day directed retreat in Campion House, Osterley, in February 1990. It was a stark decision. It was that I knew that I could no longer remain a celibate, and that to follow God's will I had to leave the priesthood.

I said goodbye to the confreres in Strawberry Hill (where I had been staying since December 15, 1989) on March 9, 1990.1 felt very sad, yet as I headed by Tube for my unknown future, I felt a great upwelling of

joy and certainty as I looked at the other people in the carriage. I, too, was a traveller, a pilgrim, a man dependent on the love, mercy and grace of God; and I knew that that love, mercy and grace were there for me.

Finding work was not difficult, but it was very simple, poorly paid work. I had done about three weeks of supply teaching before my conviction of the early 70s reasserted itself. I did not want to teach adolescents, especially adolescents who did not appear to learn anything from the likes of me. From then on I turned my hand to anything that arose – driving, factory work, delivering milk, cooking in a canteen. I quite enjoyed all of these jobs, but I recognised that they were only a means of adjusting to 'civilian life'.

Although the Vins were financially generous to me, I recognised that without a home or a pension I needed to make some serious financial decisions. Paradoxically, the way I decided to do this was to go to Australia in January 1991, and take advantage of the open space it provided to think. It was in Australia that I decided to undertake training in Counselling and Psychotherapy, and I applied to the Institute of Psychosynthesis. The reasons I chose this field were: (a) because I thought I would be good at it, and had some experience of counselling and spiritual direction, and (b) because I needed a profession where I could work until I dropped, since I would never have much of a pension to live on.

And so that is what I did. Since 1992 I have worked as an administrator with a fundraising organisation for Refugees, I have run a counselling/emotional support project for Refugees in South London, and for the past four years I have managed services for adults with learning difficulties (mental handicap) in Hertfordshire. All this time I have also been training as a psychotherapist and seeing a small number of clients.

In 1994 my Dispensation and Laicisization papers came through.

In August 1997 I married Denise Bailey in St. Margaret's church, Twickenham. Padraig Regan officiated, and I was also delighted to have Fergus Kelly and Kieran Magovern present. Their friendship over the years has been a treasure.

Once a Vincentian..?

I am still very much a Vincentian in heart and spirit. I still do an hour's prayer most mornings, Mass and reading Scripture are as much apart of my life as ever. While I miss community more than any other aspect of Vincentian life, I am delighted by the company of my Vin friends very often, in my home or in theirs. I love to hear news of my former confreres and to recall the old days. The stories maintain all their freshness!!

In October 1997 I was invited to speak to the Vins at the A.G.M. of the English and Scottish Region; I asked them to consider whether there might be a value in some structure or semiformal network of former Vincentian priests and students, and whether such a structure might be of mutual benefit.

The response was positive, courteous and encouraging.

Exploratory talks are ongoing.

On va voir.

Going and Coming

Kieran Magovern CM

For the purpose of this article I decided to talk to myself. The title Colloque suggests a friendly conversation. Who better to talk to, than myself?

You left the Vins?
Yes, one morning in January 1993 all my stuff was at the front door of All Hallows in a little red van borrowed from Damascus House. Mick McCullagh helped me to pack. In truth he packed, I was always too distracted by books, letters and snaps. I always needed someone to keep me on task. I headed for the ferry and freedom.

How did you feel?
I didn't feel sad. Truthfully I was excited. Mick gave me some of his personal money. He was looking glum. In a way I felt a little guilty that I didn't share his mood. As far as I was concerned, I was leaving what I perceived to be a dying clerical world for love. Love had come late in life. I was 47 and three quarters but I felt 17 and three quarters. My startup fund was one fifth of my previous annual salary; I had collected it a day or two before from the Provincial. As Mark wrote the cheque, I remember him asking me was I sure. Of course I was sure, all I wanted him to do was to get on with writing the cheque. My time of anxiety, questioning and guilt was over; the decision had brought me new energy.

In order to understand this moment could I take you back to the beginning of your career in the Vins?
Sure.

How old were you when you joined the Vins?
I was 17 and five months.

Could you say something about your impressions?
Thinking back to that evening 3rd September 1962, my family was very sad to lose me, particularly my mother. Contact with the family for the foreseeable future would be infrequent and brief. I felt virtually no sadness but excitement at entering a new world. I still remember the

bare-board corridors of St. Joseph's, and those dim mysterious night-lights, high up on the walls just below the ceiling. God be good to Christy O'Leary and his fear of electrical extravagance.

I was entering the Vincentian novitiate along with six others; four of us were from St. Paul's, one from Castleknock, one from St. Pat's Drumcondra and one from a Christian Brothers' School. All were below twenty. The welcome was genuine. The food was, for the time, excellent; the accommodation spartan. I remember feeling very spiritual and holy in those early days. The system in 1962 was very tight, rock-like and immutable. After the initial excitement, I found the first year very constraining and extremely boring at times.

Did the system change?
Yes, very much so. Great adjustments were made to try and incorporate the thinking of the 2nd Vatican Council. Life improved for me when we started going to UCD. After the enforced seclusion of the first year novitiate, ordinary life seemed fascinating. Looking back, one of my biggest regrets was the fact that I was refused permission to continue piano lessons in these early years. I was reasonably competent at the piano on entering. There was a lack of imagination in the training. The prevailing notions of uniformity and obedience were, in the early years, stultifying.

Were you happy?
Yes. I got to like the system. As a group we communicated very well with one another. We also gradually lost the inwardness of the first years.

How many were ordained?
Four of us were eventually ordained. At that time we felt that we had had a good training from generous and selfless confreres.

What was your first appointment?
I was appointed to Castleknock in 1970. The advantages were: a large young community and a very disciplined way of life. There was also a certain buzz about being part of a thriving enterprise, with a place in Irish society which was assured and where there was a long waiting list. It was a flagship house, which even now still counts amongst its alumni one third of the priests of the Irish Province. Even since 1970, twelve of the students have tried their vocation in the Vins; although only five were ordained.

How do you view your time in Castleknock?
1 was generally happy there. The boys always had a good, friendly relationship with the priests. The atmosphere I think was never too harsh.

Come on, have you any misgivings now?
I think that the Vins were in the bind that many religious orders or groups of priests and nuns were in. They were to a certain extent victims of their own success. Castleknock was birthed in the aftermath of Catholic Emancipation, at a time when education was a prime need of the nation. Due to its success Castleknock became an elitist institution that sat very uneasily with our charism. Amongst some of the boys a quaint notion prevailed that we were having a great time on their money. The truth is that they were having a great time on our money and that of the taxpayer.

Why didn't you ask for a change?
I didn't ask for a change because I accepted that you did what you were asked to do until you were asked to do something else. I never considered myself a great teacher but my relationships were generally good. For exams I could generate a buzz of initiative and hope amongst my students. I also enjoyed being the official accompanist for a lot of the liturgies and being musical director for a number of stage productions.

Was there any self-questioning on the part of the community?
There was, of course, analysis of the job in hand and quite stringent questioning of the methods employed but there was no questioning of whether or not we should be there.

Why do you think this was?
Generally the alumni said that the College was doing a great job, they were successful people in politics, business and the professions (and indeed in the Vins too) so why should they be doubted? By and large the community had been to School in Castleknock and loved it. It was a self-perpetuating institution. Any examination or questioning of the purpose of its existence was interpreted as hostile and presumed to be fomented by those who were jealous of its success.

For effective analysis of an apostolate one needs a certain amount of 'slack' and some yardstick to assess with. The community of Castleknock were mainly straight-from-school clerics who had been ordained and sent straight back to school. Being on the staff was like being on board a big liner whose crew were all busy fulfilling their tasks as it sailed ever onwards without much thought to its destination.

Are you against educational works?
No, only elitist educational works. The work in question was not elitist in its constitution but a time came when it was definitely so and, then, not our work anymore.

Aren't you using hindsight?
Yes, but I do think as a community we were too busy to think deep thoughts. The big tanker takes a relatively long time to change course. Castleknock had outlived its Vincentian purpose I believe. I was on that liner too and didn't have the prophetic powers to question the course. And, indeed, had I questioned a move to another section of the province would have been discreetly arranged.

What was your next appointment?
In 1981, when I was aged thirty-six, I was transferred to St. Patrick's College, Armagh. It was a shock to leave Dublin and the life I knew and, I suppose, in a way loved, at Castleknock. I was glad that I had passed my diploma in the organ that summer. When the Provincial was changing me, in the course of a walk up and down the front avenue, I volunteered for the Missions in Nigeria. I had not been told to keep my appointment to Armagh quiet. The fact that I had talked about it meant that the Provincial didn't appoint me to Nigeria; until I had volunteered he did not know that I would have been willing.

What were your high points in Armagh?
I enjoyed being musical director of a number of school shows. These were whole school affairs and very well supported by the staff both lay and clerical.

A great surprise occurred two and a half years after my arrival. The Provincial asked me to become President. He told me that I was second choice, another confrere had refused point blank. I accepted. I felt I had done a enough of the routine work and I was as entitled as the next to have a go at it. Generally I liked the job. I was lucky in my second year to be able to appoint a dynamic deputy. He was grateful to me for preferring him. It was a most successful appointment.

My job as President was to amalgamate the school with the Christian Brothers school and then the Vincentians, myself included, would be withdrawn. A steering committee was set up. I got good advice and I think I did my job well. Doing the job well meant utilising the immense good will and generosity amongst the staff and in the diocese which was the Vincentian heritage in Armagh.

What happened then?
In 1988 I moved to Leuven. I had been consulted extensively on this decision. Now I was one of 25,000 students in one of the world's oldest universities. I was the oldest student in the class doing a Licentiate in Moral Theology. I enjoyed the experience. It provided me with a sense of the development of theology. I had seen theology before, sorry to say,

as something static to be absorbed. Now I saw it as an organic discipline which was in continuous evolution. This may sound basic but it revives belief in the Holy Spirit bringing to birth a new world.

My time in Leuven was broken after a year by a request from the Provincial to go to St. Paul's as a stop-gap Head(master). Frank Lyne had dropped dead on a school trip in Germany.

A week after arriving in Paul's I realised why he had dropped dead. Simply put, the institution expected the Vins, who by this time were down to three, to be responsible for a disproportionate amount of the administration and discipline. A culture change was needed but the anger and bitterness of some of the staff, who were in denial about the realities, was a psychological barrier in effecting this necessary change.

Were you glad to return to Leuven?
You better be sure of it.

You completed your Licentiate?
Yes, my thesis was entitled *'From Law to Person: the evolution of Bernard Häring's moral theology with particular reference to his treatment of sin'*.

What happened then?
I was appointed to one of our third-level institutions. Having studied moral theology and feeling reasonably competent in this discipline, I found that my teaching load for the first half-year comprised two-thirds Liturgy, a subject which I had not studied at all for over twenty years. To put it mildly, I found the transition to University teaching very stressful, mainly because I was teaching something for most of the week for which I was not qualified.

So you resigned your teaching post? Why?
The simple answer is that I fell in love. But, life is never that simple. Lots of Vincentians have fallen in love. I think of Pascal and the 'heart having its reasons which the mind knows nothing of"; certainly I felt that I was lifted off my feet by a new logic.

Why couldn't you handle it the way we're supposed to,
by advice and prayer ?
I did pray and I did seek advice. Maybe I'll answer that question by wondering whether at the age of forty seven and three quarters there was in my mid-life a powerful natural urge to be a significant other for someone? At a deep level perhaps I needed to have this relationship and the need was powerful at both conscious and subconscious levels. A

young woman fell for me first and then I fell for her. When you become that significant other it is a powerful heady emotion. I think of the lines from the popular song "Romance is a game for fools, – but wise men never fall in love so how are they to know?" The Vins with their bland relationships, dwindling numbers and closures and threats of closure came a poor second to being really loved and needed. Having made the decision, I left with no regret at the time. The path to that decision, however, was filled with guilt, anxiety, sadness.

How did you earn your living?
I got a job teaching. The first job I applied for I got. What a transformation!

What was the difference?
To work as a Vin in a school or institution with your own confreres means that you lead a protected existence. The ethos is familiar. It is something else to be one of a multitude of teachers in a large inner London comprehensive school. You are dealing with the raw edge of a section of society which is angry, rejected and disaffected. It is another world.

For me the price of freedom and love was teaching in a type of school that I had never experienced before. I used console myself after each encounter with the class from hell "well, at least another few pounds have made their way into the bank account".

All along I missed the pastoral relationship. The children and young people that I dealt with in inner London were needy human beings when in a "one to one" situation. Put them all together into a class, particularly R.E. with the 15/16 year olds last class on Friday. Their minds were on sex, discos, drugs and booze in no particular order. The syllabus as laid down for GCSE didn't get a look in. Yet, if you circulated and chatted to them they would talk with searing honesty. What would I be like if I had their life opportunities?

Why did you come back?
The presenting reason was that by mutual consent but not mutual desire the relationship broke up. I was dumped. Love was wonderful, rejection was terrible. In intensity the sadness was much greater than the death of my parents. The break-up of the relationship caused me to reflect on what was important in what was left of my life.

What did you decide to do?
In September 1994, I took a permanent job in Hemel Hempstead. This was a much more tranquil school than inner London with a very pleasant staff. But as I saw the relationship breaking up I decided that I had had

enough of teaching. The job that I fancied in the interim period was that of a truck driver. I wanted to drive a large truck on the international routes. The difficulty was that you needed two years experience to get a job. I could have driven smaller vehicles in and around London: "multi-drop" business, but that had no attraction for me.

Fergus Kelly put me in touch with Warley; consequently in January I went to work with the Daughters of Charity in Essex. I thought that I was going to work as a chaplain. But I found that they already had a chaplain so the first job I had was in the Kitchen; after six weeks I was promoted to the wards where I functioned as a Grade A Nursing Auxiliary. It was an experience. The sisters were extremely kind. I had space and I had friendship.

How did you feel about coming back?
I had to be sure that I wasn't coming back to the Vincentians because I missed the security and the accommodation. I had earned my living for nearly three years. I knew that I could survive outside the institutional womb. It was important to feel that the decision was free.

When did you definitely decide to come back?
Well, as soon as the love affair was over, with blinding suddenness I realised that I didn't have bad feelings for the Vins. I had questioned a particular apostolate but not the individuals who worked so generously within it. My decision firmed up during my time at Warley and during the year at St. Anselm's in Kent, which was a marvellous experience. For many years I was extremely sceptical about all this "counselling/spiritual direction lark", feeling that it was mostly for neurotic women. Engaging in it, with considerable reluctance at first, I found it to be immensely energising.

How do you feel now?
I am very happy to be the priest-in-charge of St. Vincent's Houghton Regis. One major change in my life is the fact that for every weekend, as well as I can, I prepare a homily. It should have been like that years ago, but with the fragmented lifestyle I used lead, homilies were back of the envelope affairs with too much ad-libbing. Nowadays I always have a text and then I ad-lib around it knowing that there is a definite game plan.

Were your friends important?
Before I left I journeyed a lot with Fergus Kelly. This continued with Mick McCullagh on my brief assignment to the Missions. During my time out I used meet Mark Noonan every few months, when he would

issue his provincial utterances with resigned gentleness knowing that in the early stages they were falling on deaf ears. When circumstances took the turn they did, he resisted the temptation to tell me "I told you so". When I was out I didn't visit any Vin house except Padraig Regan's in Tooting, where I always got a tremendous welcome. Paddy McCrohan was a constant friend and support during this time too. When Mark finished as Provincial, Kevin Rafferty was good at keeping contact and listening with his own particular astuteness.

The friends I had amongst the Sisters stayed with me during the time of exile. I mention a few; Brenda O'Neill was always there and never heavy into advice, she listened well. In Warley, Philomena O'Driscoll was very supportive too as was Teresa O'Rourke. In St. Anselm's Providence arranged that two sisters were doing the course; Anne McGovern, Geraldine Naughton and myself formed a little Vincentian trio.

How do you feel about rejoining the Vins?
I feel very happy. The welcome I got here in this house from Gerald and Eamon (and Desmond who was paradoxically heading for Warley as I arrived, although not to work in kitchen or wards) was genuine and sincere. I didn't find it difficult to slot in. The Vins are not judgemental and this is a product of our charism of meekness.

My experience of being 'away' and then coming back means that when I preach I do so alongside my congregation rather than from above. After all the God we preach is a God who does not quench the smoking flax nor break the bruised reed. The love and mercy we preach is a gift we must receive ourselves too.

Around the World in 180 Days
(or How to survive your sabbatical)

Fergus Kelly CM

Does anyone want fifty little wooden crosses which I made at the Big Sur Camaldolese Monastery in California? I was on retreat for a week in this Benedictine hermitage cum monastery and my spiritual director – a blind Belfast-born priest – told me to go to the seashore, collect some driftwood and make crosses. The hermitages are perched on a cliff 2,000 feet above the Pacific ocean. With difficulty I went for the flotsam and with stout brogues I went each evening for my stroll on the cliff path.

One starry moonlit evening in March of last year, after a long day of prayer and whittling, I wandered from my little hut to a bench. As I looked at the magnificent Hale Bop comet in the cloudless clear sky and listened to the distant faint murmur of the surf I thought of the majesty of creation and its Creator. The stillness, the solitude, and the sense of oneness with nature were wonderful. Suddenly, in the embracing silence I felt a slight tap on the shoulder. Cardiac arrest was averted by the coincidental fact of my simultaneous intake of nicotine. It appeared that one of my fellow retreatants/hermits was also out communing with nature.

"Are you going to go further for a walk Fergus?" "Yes, Peter, when my blood pressure comes down again" "Well, Fergus, I'd bring a stick with me if I were you – I have just seen a small mountain lion further down the path."

Our beloved founder told us to answer the first sound of the bell as if it were the voice of God and when writing even to leave a letter of the alphabet half formed when that call to a community exercise is heard. I felt like a seminarist rushing to prayer as I galloped to my hermitage upon hearing the electrifying words "mountain lion". I thought of the words of Peter 5:8. It is truly amazing what speed an unfit middle-aged cleric can achieve when he has to.

The course I was 'doing' from January to April last year was a three month renewal session. We, all 35 of us, from ten different countries, were based at the Vatican II Institute for Clergy Formation which is in the grounds of St Patrick's Seminary at Menlo Park some twenty miles south of San Francisco. As the name implies, the course, which is a mixture of updating in theology and spirituality with opportunities for spiritual direction and counselling, is open only to bishops, priests and deacons. I had been warned by a confrere who had sometime previously

followed a different course in California that the Vatican II Institute was "safe" i.e. not challenging enough in the area of feminist theology in the fire of which all Vincentians should be purified. All clerical, patriarchal, masculine and exclusive theology needed to be jettisoned and confreres going on sabbatical courses should be cast adrift on the sea of inclusive, feminist and collaborative theology and spirituality. I'm glad to say that I resisted the temptation to cast myself loose and thoroughly enjoyed the all-male and clerical atmosphere of the Vatican II Institute. For any confrere who has been given some sabbatical time off I would strongly recommend this course. Cheers Ms Greer and Sister Chittister.

Remote preparation is vital for mental prayer as it is for sabbaticals. Our beloved Visitor had agreed, for all kinds of reasons, to my taking eight months off from January to August. Keeping this in mind I made my plans. While in Lourdes on a weekend pilgrimage in autumn '96 I met a family from Singapore and they insisted that I visit their home and experience the vibrant young church there. Similarly when out in Jerusalem a few weeks later, ministering to Michael Prior as he had his angiogram/angioplast, I met a priest from Newcastle, Australia and he invited me to spend some time with him – 'ad cleri disciplinam' being one of our calls, I accepted. While in Menlo Park one of the other course participants suggested that as I would be in Singapore I should pop up to his native country of Malaysia and check it out. Towards the end of my time off I wished to spend a considerable amount of time in South Africa and as a good friend of mine, Doug Wiseman, is a priest in Capetown diocese I had a heaven-sent opportunity to see something of, and do some work and study in that beautiful/tragic country.

The Catholic Church in the United States seems to me, at least at times, to be in a state of paranoia. There is a great terror of the Right in clerical circles – perhaps a justified fear in the light of the ultra conservatives' perceived ability to have easy access to powerful ears in Washington and Rome. Mother Angelica's media 'empire' was mentioned over and over again and I had the dubious pleasure one evening of seeing her perform on the box. One of the participants on the course who has had painful dealings with the said Mother is Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, Michigan. Ken has been a bishop for about seven years. Six months after his appointment some of his close friends told him that he had changed, was becoming remote and was beginning to distance himself from people. He took prompt action; sold his episcopal palace, gave the money to the poor and now lives out of a suitcase as he goes from parish to parish for three month stints. He is a one-legged (he had polio as a child), piano-playing, unorthodox, cheerful itinerant bishop who has an obvious love for the poor and underprivileged – a great pastor.

Living in the grounds of St Patrick's Seminary is the relatively young retired archbishop of San Francisco, John Quinn. He shared with us some of his episcopal experiences and it was obvious that he had very painful memories of the occasions when he had been deleted to Rome and had to answer the – at times – faceless and nameless accusations sent by e-mail and fax from the theological vigilantes. What a strange country!

One day as I wandered about this "city on the bay" trying to find the beautiful cathedral I came across instead a canine chapel of rest. It is a branch of the much larger complex called "Pets Paradise Inc". I actually witnessed a funeral for a dearly beloved poodle. There was a 'minister' in full robes, candles, incense and water sprinkling. As I ambled about the outside garden of rest I read the inscriptions on the mini gravestones. I was reminded of a similar place at the back of the old ruined Ardilaun mansion at St Anne's Estate near St Paul's, Raheny. As a students in St Paul's some of us, tired of being reminded that – "a gerund is a verbal noun and a gerundive is an adjective", would absent ourselves and visit the said graveyard and read that

> "Keeper is at peace now
> Remembered by Lady Sarah"
> or
> "In memory of Pilot
> A great ratter"

Meanwhile back in St Anne's mansion some of the Ardilaun servants were living in damp basements or draughty attics – or so I was told by one of these old retainers who lived near my home. Ah well I suppose it was always a dog's life.

San Francisco is a multi-cultural and diverse diocese. We were encouraged on Sundays to go out to the parishes and experience the very varied liturgical styles. One of my most memorable experiences was being at the celebration of the Eucharist in the Sacred Heart parish in the Castro district of downtown San Francisco. This is the area which has become the centre of the gay and lesbian community. I have rarely experienced such friendliness in a church anywhere. The congregation was a mixture of all types of humanity. I was told that some of the worshippers were Aids sufferers but to hear the singing and experience the beautiful and dignified sense of joy and happiness was wonderful to behold. "So you're from Dublin Father – my grandmother came from near there, Kerry county. Welcome to San Francisco."

My sojourn in South Africa was a most fulfilling and rewarding time. I had the opportunity to see at first hand some few of the problems

which the church and people of that country are grappling with at this time. I lived in a white/coloured parish about 15 miles from the centre of Capetown. I wanted to see something of the workings of the diocesan Justice and Peace commission and I was told that a meeting dealing with the issue of rape and sexual abuse would be held in the nearby pleasantly named town of Elysies River on the Saturday after I arrived. There is nothing pleasant about the setting of this poor town – grim, dirty, dust blown and teeming with people.

When I entered the church hall the meeting had begun and at first I thought it was a women only meeting. As I crept to a spare seat – there were about fifty people there – I had a strange sense of uneasiness – even of danger. "They are women who have been hurt mainly by men – I'm a man," and as I listened to the stories of rape and sexual abuse, almost always perpetrated by men, I felt even more uncomfortable and dare I say – ashamed. Some women had given up on the church – some felt that the church had given up on them. "Have any of your priests ever given a sermon on sexual abuse?", one woman asked. A few – a very few – said yes.

When the meeting finished I was just about to slink away when one of the women spotted my crab-like movements and said "where are you going Father – why not stay and share lunch with us?" Their welcome, their warmth, their humour could not have been more kind and friendly. I had to gulp somewhat as one woman said to me "thank you Father for coming and listening to us today – we really appreciate the support of our priests." One lady who had been abused for ten years when she was a child invited me to celebrate Mass a few days later in her tiny retreat house which she runs for poor people from the teeming townships who need to get away and rest and pray and sleep. She gave me a copy of the following poem (which I print with her permission). It is hard and tough but it is one woman's attempt to deal with some of her pain;

EXORCISM

where were you god
where were you
when the little girl-child
cried out?
where were you man-god
while the brute-boy thrust
his penis into her innocence
repeatedly?
where were you god-man

where were you
while he hurt her,
threatened her instilling
unspeakable unspoken terror
with
each
penis
thrust?
omniscient god you knew then
how this violent shaft would
forever
shatter her
porcelain wholeness.
you saw, you knew –
yet you did nothing?
but then,
you are the god who
demanded human sacrifice
blooded from the arteries
of your own son.
what kind of father,
what kind of god are you?
if you needed, wanted
your son's bloodied agony
to appease you,
then a girl-child's pain
would drop from you like
spit into soft dust.
yes father – god
I rage
… against you.
within me I have a Galilee
of anger, but you are not
invited to walk on it
or fry fish on its shores.
no.
I will not allow it
until
you have
begged
my
forgiveness.

The church is in the middle of the mess of this beautiful and tragic country they call South Africa. I spoke with the archbishop of Capetown – Dr Laurence Henry and I was edified with his composure and wisdom in his most difficult position.

I was told – not by him – that in the '50s when he went forward for priesthood in South Africa that there was a seminary for whites and another for blacks but none for those of mixed race. He had to study at Propaganda Fide in Rome. When after ordination he returned to Capetown he was appointed curate in a white parish – strange indeed are the ways of vicars general. Seemingly it was quite a common occurrence as a young priest as he visited in the parish to have doors closed on him. In his novel *Orley Farm* Anthony Trollope says "There is nothing perhaps so generally consoling to a man as a well-established grievance; a feeling of having been injured, on which his mind can brood from hour to hour, allowing him to plead his own cause in his own court, within his own heart, – and always to plead it successfully." In these post apartheid days the white shoe is on the coloured/black foot and yet I was told over and over again that Laurence Henry is a man devoid of bitterness or attempts at revenge. He would not agree with A. Trollope.

While in Capetown I wanted to do a little research on an ancestor of mine and a predecessor of Archbishop Henry, Bishop John Leonard, Vicar Apostolic of the Cape Province from 1873 to 1908. He was a past pupil of St Vincents's Castleknock and a priest of the archdiocese of Dublin. I had always assumed that the Vincentians had never penetrated into South Africa and was surprised and delighted to read in the March 1908 issue of "The Catholic Magazine for South Africa" that "among mourners at the bishop's funeral was Fr Hagarty CM who came from his missions in Natal." Among the letters of Bishop Leonard I came across one to his nephew – himself also a past pupil of Castleknock – warning him of the dangers of dropping out of university and seeking his fortune in Argentina. "Many young men of fortune get "washed up" on the shores of Capetown. Only last week a young man educated, like you, by the good Vincentian Fathers at St Vincent's came to see me asking for help. He spends his time in the dens of iniquity which abound in this town. Don't let the same happen to you. Attend Mass each Sunday and confession once a month. Please send me the name of your confessor and the bishop of your diocese in Argentina." I wonder what would happen if I wrote to my nieces and nephews in similar vein.

And so back to Europe. I had promised Srs Maureen Cushley DC and Joanna Dineen DC that I would visit Bucharest and see the great work being done for the children with Aids there. This was a sobering way to end a sabbatical. The DC's have been at the coal face of this ministry for over five years. I visited the hospital where many of the children live

out the few years of life left to them. In spite of my lack of Romanian and their absence of English we spoke together and sang songs. One wonderful lady, Maria – a single parent herself – looks after three beautiful young nine year old girls in her own home. Sr Maureen assured me that it is probable that the three of them will have died before their twelfth birthdays. I helped these two DC's and a young Scottish doctor, Catherine McDougall, to clear a garden and paint a house for a mother and baby Aids project which has just begun. The weather was stiflingly hot and humid. My attire was not very clerical and I was told that as I walked the streets searching out iced drinks for the work party that I looked like Rab C Nesbitt of TV fame.

What do I remember of these months? In my mind's eye I see Fr Desmond Curran serving the two hundred and fifty thousand people of the squatter/township of Kaylitsha near Capetown; the little Chinese man Sam in Singapore whose devotion to the church is total and who sang for me in Irish "Hail Glorious Saint Patrick"; the old French priest Fr Andre who has spent fifty years serving the scattered ethnically-Indian peoples who work on the tea plantations in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia and who showed me such hospitality in his simple home: the boy at the Orthodox monastery in Romania who on seeking alms from me had second thoughts and gave me some coins. Faces, names, places, homes, planes, churches, meals, people, people, people, kindness. And so to bed.

Reflections on the CIF Course

John Gallagher CM

It is with deep gratitude to the community that I can reflect back to the GIF course in Paris, September 1995 .

Months prior to attending the course I realised that my knowledge of St. Vincent, not to mention the founding of my own Province, was greatly impoverished.

I began to prepare for the course first by studying the correspondence between St. Vincent and the first Missionaries he sent to Ireland and Scotland. I felt deeply touched by the faith and generous spirit of these men, along with the descriptions of the many hardships which they had to endure. Their deep faith, generosity and missionary zeal was equally evident in those who later founded this Province.

The CIF course afforded me the opportunity to study in much more detail the life and times of St Vincent, our Congregation as Missionary and International, bonded by our rich heritage expressed by our Constitutions.

Learning of the missionary zeal of the confreres who worked and died during the plague in Genoa. The insistence of St Vincent, to send more and more confreres on Mission to Madagascar when many were being martyred. The zeal which sent other confreres to the end of the earth, to China… and there are many more examples of equally heroic virtue which receive perhaps less headlines.

I can still hear John Rybold say, "These are our brothers".

These few words of John, left a deep impression on me as they reflect the individual and collective memory and experience of the Congregation from its birth.

The exercise of one day was to reflect on the confreres we know who have inspired us. For me there were several. As each of the group spoke and we began to share our personal experience, it was not difficult to understand why. They were men of deep faith, loyalty and love for our Community and our Mission. Men who gave of their best with the single purpose of making Christ better known.

I remember sitting on an old stone wall bordering the house where Saint John Gabriel Perboyre was born and lived. The landscape was not unlike that of parts of the west of Ireland. I can still see myself sitting there wondering and reflecting –

How the seed of God's word grew interiorly in a young man who was called to join our Congregation. The Providence of God leading him

– and his openness, allowing that first little seed to grow into a strong shoot.

Such men can still be seen in many parts of the world responding to that first call of God, and inspired by St Vincent in our Congregation.

Perhaps one of the deepest insights of my time in Paris is the simple fact that there are many confreres in our Congregation, up to the present day, inspiring and inviting us by their example, to be men of deep faith, open to the will of God, loyal, and using St Vincent's own imagery, on fire with love and zeal for our Mission and our Congregation.

The experience of living, working and praying with so many other confreres from around the world was a very rich one. I was aware that between us, we represented many opinions and experiences of being Vincentian. As in any diverse group of individuals there were at times many different and sometimes passionately expressed conflicting opinions. This was by and large healthy, challenged openness, good listening and understanding. Certainly, the bonds which brought us together as Vincentians were stronger and richer through our sharing and exchange.

I will always remember our trip to Folleville – and the sense of belonging I felt visiting the little church there.

We were brought back in time to a significant moment in the history of the Congregation: that Saint Vincent, our brother, preached a mission marking a foundation stone for the whole Congregation. The Mayor of the region, along with a number of our lay brothers and sisters, joined us for Eucharist. It was a moment of grace that reminded us again that we are brothers, sharing the same Mission of Evangelisation, inspired by St Vincent's love for Christ.

The expose we received on the virtues could not but inspire us. They still remain the five precious stones of the Congregation. Tested by time and lived experience they are handed on to us as our inheritance. They are our special gift and call following the example of Christ.

I found Jean Pierre Renouard's treatise on them challenging. Lively, fresh, enthusiastic and real. Times may change, and we are forced to change, but the central values of the Gospel are timeless.

Someone once said "There is a danger for us that the Constitutions would remain on bookshelves gathering dust".

The Constitutions are not only central to our lives, they express formally who we are. They are the source of all that we are and they remind us of what we are called to be as vincentian.

I would have found it difficult without the help of the course to understand, not only the process by which the Constitutions were formed, but also to appreciate their representing the sum total lived experience of every confrere since the time of St. Vincent.

One danger, I feel, at a time when we are constantly reflecting and reviewing statutes, lines of action, convocations and assemblies…

The Constitutions remain for us our most extraordinary essential resource.

The time spent reflecting on our vows gave new perspectives and a modern approach; especially the vow of Stability which is so central to our Vincentian calling.

As I reflect on the course and see the emphasise on Evangelisation and Mission, I am reminded of my years in the seminary when the emphasis was perhaps more on Community Living. I wonder if today there is a danger of our community lifestyle loosing out. It is true and right that we are for Mission and Evangelisation. This is essential and this is our calling. However, the expression of charity, fidelity to each other in prayer, practical support in our exercises, along with a common and shared lifestyle is essential for the support of the Mission. I find it difficult to see how our Mission will ever be successful without lending sincere expression to our community living.

At a practical level, I appreciated very much getting to know confreres from around the world and forged solid friendships with some. The exercise of being together, living together, and learning together was of immense value.

In conclusion, our heritage must be generative. Not only must we share it with the many lay organisations and peoples who work with us and share our vision in the church. I believe that we must act on the words of Jesus "the harvest is great and the labourers are few; Pray the Lord of the harvest to send more labourers into the harvest".

The GIF course was indeed a very valuable one and I would like to express gratitude once again to all those who made it possible.

Aidan Galvin CM

Friends and family were puzzled by my lack of enthusiasm for a three and a half-month stay in Paris. I am not sure why I was so reluctant. I know I was very tired at the time. 1 was conscious of my lack of French. I had a fear of being overwhelmed by a torrent of Vincentiana, a little like returning to the Seminaire. I had never been to Paris.

Emerging from the Metro, I had my first glance of the rather dull graffiti-decorated façade of the Maison Mère. It did nothing to lift my spirits. Arriving a little late, I joined Evening Prayer in progress in the chapel. A fuse went and we were left in darkness. It captured my

mood. At the end we were invited forward to stand before the body of St Vincent; "Dear God this can only get better" was the only prayer that came to my lips.

My prayer was answered. I remember sitting on my bed in a rather starkly furnished room on that first night. I was thinking about a conversation I had earlier in the evening with another participant. He explained that he was only there under obedience and assured me that the course would be the most boring experience of my life. I decided there and then that I would have a wonderful time. And I had.

What made it so wonderful? The leisure and luxury of no real responsibility, the company of delightful confreres, an absolute love affair with the city of Paris and some interesting insights into our rich Vincentian heritage. I don't know how that order would rank in the minds of those who conceived the course, but it worked for me!

A few weeks into the course I was walking back from Mass in Nôtre Dame on a delightful sunny spring Sunday. I can distinctly remember feeling life is great! As I stopped to buy a Sunday Times, I saw a copy of the Irish Sunday Independent. The headlines were about the "Dunphy versus De Rossa" court case and Episcopal views about the closing of a vasectomy clinic in Donegal! I realised one reason for my happiness; I was out of Ireland. I suddenly became more aware of how much of the negativity evoked by recent clerical scandals one is inclined to internalise. It enhanced my delight in being in an international environment and contributed greatly to my enjoyment of the time off.

This was my first true experience of the international nature of the congregation. One could not fail to notice the contrast between the descriptions of the older ageing western provinces and the dynamism of younger provinces. The international nature of the course is its strength. The gathering together of such a diverse group of people, with a common heritage and tradition was fascinating. I was intrigued by the variety of personalities, ministries and the contrasting contexts in which they are exercised, including thirteen different languages! Listening to the Polish confreres – now belonging to the province of Madagascar-talk of the stark landscape in which they operate, or watching the fall of the regime in Zaire through the eyes of a confrere waiting to return there, gave real depth to one's understanding of the nature of mission. Stories of ministries from China, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Indonesia, India, Philippines, Brazil, Austria, France, Italy, Poland and U.S.A. revealed theologies and patterns of ministry as diverse and diverging as the participants.

Left to our own discretion, I suspect few if any of us would have chosen the Constitutions as our starting point. In hindsight, it is probably the only way to do it. Given the contrasting backgrounds, life experi-

ence and cultural diversity, it is reasonable and logical to focus on the common tradition that helps to weave the fabric of our lives wherever we live.

There was the inevitable tedium of simultaneous translation, which reduces the spontaneity of the most eloquent speaker. There was the occasional frustration of material being expanded to fit the time available. I heard some suggest that the course should only take place in single language groups. Aside from the financial and practical difficulties this might cause, the course would lose something of its essence.

Like any course or sabbatical, it is partly what you make of it. Anyone who finds Paris boring would need more help than a three-month sabbatical!

Ironically, the weekly session on the history of the congregation I had anticipated enjoying least, I found to be most enjoyable. This was in part due to the imaginative presentation, which rescued it from being potentially a listing of dates, names and events. History always lends perspective. It was interesting to note the focus of Superiors General and Assemblies through the centuries, much of it centring on the internal life of the community. Against that background one can understand the tensions and anxieties generated by the post Vatican II invitation to reflect on the mission of the Congregation and return to the charism and spirit of the Founder. I also developed an appreciation and admiration for the remarkable survival instincts of the French confreres. Their history was indeed a turbulent and violent one.

I have no regrets about my stay in Paris. It was right for me at that time in my life. If one is happy to go with the flow, to tour various CM sites on a bus, content to know that you will stop somewhere to eat and somewhere to sleep, it can very relaxing. If you're the type that requires a lot of detail about arrangement it could be a little stressful as information tends to be revealed on a need-to-know basis! I enjoyed the little bit of regression being a student again allows. Table-tennis between sessions. Poker at the back of the bus, I thought I had left such little pleasures behind. A year on, if I were to search for flaws I am sure I could resurrect some, but the overwhelming memory is of a restful, pleasant, enlightening experience; a personal delight being a surprise celebration of my birthday through the gracious hospitality of the Spanish confreres in San Sebastian.

To the Editor's question to me, "How can the Irish Province benefit from this course?": In my case it got back a relaxed and rested confrere with an expanded Vincentian horizon and one who finally really read the Constitutions. Cheap at the price! Any recommendations for the C.I.F. staff in Paris? – a reunion every two or three years in Paris. Now there is a good suggestion!

Colm McAdam CM

"It was the best of times and the worst of times" once wrote Charles Dickens.

CIF is not an experience I have too fond memories of – and certainly not one that radically influences my current ministry!

The sessions (lectures really) were, for the most part, sterile and imprisoned us in passivity. Two exceptions, though, are worthy of mention; Tom Davitt on the Beati and Tom McKenna (USA Eastern) on Community Life.

Life in the Maison-Mère during the CIF programme wasn't exactly the Hotel Ritz; one immediately thinks of the seemingly endless queues for meals, which left much to be desired – considering the hefty fees for the programme and especially for the accommodation. Not having an easy chair in our rooms was, we felt, stretching the vow of poverty a bit too far.

One of the few good things about CIF was that it was my first time in Paris – and in the springtime too! Another was the frequent contact, by phone and letter, with a confrere back home. But perhaps my abiding 'take-away' from the programme were the pilgrimages to the various places of Vincentian interest, which help to keep the writings of St Vincent and St Louise alive.

Carstairs State Hospital
Vincentian Chaplaincy 1991-97

John Concannon CM

The hospital was built in the early 1940s. The Lanarkshire Moors setting emphasises how marginalized our society wants the patients to be. There are about 220 patients, who are the most mentally ill in Scotland and Northern Ireland. They require 'Top Security' because of the danger they pose to society, staff and themselves. In the '70s, there was a break-out at the hospital. A patient, a member of staff and a policeman were murdered. That event shaped the attitudes and response of the media and the public for the following fifteen years. The emphasis of management and staff was on custody and security.

Policy Changes

A new hospital management team introduced many changes c.1990. There was a new emphasis on understanding and care, without compromising on security. Individual care plans were devised for each patient and the average stay of patients began to drop. The new 'target' stay was about four years for most patients. All this was a far cry from the mentality of 'lock them up and throw away the key'. New advances in medication for most mental illnesses offered hope for patients and help for staff in rehabilitating them. The changes met with opposition from some staff and from the public. But the new Mission Statement of Patient Care eventually created a new ethos and culture.

Patients' Spiritual And Religious Needs

Chaplaincy had no input or influence on the new ethos and culture of patient care. There was no mention of patients' spiritual and religious needs. When I was appointed Chaplain in September 1991, replacing Fr Sean Murphy CM, I set about raising the profile of the Chaplaincy and its potential contribution to holistic patient care. The Church of Scotland Chaplain, Rev. B. Gauld, was supportive of the ideas, but after fourteen years experience of the former 'regime' and a heavy work-load elsewhere, he played little part in the changes.

At the beginning, I concentrated on the weekly Mass and one visiting session for patients on the wards. Getting to know patients and gaining their trust was a slow process. But in listening to their stories and experiences, I was building up a profile of their specific spiritual and religious

needs and questions. It often stretched my patience to listen to their painful experiences of rejection and marginalization. Many patients felt abandoned by family, society and church. Being a mentally ill person in the state hospital is a very lonely corner of Scotland. Little wonder that patients asked questions like;

> 'Can a mentally ill person get to Heaven?
> 'Why me? Why me? Why me?
> 'What did Jesus say about mental illness?
> 'Will I ever get well again? I see no way out of here'.

These are some of the gems from hours of listening and conversations, much of which was incoherent and confused. But they reflected the reality of life for the patient at that time. In the context of a growing relationship of trust, they could ask the apparently 'stupid question', which became the 'gem' to work on. Thus patients could explore their own identity, who they belonged to, their self-esteem and value, their fears and hopes.

Indiginizing The Mission

"Why are all priests Irish?" was a patient's first question to a Provincial, who joined in the Eucharist one Saturday. Long before that I had become convinced of the patients' need for one of their own a Scottish and preferably Diocesan priest. Such an appointment, could also benefit staff – taking the West of Scotland denominational culture into account. Besides, our CM role is more and more to listen to the cry of poor people, respond in service and then indiginize that service/structure into the local Church – Diocese. This continuously frees us to move to new margins, where we are always guaranteed to discover ever poorer persons and families. Now that all staff had been issued with a 'Best Practice Statement – Spiritual Care' (cf appendix following), raising their awareness of spiritual needs and setting out structures and processes for responding to same, the time seemed right to indiginize. That Charter and the Opening of a new Chapel (on the 27th September '97), offers the new Chaplain a more sympathetic and collaborative working relationship with staff and vice versa.

Recruitment And Handover

Having received Community backing and encouragement, I met with Bishop Joseph Devine of Motherwell. I outlined the needs of Patients, the growth and development of the Chaplaincy and the desirability of now appointing one of his own priests as chaplain. I had previously given a presentation at a Deanery Meeting. Fr Harry O'Brien, the

General Hospital Chaplain, became involved and we began supplying for each other during holidays. In time, a Fr Paul Morton expressed an interest in the Patients. After five months 'come and see', much questioning and sharing, Paul was appointed Chaplain. During July 1997, we worked together – in-service training. Then, I withdrew from direct service but, in regular sessions, listened to Paul's experiences and talked through some of his joys and pains. I tried to pass on the best of what I had learned over six years. Even before Paul's interest in the chaplaincy, I had involved the Patients in the change – my own appointment coming to its end after six years. We accepted the importance of our relationship, but the central importance of the relationship with God/Jesus seemed to ease the pain of my going. 'He needs increase and I must decrease' is very challenging. But it was so rewarding to experience his youthful enthusiasm (12 years ordained) and his search for new and better ways to serve those poorest of poor women and men. The concluding event of the three months on-going support and training was our participation in the Chaplains' Conference at Ash worth. (Fr. Noel Travers' nephew gave us a teach-in). In these days of fewer priests, may the State Hospital Patients always have one to celebrate the Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick with them. Gratefully, in our present climate of growing lay involvement, good lay folks will become increasingly involved – receiving valuable 'Loucent' (Louise and Vincent) inspiration, formation and encouragement from Sr Cathy Doolan, DC, who continues the Daughter of Charity ministry.

So at last, all powerful Master, you give leave to your servant to go in peace… because my eyes have seen your salvation continuing for that group of your suffering ones. But to whom shall we go in New Mission? Along Gospel lines and in the spirit of Vincent, it will be to poorer brothers and sisters – e.g. some of those mentally ill people, discharged into an often non-existent Community Care. With such new poor people and through them, may I/We find Jesus Christ, suffering and healing as powerfully as I have found him in Carstairs '91-'97.

This sabbatical time of reflection and waiting in joyful hope is teaching me about our CM charism. and mission. May its outcome and my appointment convey a message to young diocesan priests, like Paul and Len Purcell (now chaplain to Deaf Folks in Glasgow) and to the various lay people, involved in those two former missions of ours, about the role and mission of a 1998 Vincent de Paul priest and Community, trying to enflesh Vincent's living out of the Good News for poor people in the next Millenium.

Some could eventually explore 'Who is God?' and how does this God relate to *me,* a mentally ill person and how do I relate to Him? At this stage, there were some very significant and meaningful celebrations

of the sacrament of reconciliation. The 'timing' of such celebrations demanded a great discernment and sensitivity. In all this the support, help and collaboration of others was vital.

Chaplaincy Team Work

The Church of Scotland Chaplain, Rev. Willox, has written about the good ecumenical relationship with the Vincentians in Lanark, when the hospital opened in the late 1940s. He praised Fr Dermot Sweeney in particular for the quality of relationships and commitment to Patients. He also noted the regrettable lack of continuity of care, due to the constant changing of priests involved in the chaplaincy work. Fr Scan Murphy CM was the first confrere to provide a degree of continuity of care and services.

Sister Eleanor Rogers, DC gave admirable and inspiring commitment to the patients. Her long experience with Mentally Handicapped Patients in Rosewell was invaluable and we did much sharing and planning together. We introduced a new Cantor who greatly enhanced the quality of singing at the weekly Eucharists. It proved more difficult to recruit a regular musician, but eventually a good guitarist added a new prayerfulness and joy to our celebrations. These committed lay folk were very important in the change-over to a new chaplain. Involving lay people in visiting the patients was a great challenge and I only managed to introduce three consistent visitors/helpers.

The Special Hospitals Chaplains' Conferences were a great support and learning experience for us. We gathered 2 or 3 times a year at Broadmoor, Ashworth and Rampton. In '93, we hosted the Conference at Carstairs for the first time. That event profiled Chaplaincy in a new light and way for the hospital management and staff.

Patient-Led Services

There was a slow, but growing acceptance of patients' needs and rights in the spiritual/religious sphere. We talked more with staff about discerning and learning to differentiate between mental illness symptoms and religious experiences. Mental illness does not rule out genuine religious experiences. We were forming a more consistent community of worshippers, where the over-religious and disillusioned patients became less dominant. The Word of God became more meaningful for some. This was greatly assisted, in my opinion, through using Fr Peter McDonagh's translation of the Sunday Lectionary Reading for Deaf People. Both patients and those trying to serve them were learning how to receive affirmation, consolation and challenge from Scripture and various liturgical prayers. Above all the struggle and example of Jesus can give encouragement in the struggle/work of getting 'better'. The

need for regular affirmation and the consistent assurance of God's Love and merciful forgiveness is great. The sacrament of reconciliation gives invaluable freedom of heart to those able to receive it.

That need for Reconciliation is often heightened as the mental illness is being cured and at times of special crisis, so it is an on-going process.

Some patients also taught me a new reverence for Holy Communion, through their deep felt sense of unworthiness; their eventual acceptance that the Lord only needs 'say the Word, and I shall be healed'. Some shared on the strength and life they could draw from Communion. Some of our favourite State Hospital Hymns captured and deepened these experiences.

Best Practice Statement
Spiritual Care

Whilst it is appreciated that the spiritual beliefs of patients are of a personal nature, nurses must be aware of the need to assess, plan, implement and evaluate spiritual care needs, in order to provide patient-focused care. Holistic care implies the recognition of the uniqueness and dignity of each individual and the provision of care to meet spiritual, as well as biopsychosocial needs (RCN, 1994. Guidance on Patient Focused Care)

Structures and Processes
To facilitate meeting patient's spiritual needs the Clinical Team, and in particular the nursing staff, should consider the following structures and processes.

1. A full spiritual assessment as part the holistic assessment of each patient.

2. The right and ability to attend religious services.

3. Access to the appropriate religious representatives on an individual, ad hoc, basis.

4. Re-assessment of spiritual needs in times of psychological crises, e.g., grief, bereavement, physical illness, admission, return to prison, etc.

5. Access to appropriate literature, e.g., pamphlets, texts and bibles etc.

6. Promotion of the services available via ward notice boards and the ward-patient booklets.

Outcomes

That patients will have:

Their spiritual needs assessed and recorded regularly
Knowledge of the range of services and literature available.
Access to their choice of services to meet both their everyday needs, and at specific times of increased need.

That nursing staff will have:

A greater awareness of the spiritual needs of their patient group.
A more active role in ensuring these needs are met
A more informed understanding of the patients' level of satisfaction with their spiritual care.

That religious representatives will have a greater involvement in patient care.

Towards a Theology of Captivity

Michael McCullagh CM

All movements towards liberation receive life from the wombs of oppressive regimes, whether from the Egypts and Babylons of history, from the memories of unjust institutions or from the totalitarian and ideological structures of contemporary society. From the experience of oppression comes the cry and the will to break the chains of structural injustice. However, what begins as a bid for liberation and equality often ends as another regime of similar oppression. How often in history have we seen the oppressed become the oppressor. This happens, I believe, firstly, because of humankind's refusal to accept that our world and its people have, from the beginning, existed in a state of captivity and, secondly, because of an unconscious belief that in making others captive we assert our own freedom.

This short article will offer some reflections on the lives of people who accepted the captivity of life and in this acceptance found God.

Theologizing in chains.

Leonardo Boff offers some reflections on the subject in his article, "Theology of Captivity".' First of all, he acknowledges the captivity of the world to evil and sin brought about because the world is something separate and different from God. Within this world of evil people are the captive victims of suffering and death, a captivity which generates and relies on hope in the promise of new life. "Sin", says Boff, "is the refusal to accept evil and suffering in the world". It is the desire to be like God. (Gen.3, 5). Above all it is the primary refusal to accept mortality.

I remember my teacher in Maryknoll once drawing the distinction between the consequential cross and the incarnational cross. One may endure a cross as a consequence of one's actions but from the moment of Incarnation Christ assumed a cross. There was indeed a cross in Bethlehem and because of that, life was given back in the crib on Calvary.

Here I reflect on Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward,*[2] itself a symbol not only of a country but of a world in captivity. In the course of this allegorical novel he says of one of his characters that someone was trying to "pull her out of the category of the criminally ill into the category of the hopelessly healthy". In failing to accept the captivity of our mortality, the author is, in effect, saying that we number ourselves among

the criminally ill. In these instances, humankind responds, says Boff, by "dreaming up ideologies of indefinite progress and of the human capacity to resolve, in time, all the serious problems that occur in society". People appoint themselves as saviours saying "we have the solution! Let us use power and, if necessary, violence to implement it. It is the iron law of history!"[3]

This does not mean that we accept oppression or captivity. Rather the memories of oppression must be kept alive so that what was inflicted on others in the past may not be inflicted on new generations today. There must always be hope. Working in the AIDS wing of a prison forced me to have hope. I knew there was hope for the men beyond death but something of the hopelessness of their double captivity in prison and in inevitable imminent death forced me to look for hope in the here and now. Their hope gave rise to freedom, life and joy: "We're incarcerated, we're terminally ill, we're free" said one of the men, perhaps the first living theologian I encountered in captivity. "Hope" said Boff, "is the hunch that imagination is more real and reality less real than would appear"[4] Later we shall see how many have had to rely on that imagination in all kinds of human captivities.

Human beings have had the inner resources to transform tyrannical oppression and captivity into a means of liberation. There is always that inner freedom which can never be taken away. In another of Solzhenitsyn's novels, *The First Circle,* he says that when the guards stripped the special category prisoners of every possession and every freedom they no longer had control of them. This in itself is an admission of an inner life and freedom which can never be made captive. "The human spirit", says Boff, "is capable of breaking chains while remaining in chains"[5] and that is because the inner spirit is more durable than the chains which bind it.

This human captivity is well expressed in George Herbert's *The Collar,* the collar meaning a clerical collar, the caller as in one who calls out or choler as in anger. His opening lines are a bid for liberation:

I struck the board and cried "no more, I will abroad!"

Struggling with his efforts at liberation he finally ends with peace when once more the inner spirit finds life in captivity;

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wilde
At every word,
Me thought I heard one calling, Child
And I reply 'd, My Lord

In the last few years we have come across countless stories where our Vincentian brothers and sisters have found themselves in captivity at home and abroad. In Harryville in Northern Ireland, our confreres found themselves under siege each Saturday night as they gathered with their faithful to celebrate the Eucharist.[7] Here too, I believe, our confreres did theology – they sought to seek with others of different faiths some understanding of what was happening and once more the human spirit endured.

Others have also found that inner freedom. Some years ago a man falsely accused and wrongly imprisoned, after losing yet another appeal wrote out the content of his dream and called it 'A Prisoner's Meditation'[8] One night he had the vivid impression that he was escaping with only a small stream to cross and then freedom. With his guards sixty seconds behind he sees a figure like Christ hanging on a tree. Perhaps it is Christ or another prisoner. It is now decision time. The man will die. Yet he requests a drink of water. The choice is between further unjust imprisonment or responding to the needs of a brother. "I feel the tears rise as I stoop with cupped hands to the cool stream. I raise them to his parched lips and he tries to drink. His head falls limp. He is dead. I am grabbed from behind and led away full of peace and joy at knowing that I did not pass "Him" by. In this I have discovered my true freedom".

We also have had the testimony of the hostages, Terry Waite, John McCarthy and Brian Keenan whose book *An Evil Cradling* [9] speaks of the creativity and durability of the human spirit. Having been beaten for fifteen minutes he heard a cry come from within him:

> *"A noise that I have never heard before, nor do I ever want to hear it again. I only know that it came from me, yet it did not come from me – It was a cry so awful and so excruciating, which came from some part of me, but was not so willed by me. It was a primordial sound fusing every moment of anguish in me. Where it came from I don't know, only that I was the vehicle through which it passed. That one awful anguished scream. Suddenly it was over. He stopped. It was as if that cry that came through me had silenced him".*

In our times we have observed the power of that collective silent scream of humanity in achieving freedom through creative nonviolence. This cry is expressed beautifully in a Latin-American song of liberation.[10]

> *Cuando no tenga esperanza*
> *buscare, buscare.*

The Captivity of the Incarnation

It is now accepted that Paul's letter to the Philippians was written in captivity. One can associate Paul's own imprisonment with the captivity theme of the kenosis hymn of 2:6-1 1. The hymn expresses his understanding of how Christ finds life and freedom in his captivity in the limitations of human nature 'even to accepting death on a cross'. In his death-acceptance he receives liberation on behalf of all humanity. The theme finds poetic expression in another hymn of Herbert's, *Easter Wings.*[11]

God has created beings with the fullness of life but they lose all until they identify with Christ in his emptiness. Then the poem builds up with the lines so printed on the page as to portray a dove in flight showing how humanity is enriched in its complete identity with the captivity of Christ expressed thus in the final line:

Thus shall the fall further the flight in me.

The Captivity of the Saints

Many of the saints speak of a captivity and none more so than Patrick in his *Confession.*[12] His freedom comes at two levels, first in the physical sense in being delivered from the bondage of slavery but also at a spiritual level where he had found himself captive to Satan. "I was", he says, "Like a stone lying in the deep mire and He who is mighty came and in His mercy lifted us up, and raised me also and placed me on top of the wall". Towards the end of his Confessions he says: "And me they put in irons".[13] In fact the word 'captivity' is used throughout his writings making reference at one point to the captivity experienced by women: "Greatest is the suffering of those women who live in slavery".[14] As with all others, Patrick too found God without having to break the chains of bondage. "God gave me a gift in the land of my captivity because I earnestly sought Him and there found Him".

St. John of the Cross, who died in 1591, nine years before St Vincent's ordination, experienced a physical capivity similar to that of a modern hostage compounded by the fact that it was at the hands of his own Carmelite brothers. His captivity was truly one of the Dark Night. He explains it in his poem: *En Una noche oscura*[15] (One Dark Night). If flame is his image for God, then night is the image for the journey, and especially the journey from captivity to freedom:

forgetting all my quest
ended, I stayed lost to myself at last
All ceased. My face was pressed
Upon my Love, at rest
with all my cares among the lilies cast.

Like the others in bondage John is writing this while still in his captivity in Toledo. Here he identifies with all of humanity in its bondage, especially as expressed in the Exultet. Light has come into darkness. The earth in its captivity is now united with heaven; the captives in Egypt move from the captivity of darkness to light, this is the night from which Christ rose into daylight, the night which forever holds within it the eternal banquet celebrating a freedom from east to west for all humanity. Night as the place of death now becomes the locus of resurrection:

> *Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth*
> *and humanity is reconciled to God!* [16]

The Captivity of Vincent and Louise

Fr Roman, speaking to those attending CIF in Paris in 1994 said of Vincent's captivity: "If we cannot disprove it, then it happened". While once happy to reside in the revisionist camp regarding the captivity, several re-readings of that "wretched letter"[17] in the context of this article has caused me to critique the event from the perspective of Vincent's dispositions. Like many others in captivity, he too reaches that moment of desperation where he discovers the God of deliverance: "God always kept alive in me the conviction that I would be freed because of my unceasing prayers to Him and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, through whose sole intercession I firmly believe I was delivered." Later he identifies with the Babylonian captivity when he sang Ps. 137 to one of the wives of his renegade master: 'Quomodo cantabimus in terra aliena' (how could we sing in a foreign land?) What Vincent did here was to praise God while still in chains. It brought about a triple deliverance, first of the Turkish wife who discovered that the eschato-logical moment is in the here and now, secondly the deliverance of the renegade from apostasy and, thirdly, Vincent's physical deliverance. Ironically he is still in spiritual captivity as he hopes that the vice-legate will provide him with a good benefice.

It is only much later, of course, that Vincent finds ultimate liberation from the chains of his ambitious aspirations. To do this he voluntarily traded worldly captivity for spiritual captivity. As chaplain in the court of Marguerite de Valois, Vincent takes on himself the imprisonment of near despair of a fellow chaplain, a doctor of theology assailed by great doubts. Immediately it was as if the chains were transferred. Vincent only found freedom in promising to consecrate the rest of his life to the service of the poor. "The taking of this resolution immediately banished the temptation, and banished it for life."[18]

Fr Hugh O Donnell once presented us with the rhetorical question: "Who was the poorest man St. Vincent ever met?[19] Himself, of course!

If, in fact, his captivity did happen then how greater would be his understanding of the captivity of St. Louise.

Vie Thorgren speaks of Louise's liberation from captivity as generativity, the movement whereby "an individual goes beyond the need to fulfil oneself into the capacity to give freely of oneself'.[20] It is above all dependent on being able to accept totally the limitations inherent in one's life story. Louise's Pentecost is the first step in her liberation, an invitation not to escape from her life as it evolved but to embrace all of her life and the suffering it entailed. The next step is her discernment in finally identifying and accepting Vincent as someone who would understand her captivity.

Finally, Louise who, in today's world, would be termed the unwanted, insecure child, found self-acceptance in the conviction that she belonged to God, that God was her God and that her own hidden life could be redeemed and regenerated in the life of Jesus hidden both in the womb of Mary and in Nazareth. So, Louise, wounded on her mother's side, moves to a security which enables her in a detached way to become mother to abandoned children, to the poor and her own sisters – it is an action totally redeemed, totally free of any element of campaign or redressing personal grievances and this we recognise as generativity or liberation.

The Captivities of Today

All of us wrestle with God from time to time, especially when the innocent suffer, when the good we strive to do is undermined by human weakness, when those we love become ill or die, and when the God of life and meaning is replaced by moments of darkness, emptiness and debilitating doubt. Gustavo Gutierrez in his book *On Job,*[21] asks how people can make sense of God in their captivity. They too, like Job, and like some of the people in this article, may have to wrestle with God. If, like them, they can continue to wrestle, the hope is that, one day, the stranglehold will change to a gentle embrace – the embrace of God in captivity.

Notes

1. 'Leonardo Boff; *The Structure of Moderity, Teologia desde el cautiverio,* (Indo-Arnerical Press Service, Chapinero – Bogota, 1975), pp. 112-126. Translated by David C. Kelly, M.M.
2. Alexander Solzhenitsyn: *Cancer Ward,* Penguin 1971, p.451.
3. Boff, ibid.
4. Boff, ibid.
5. Boff, ibid.

6. Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets.*
7. Our confreres, Frs. Frank Mullan, Eamon Cowan and Scan Johnson and their worshipping community were intimidated and their house and property attacked over a period of a year.
8. This meditation was given me courtesy of the author by Fr Dan O Connell CM.
9. Brian Keenan, *An Evil Cradling.*
10. Carolyn McDade: *This Tough Spun Web,* Womancenter at Plainville, Mass. 1987. When I don't have hope, I will search, I will search,
11. Gardner, ibid.
12. Patrick's *Confessions,* par. 12.
13. ibid. par,52.
14. ibid.par.42
15. Iain Matthew: *The Impact of Cod,* Hodder and Stoughton, '95.
16. The Exultet of the Easter Vigil.
17. Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents,* vol. I, July 24tk 1607.
18. Coste, *Life and Labours,* vol. 1, p.49.
19. In a retreat to the Convocation of the Anglo-Irish Province, 1989.
20. Vie Thorgren. *Vincentian Heritage.* 1991. vol. 12. p. 203
21. Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job, God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent,* Orbis, 1987, 93-103.

A Vincentian Association

Christine Crump

I was not happy when Fr Eugene asked me to write about our Vincentian association for 'Colloque', especially having read some of the inspiring articles of an earlier edition. But I owe him a favour and was encouraged by the brave reflections of a traveller lady in the last edition. So I hope in that tradition to do as asked and tell you something of our story – how we began, how I became involved, how it developed, the good points and bad, where we are now, our hopes for the future.

The seed was planted some years ago in the mid-80s, I think, when a lay woman contacted the DC Provincial to discuss the possible development of a Vincentian lay association of people involved with 'the poor'. She herself had a Theology degree, making a special study of Vincentian spirituality, had trained as a spiritual director and belonged to a Vincentian prayer group. Professionally she taught in a secondary school and was also part of a retreat team. At present, the only way she could gain access to the Vincentian family and its spiritual riches, as a lay person, was by joining the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, adding voluntary work to an already pressing list of commitments. Could there not be a place for her and people like her in an association of lay people working to create a caring community but in a wider field?

The sisters responded by offering the help of a provincial counsellor to explore the possibility. She has remained with us as adviser and spiritual director. Three more women and two CMs were invited to meet on the feast of Saint Vincent to consider the idea. All lived in south-east England – a retired lady, a friend of one of the priests, a former sister who earned her living by providing a service for elderly, housebound people and myself with a young family, parish involvements and part-time work on estates in an inner-London borough. Personally I thought it was a great idea. I had been with the sisters a short time but my own spiritual well, shallow enough to start with, was approaching empty as involvements had increased. What particularly appealed, daft as it might seem in the light of papal teaching, was the recognition of my working life as a valid contribution to "building up the Kingdom". In those days, of the late '80s, our community education work included the training of council tenants to be able to respond to recent housing legislation – but working life and parish life were two different worlds. It seemed that for

me and so many people I could think of, this new network could offer meaningful spiritual nourishment and mutual support, an opportunity to become better news for the poor. For people with limited experience of contact with the poorest, there was a family that could introduce them.

The little group continued to meet informally and intermittently in London; more were invited. Our leader prepared material – from the Gospel, church teaching, the writings of Saint Vincent. We reflected, shared our experiences and celebrated the Eucharist. A sister or priest joined in, sometimes both. More people came and went, sometimes travelling from as far as Wales or the north of England. Spiritual direction was available so that commitment was a consequence of reflection and choice rather than willy-nilly 'do-gooding'. Balance and a sense of proportion were encouraged between family responsibilities that took priority and additional involvements. We were introduced and warmly welcomed to Damascus House, a Vincentian retreat and conference centre in north London. A few of us, who lived near each other, began to meet on a fortnightly basis; we started a do-it-yourself newsletter to keep in touch with the others and agreed that we would all try to meet twice or three times a year. There was networking in other ways as people got to know each other better. We were by now about fourteen people, mainly women in our thirties, forties, fifties; some single, some married; housewives, nurses, teachers, social- and community-workers, volunteers. There was a wide variety of involvement with people sometimes described as "socially excluded" – in family, neighbourhood or workplace. Some people were politically active.

As time went on – a year or two – structure, an ever unpopular topic, was addressed. There had been fear that to encourage us would be counter-productive for the SVP who were mounting a renewal drive. Our little group was invited by the sisters to develop 'under the umbrella' of AIC, another Vincentian lay association that no one had heard of. The Association International des Charités is, in fact, the name now given to the former Confraternities and Ladies of Charity initially organised by Saint Vincent himself.

The Charities had spread internationally, usually at the instigation of sisters or priests; leadership was traditionally from the French association and direction the responsibility of the Superior General of the CMs. After Vatican II and a desire to update, a Rome general meeting of delegates revised the Constitution, elected a lay president and executive board, and provided for the involvement of DCs and CMs as advisers and spiritual directors. There would be a secretariat in Brussels and the charity registered under Belgian law. A four-yearly assembly of delegates would

reflect, elect and set operational guidelines. All National Associations were invited to re-join; most did, retaining their old name; "Señoras de Caritad" in the Latin American countries, Karitas Deutchland in Germany; Vincentian Volunteers in Italy; Equipe Française in France. The British and Irish Ladies of Charity retained their name but preferred not to belong to the new association.

Literature (a lot of literature!) was sent to us from Brussels; The Constitution and associated documents, leaflets and handbooks, information on how to set up an office, develop a national network and instigate voluntary work 'under project form', and more. A small delegation visited us, reporting back enthusiastically. As a 'new shoot' we were asked to host the next bi-annual meeting of the executive board in London so that our little group could meet them and discuss the usefulness of involvement. We hurtled into the world of simultaneous translation and international conference procedures. The Damascus House staff and our good friend, the then national SVP president, gave wonderful help in organising and welcoming. The executive board members were impressive women, warm, able and committed. We enjoyed mealtime informality and their stories. Certainly we shared common aims but how were we to marry the requirements of a large voluntary organisation with those of a small support group. Sadly our leader would decide not to participate, having done so much; a number of people did not return.

Those of us left decided to soldier on and give it a try. A committee formed. By now it was 1990.

Thanks to continued help from the sisters, not least financial support, we were able to sample international Vincentian life. Representatives went to AIC assemblies in Assisi (1990) and Guatemala (1994), to European conferences on the European Union (1995), Asylum seekers (1996) and Domestic Violence (1998). We were invited to the celebrations in Rome for Saint John Gabriel Perboyre. The AIC International president and European vice-president spoke at a Vincentian family event in Liverpool. Arrangements were made for two of our members to visit the work of a mature association in Mexico. Because of its corporate size, AIC has consultative representation at the UN, the EU, the Vatican and other international bodies; we were able to follow its work with and on these structures through the thrice-yearly 'Bulletin' and on occasions, when there were NGO (Non-Governmental Organisations) meetings in the London area, represent them.

'Grass roots' work, experienced at first hand in Guatemala and Mexico, second hand through the Bulletin, was so impressive. Where possible we organised financial support, but the experience of life without national

insurance in an economically hostile and physically dangerous environment broadened our horizons and sensitivity in a way nothing else could. At home we introduced ourselves to the sisters in different parts of the country, considered and tried ways of involving new people: looked at different types of formation material: tried different ways of meeting. Our status within AIC was a 'group in formation' so we did our best to respond to requirements. A good deal of clerical work became necessary and we were indebted to the sisters for giving us office space and some help in the Provincial House in Mill Hill. There was financial help as well. Annually, those of us who could held an AGM to chart a course for the coming year. When we got stuck there was assistance from a small CM/DC advisory group. In practical terms, we were helped to design a leaflet, and circulate a monthly newsletter with a 'pause for thought' section that could be used individually or for our own meetings. We decided to apply for associate rather than full AIC membership; which would obligate us to articles 1 and 3 of the Constitution only;

> "As an association, feminine or mixed, founded by Saint Vincent de Paul or in keeping with his tradition with a philanthropic, religious and pedagogic objective" (article I.)
>
> for the advancement and development of the underpriviledged, the combat against all material, physical, moral and spiritual forms of poverty and suffering in any country whatsoever, without political or religious discrimination (as) a witness of the Charity of Christ in the Tradition of St Vincent de Paul, (article 3.)

We believed that in this way we could retain our original purpose as a support group whilst allowing scope for those who chose to develop thoughtful voluntary work.

So where are we now? As a network we have strengthened; we know each other better; our monthly newsletter is a means to communicate with home and abroad and a tool of formation. Twice a year, as many of us as can come together for a vincentian family day in London in September and a general meeting in Liverpool in March. We participate in AIC international events as we can.

And what of the poor? Have they benefited at all from our efforts – in our families, neighbourhoods, at work? We have tried to be selective in our recruitment, seeking from the outset members who include people who have a disability, are from different ethnic backgrounds, education and income. For those of us whose involvement is mainly

in family and neighbourhood, there is the challenge of serious illness, handicap, mental illness, divorce and bereavement, unemployment and redundancy, alcoholism and drug abuse, asylum and prison. In our first newsletter years ago, I remember an article saying that commitment to the poor was not an abstraction, a promotion of '-isms', but in knowing names and faces, having friends among them. These people certainly do and we are all enriched by it.

Nine of us, in state health, education or community care, experience the frustration of the patient with limited personal care due to staff rationalisation; the child with learning difficulties in a class of 32; the deaf young person and his family who had such expectations; the unemployed person without qualifications; the mother dreading the next domestic trauma. We hope our patients, students, clients receive a more personal and peaceful as well as professional service in a world that evaluates by numbers; and that their voice is heard in our representation to policy makers. Our network gives encouragement to do this.

Eleven of the group have developed voluntary projects – as a consequence some deaf people in Paisley now have a liturgy group and diocesan priests, training in signing; some elderly housebound people in Liverpool, formerly in dire straits, enjoy loyal friendship and a practical service; some mentally ill people, rarely visited in their hospital ward, have music; isolated people in Bexley have a 'meeting place' to enjoy or volunteer in; bereaved people have a community counselling service. Some of us who volunteer have done so in existing services belonging to a deanery third world fund-raising team or as a facilitator for the 'Beginning Experience' for divorced or bereaved people. We are now about two dozen but there are many others now volunteering in our projects or through the network links that would not otherwise have been involved. In Bexley alone this is well over a hundred.

What then have been the advantages of a Vincentian association linked with AIC? The association, I think, has helped us hang on and try to find a way of relating to such upheavals as there are in family, neighbourhood and working life at the end of this century. For most of us, our spiritual/Christian life had not kept pace either. Most of us had no training in reflection nor had experienced spiritual direction. There had been little to attract us to learn more of our faith and talk together. Those of us at work were struggling in the outside lane of high-speed patchwork service – and mission statements that were rarely backed up with resources. Those at home had limited means or models of involvement, and words like 'marginalisation', 'solidarity', 'social exclusion', 'structural action' belonged to the loony left of politics – another world.

AIC introduced most people to the widely held circular practice of involvement for personal development, not assistance, and gave practical examples. We were introduced to papal teaching – suggestions for Millenium preparation, guideline articles on topics such as refugee work and statements relating to the role of women as well as major documents. Bejing and Istanbul conferences became more than newspaper headlines as our opinions were sought.

We experienced the warmth of Vincentian welcome, from sisters, priests and SVP and the liveliness of Vincentian Volunteers. Involvement with other groups and organisations, religious and secular, brought appreciation of the great desire for a global caring/sharing world in most walks of life, corny as that might sound and unlikely as it appears to be from normal media coverage.

And the difficulties… we have come a long way from the original intention of being an informal support group. It seems to me there have been three major problems: trying to respond to different expectations of members and sharing the necessary work to keep us afloat and, the biggest one; that to be a lay vincentian you must volunteer. Ironically (providentially?) where there has seemed to be nothing but success has been in the developing of involvements with and for the poor. (I imagine Saint Vincent would have an opinion about that!) With regard to expectations; some, who preferred an association that would be similar to a Carmelite or Franciscan 'third order' were disappointed. The Vincentian communities may have considered this development themselves; but it would be beyond our capacity to do so. Others, particularly those with family involvements, wanted a more flexible structure and grass roots rather than committee or clerical involvement. Those members with the enthusiasm and skills for organisation lived too far apart to meet regularly. Invariably most of this work has been done by the one living nearest the office with limited skills for the job (myself). Lastly, in my experience, ordinary parishioners have difficulty seeing as vincentian a professional choice to work in a difficult area (but you get paid for that!); to talk over possible involvement with a local volunteers bureau ("they aren't catholic"); to join a tenants' association or, worse, a political party ("they're all awful") or to include, in extended family gatherings, those usually left out.

Our hopes for the future? To date, the involvement of vincentian sisters and priests on our journey has been invaluable; when they are with us, at meetings or in other ways, there is enrichment. We have been heartened by the recent work of Fr Maloney in developing the concept of Vincentian family with a common formation and, when possible, shared

tasks. This, we hope, will include an appreciation of our heritage and an attempt at understanding the present local, national, European and global scene in which we figure. As lay people we are poorly educated to understand its frame work or appreciate our own responsibility or potential in taking useful action. With this in mind, we look forward to the Vincentian Justice initiative to be considered in London in Spring 1998. In terms of our membership and activity, we have, as yet, no members who are house-bound or have no home, are in hospital, prison or institution, at college or school. It seems to me that, to include birds of every kind, a mustard seed can grow to develop the accommodating branches, given the appropriate conditions. For this we need the support and example of vincentian sisters and priests who devote their lives to the growth of a sharing, inclusive community and who are open to the wider involvement of others.

‘A Year with a Difference’
(The Vincentian Volunteers)

Barbara Quilty DC

“Welcome to a year with Vincent de Paul,” we say to prospective Vincentian Volunteers when we send them our information pack. And as I sit here at the desk I know that “welcome” extends to me, and to all the others who will be involved with the volunteers during the year. In this, my first year as the Director of the Vincentian Volunteers, I have been invited to a year with a difference. I have been invited to “let go” of other wonderful experiences and enter into the world of a group of young people who, perhaps for the first time, are moving out of their known environment and entering into the world of poor people, of distressed and vulnerable people, and somehow they are saying to me, “Come with us as we step out on this journey, share your story with ours and be part of our dream – a dream that we cannot yet put words on, but we know that Vincent de Paul is involved in it.” And so I have set out on this journey with them, confident that I will meet Vincent and Louise in a new way as I see them through the eyes of these young adults who are not afraid to take risks, who are open to the unexpected and who know that this year will somehow change their lives. I invite all of you who will read this reflection to share in our journey!

Let me tell you something about the spirit in which we live and work. The Vincentian Volunteers sprang from an original inspiration of the Daughters of Charity about seven years ago and the organisation is now under the trusteeship of the Daughters, the Vincentian Fathers and the St Vincent de Paul Societies of England & Wales and Scotland. It is for young people who have been moved by the spirit of Vincent and Louise de Marillac – maybe by a letter, a word, a poster or a person – to a belief that somehow Christ is alive in the hearts of all people and particularly in those who are poor. Carol, a current volunteer, has been able to say: *I never thought I would learn to see the face of Jesus in everyone 1 meet.”* Other volunteers have been touched by the phrase, *“the love of Jesus leaves us no option.”* And so they have come, and they stay, and they offer generous, respectful, loving service to those to whom they are sent.

The volunteers come from a broad spectrum of nationalities, cultures and religious backgrounds, and this diversity adds great richness to the group. They offer service in many different areas: with people who are

homeless or in prison, without hearing or sight, or with a learning disability. They work with children – including the blind or terminally ill. Sometimes their service is to families; to the elderly or lonely; to young people, particularly those in difficulty. It is a new world for most of these volunteers, but a world in which they show they can be at home.

Of course the year is not only about service. It is about living with one another, sharing life with one another and praying together, and it has been so lovely to see the depth to which they can enter with each other.

And like all of us, when they give and share they also receive. I can see the insights into themselves that come when they reflect on their experiences. I can see how they are letting themselves grow and change because of the people with whom they come in contact. They learn to appreciate little things, unimportant things. Dagma will remember for ever that Barry took her hand and said *"Thank you, Dagma,"* on Christmas Day, just a couple of days before he died. Charlotte felt recognised when George simply said *"Cheers, Charlotte!"* when she did a little service for him. And as they go along they are building up skills of listening, of empathising and of understanding the difficulties others face.

The volunteers gain many professional skills from the in-service training given at their place of work, skills that will be useful for the rest of their lives. Each month brings new levels of responsibility and a deepening of their own self awareness.

For the volunteers to get the best out of the year, they need a good support structure, which I hope we provide – a structure for work as well as for daily living. They have all been able to respond very positively to their individual work supervisors as well as to their respective local co-ordinators, each of whom visits weekly for a meal, prayer and discussion with the group. Like all of us, the volunteers blossom under the affirmation and encouragement given by those who support them. Every six weeks they have time to meet as a group for their own formation, and each time they come – from Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool and London – there is a new depth to their level of understanding. As they meet together, I look at them and know that Vincent and Louise would be at home in their company. The letter below somehow reflects what is happening in the lives of the eighteen young adults who are trying to respond to Vincent de Paul as he bids them welcome:

Dear Kerri,
It is a strange feeling, being in prison. Your life tends to be turned upside down and all the things you are used to are temporarily put to one side.

Your individuality is gone and you become simply a number. The officers are obviously doing their job but you cannot forgive the contempt some of them have towards you. When I became a mess worker I was given a degree of self esteem back. Although I remained a number, a small amount of pride and self respect returned for the job I did. This was not enough. I like people to call me by my first name. I like the touch of personality. This is where you come in.

In the four months I stayed in Strangeways, I was either called by my surname or by my number. You were the first person in all that time to ask me my first name. No matter how trite that may sound, it felt good and I am deeply grateful for it. The constant smile on your face was something to look forward to.

Thank you for your kindness.

John (not his real name)

This letter from 'John' to Kerri reflects what this year of service is about. 'John's' journey had taken him to prison, where he met Kerri, whose journey had led her from university in the USA to that prison in Manchester. Because of her awareness of him as a person and her love and understanding, 'John' was able to begin to share his story with her, a story of pain and fear, but with a sense of hope for the future.

Kerri was probably unaware of the way in which she was affecting 'John' or any of the other prisoners and their families. She was just being herself. And the other Vincentian Volunteers are living like this too. They are working with some of the most vulnerable people in our society and serving them with respect and love. Tom, a volunteer in London, says he finds the experience "challenging, interesting and ultimately quite fulfilling," while Catherine, aged eighteen, could write "*I am experiencing the happiness of living in a community, where we soon become friends, and of working with those who are marginalised, whilst keeping in mind the inspiring spirit of St Vincent.*" And Fran continued in this vein when she said, "*I am being helped to understand St Vincent's devotion and love for the poor and how God is within everybody.*"

These are not the words of people just doing a job. They are words of young people who know how to dream dreams. They are seeing something of the value of each person, no matter how deprived or distressed that person might be. Somehow they are touching the mystery of life and death. I am asking myself the question: What is it that makes our volunteers, ordinary young people, give up a year of their lives and perhaps a good job or a chance to travel, to come and live with people

they have never met before, in a strange area or country, to live a very simple life and do work that is very demanding, emotionally wearing and not always rewarding, and do this in a way that reflects happiness, even joy?

Would Vincent and Louise be at home in their company? Of course they would! Only today someone said to me that if Vincent de Paul were alive today he would sit down in the company of the Vincentian Volunteers and enjoy a cup of tea with them! I wonder… and wonder. What is this way of life saying about the Church today? There are so many questions, so many aspects on which to reflect.

"The Love of Jesus leaves us no option". Is this too religious for today's world? Not according to the volunteers. Kez, working in Newcastle, said it was this phrase which originally caught her eye and ultimately helped her to decide where to apply. Others recognised a truth for themselves in her words, and asked that we would not lose sight of them. The volunteers are-aware that their journey, their story, is now linked in a special way to the journey and the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the midst of working with those who are hungry, lonely, disabled or dying, they are being touched in ways they had not imagined. As Anthony, in Liverpool, could write: *"In serving my brothers and sisters I am experiencing a new strength and a new attitude in my heart… It is a very special atmosphere which has been created in the name of Jesus"*. Jess and Charlotte both described themselves as "privileged" in being able to offer a year of service. What is also remarkable is not only the dedication and generosity of their service, but the way in which the volunteers befriend each other – sharing meals on a limited budget, praying with one another, going out to things together, and generally sharing life. There is also a willingness and ability to reflect on life as it is happening all around them. They do this in a respectful, non-judgmental way. The support system helps, but in the end it is the volunteers themselves who bring the programme to life and who carry the people whom they serve, calling them, not "the poor", but Barry or Eric, John or George…

I speak to Vincent and Louise myself and again ask them what they think! I see them smiling at me, saying "We have been around for a long time in the Vincentians, the Daughters, the Ladies, and in the whole Vincentian Family, and we recognise the Vincentian Volunteers as new members who will lead us into the 21st century in the spirit of Jesus, who washed the feet of his friends. Stay with them!"

Melissa, working in Newcastle, catches the mood, the questions, the risks, and maybe the outcome when she quotes:

"We speak of poverty of being poor of going to the poor
and I wonder if we won't learn
that the most profound sense of poverty is just this fact
of accepting ourselves as human persons
each day accepting and choosing
to be more human, more person
to risk the poverty of our person
the poverty of openness
the poverty of encounter
to risk being known by others
not to risk is too costly."

When Jesus washed Peter's feet he said to him, *"At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but you will understand later."* Jesus is still speaking; to me, to the volunteers, to all of us who are ready to listen with our hearts. Welcome!

The Changing Face of Mission

Jay Shanahan CM

We closed a week of mission on Saturday 14 February. The mission took place in Longford and the theme was apt – "Kindle in us the fire of your love".

I have two memories of that Mass. One is Bishop Colm O'Reilly standing in front of 1200 people during the presentation of gifts with a large red heart-shaped balloon in his hand and a smile on his face. Of all the bishops I have met in parish missions none typifies the gentleness of Christ more than Colm. My other memory is his words of thanks and congratulations. Colm concluded "…we cannot change the culture of the times in which we live – but we can change the morale…"

Last November, we were working in Limavady, Co. Derry. The parish priest there was Fr Michael Collins. In his time in Long Tower, he had experienced several Vincentian teams – Jim Tuohy, Aidan Galvin, Michael McCullagh, Reggie Deaton and myself. At the end of the week in Limavady, Michael made an astute observation. He compared our development to the Edinburgh Arts Festival. The Festival had run well and drew considerable crowds for many years. However the attendance began to wane in the 1980's. Rather than close the Festival, the organisers set about developing 'fringe events' that were many in number but were geared to small groups – his opinion was that the same was happening in regard to parish mission and in this regard our approach was unique.

So how has our work of mission tried to confront the morale and the climate within which we work?

In October, Paul Roche, Jimmy Sheil, Aidan Galvin, John Joe Spring and Dorrie Balfe, (two members of staff in All Hallows) spent a weekend in Manchester. The purpose of that weekend was to prepare for a mission that would take place in April 1998. On their return, Paul and Jimmy both commented on the optimism that existed in the consciousness of the people that they met in Manchester. This was in stark contrast to the prevailing attitude of many good people that we meet in Ireland at present. Working in Ireland, I have often said that I felt like a life-guard standing in the middle of the Sahara. We are highly trained – we have an invaluable service to offer to those around us – but for whom?

Present Realities

A recent RTÉ documentary stated that the current Mass practice rate among Irish Catholics is 60% – to me that is generous – I would have said that 50% might reflect a more accurate figure. I worked in Ballymun in 1989 – the practice rate was 12%. I returned to the same parish in 1995 – it had dropped to 6%.

Our presentation at the Paris Summer Course in 1997 presented us with a challenge that has helped to focus our minds in this regard. At a team meeting in preparation for the Paris paper we asked ourselves "What has changed in Ireland to effect such a radical shift in religious practice?" We concluded that the shift was due to several factors. But beyond the obvious considerations of economic prosperity and clerical scandals one could sense a deep sense of communal isolation that left many alienated. That alienation was due to the inability of an institutional church, incapable of grappling with problems of an emerging culture in a practical pastoral way. Within this emergent culture one could identity several alienated groups that find in the structure of a traditional church no place to lay their head. They might be listed as follows:

a. Reflective women who are not attracted to a church which has proved itself slow to accept failure for indiscretions of the past and criticisms of the present.
b. Groups of people whose way of living does not adhere to the officially sanctioned patterns of sexual behaviour and who effectively feel excluded from the church.
c. A yawning gulf between youth pop-culture and perceived stagnant adulthood.
d. A liturgy detached from life – as culture and Catholicism drift further apart, many will utter in weary fashion – why bother ?

The land of saints and scholars has rapidly become a valley of dry bones – a land where the Lamb of God and the Celtic Tiger do not rest easily side by side.

Emerging Voices

A new church is emerging in Ireland. It reflects many of the following characteristics:

a. It is more community based, less dependent on institutions or education as vehicles of control and order,
b. There is a greater sense of people choosing to belong.
c. Far more participation, less clerical domination.

d. More concerned with needs and problems of society.
e. Less occupied with 'self-preservation' and a 'perfect society'.
f. More prayerful, less dogmatic.
g. More scripturally nourished, less centred on the sacraments.
h. More trusting of women and the young.
i. More given to listening than dictating.

It is to such a church that we, as a mission team, need to direct our energy and expertise and such a model of church has been the foundation on which we have reshaped the orientation of the of mission team in Ireland.

Structuring a Week of Mission

In recent years the emphasis in missions has been placed on a collaborative approach to mission. The events outlined below are an attempt to involve people of the parish at all levels in order to generate a boost in spiritual and communal morale. The main emphasis is towards the uniting of groups around a common goal – the rekindling of a fire that was so central to Longford and the different parishes that we meet.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON – SERVICE OF LIGHT

The week of Mission generally begins from an historical context. For that reason, we try where possible to connect with our inherited faith. This may be done through a short ceremony of light. Ideally, we choose one of two locations:

– a place of local historical significance; mass-rock, ancient cemetery, monastic ruins or
– a local cemetery

The emphasis may be on the creation story, the wonder of nature or events of local history. A small fire is lit, symbolising the transmission of faith. Traditional music can enhance this event greatly. A resume of the local history is often used. The Mission Lantern is then lit and this will be used later at the beginning of the Vigil Mass.

GENERAL FORMAT:

1. Greeting and short history
2. Scripture Reading
3. Short Account of local history
4. Lighting of Fire and candles of others present
5. Decade of Rosary for those who have died and concluding prayer.

SATURDAY EVENING – VIGIL MASS:
Darkness – Lucernarium: As the Lantern Bearer from the cemetery carries the light into the darkened church the children/young adults from the local school light the candles of the congregation for the Liturgy of the Word.

SUNDAY MORNING:
The Sunday masses follow a pattern that is normal to the parish

'Blessing Service For Babies' – follows the last morning Mass. This service is about 20 minutes in length. Planning for this event could include an invitation to all the infants of the parish (pre- and post-baptism). For many this will be their introduction to the week of mission, for some it will be their only involvement. That is the reality of parish life and religious practice.

MONDAY-FRIDAY:
* Morning Masses are celebrated as is traditional in the week of mission.
* Evening Service (with Hymns, Gospel, Teaching and Ritual Prayer is consistent with Missions of the past).
* A visit to the Primary School takes place after Mass on Monday
* Visitation of the Housebound during the week
* Confession takes place after the early Mass and Evening Service.

SATURDAY:
Mass of Our Lady – includes the blessing and distribution of the Medal of Our Lady.

The Week of Mission closes with the Vigil Mass of Saturday evening.

The 'Fringe Events'
The following may prove to be of interest when the time of planning a week of mission is being planned:

BLESSING OF GRAVES
This is an event that has proved very popular, especially in rural parishes. The event includes the blessing of individual graves and is normally planned for Sunday afternoon.

BLESSING OF PETS
an event that could take place on Saturday afternoon or at a time deemed appropriate – it is a short ceremony of 20 minutes that holds a particular attraction for children.

INFANT MEMORIAL SERVICE

In Autumn 1995, we devised a memorial service for those who have experienced prenatal, natal or infant bereavement. The service includes the establishment and blessing of an appropriate plot to commemorate the infant dead. The favoured time for this ceremony (about 30 minutes long) is a Saturday morning.

1998 – Mission Strategy

OPEN SESSIONS:

These sessions follow the morning mass. Ideally they are conducted in a location other than the church and are preceded by a cup of tea/coffee. The aim is to explore our faith in a holistic way and the sessions constitute an informal programme of adult education.

The sessions are about an hour in length, are informal and may be presented by a member of the team or an invited speaker with expertise in a particular area. Topics include:

– Prayer and ways of praying/Lectio Divina/Gospel Sharing Bereavement and Loss Coping With Addiction Parenting/The Changing Nature of Family The Role Of Lay people in the Church
– Growing In Self-esteem
– The Value of the Credit Union
– Changes in the Church/The New Catechism
– Let's Talk About It – an open forum on a particular issue

Additional suggestions for topics are always welcome and the sessions may also be conducted at night after the evening service if desirable.

PARISH SOCIAL:

This could be planned for the Friday night of the week of Mission and has the obvious opportunity of bonding a community.

PRAYER AROUND THE CROSS:

This service is part of an Evening Service. It is an ideal opportunity for the promotion of ecumenical awareness and prayer.

RECONCILIATION SERVICE:

This service constitutes one of the Evening Services.

SERVICE OF HEALING:
On one of the evenings in the week of mission, there is a special service of healing. This is a blessing service and is different from sacramental anointing or sacramental reconciliation.

SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING:
The week always includes a service of sacramental anointing. Several possibilities exist for the time and manner in which this may take place.

SUNDAY (AFTERNOON EVENTS)
Other parishes have found greatest benefit in organising diverse Parish Events:

* PARISH EXHIBITION
offering individuals and groups:
– an opportunity to promote awareness of their activities
– to display their talents and achievements
– and serves to deepen a sense of community pride.
– the possibility of attracting new members.

* FAMILY FUN DAYS
offer creative ways of building community bonds through organising of games, competitions, face-painting, charity auctions etc.

NATURE WALK
planned and organised by local community.

CHILDRENS' CONCERT
where local talent exists, this is ideal for Sunday evening – 40 minutes would be an ideal length and the church might be used.

TABLE QUIZ:
A purely social event that is most effective when organised on a Monday or Tuesday night. Our experience has shown that a pub, hotel or GAA centre is the best possible venue.

VIGIL OF PRAYER:
The concept of a night of prayer has proved very popular. This would obviously depend on the type of parish, but many smaller parishes have successfully organised such an event
– on the Saturday night, concluding with Mass at 6 a.m. on Sunday morning or
– on the Friday night at the end of the week concluding with Mass on the Saturday morning.

The task of leading the hour can be allotted to the different social or spiritual groups of the parish – each taking one hour with tea/coffee available in a suitable location.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE:

Paul Roche has a very powerful image in his closing sermon. It is a story of St. Vincent returning to Paris after being away. St Vincent recalls how he feared the walls of Paris would cave in on top of him because he had returned and left souls neglected in a particular parish.

When I look at areas of neglect in a period of mission two problems come to mind that we have never been able to address. I believe these problems lie beyond the remit of a mission team – but they exist nevertheless:

1. THE YOUNG:

The absence of the 16-30 year olds is glaringly obvious at most missions we undertake. Even in 10 years, the changing nature of family and family life-style could be measured by the presence – or absence – of young adults. Even the concept of challenging them to be involved in one night of mission is waning. A long school day and part-time work may be offered as two explanations – but there is a third that has a greater ring of truth about it – irrelevance. Their absence does not express a "no" vote – rather it communicates that they are unaware that they are even expected to vote at all. It is not rejection – it is more a case that they never even considered the possibility of acceptance. When involved in a night of mission, they will deliver and deliver generously but, despite all encouragement, it will be for one night. This is particularly true for urban areas. In a word their attitude is one of indifference. The problem is one of creative evangelisation.

2. PERPETUATION

How do we perpetuate the quest for religious meaning that a mission engenders ? So often the seeds die, despite all the efforts to foster even the smallest initiatives. These initiatives are choked in our experience by two forces;

a. Zeal of the local clergy who lack the energy or desire to inspire those initiatives – and, far worse, control events by strategic neglect,
b. A lack of direction and confidence on the part of the laity that leads to a derailing of efforts by particular interest groups whose vision becomes limited.

The answer to these two problems might well rest in one of the following

1. Youth Mission – geared specially to the young – involving considerable pre-mission planning and structuring
2. A Programme of Evangelisation planned well in advance of a Parish Mission with continuous presence
3. A Pioneer Parish – abandon 15 or 16 missions in a year – settle for 2/3 and work intensively there – ensuring from the outset that we are given a free-hand in what we seek to do.

Conclusion

On January 1st, Maureen Treanor was appointed administrative co-ordinator of the mission team. She is also employed in All Hallows in the area of developing mission. This double appointment has created space for greater lay involvement in parishes and Maureen helps to structure programmes for parishes with whom we have been involved. This is a major step in a move towards a greater degree of adult education in our missions.

The next chapter in the story of the mission team must surely be the involvement of someone with the necessary skills for youth ministry. That someone may come from within the campus of All Hallows or from one of our current ministries – but such a person would give us the breadth of approach in our task.

As of now, February 1998, there is no shortage of work. We are fully booked until November 1999 and there are several requests pending for 2000. Mary MacPhilips, the administrator of Purcell House, works with us in the area of team development. Fr Joe Mullan, a past student of Castleknock, has commenced working with us in the area of communications. Interaction with the All Hallows staff helps us to maintain a theological perspective in our task of mission. Before our eyes the team has effectively widened. In spite of the prevailing culture, we have survived – and succeeded – in our efforts to bring good news to the poor.

Our involvement with parishes has always been one of response. We go where we are invited. Consequently most of our missions have been not to the materially poor – but to those who experience profound poverty in their relationships – with themselves, with others and with God. Perhaps a new millennium could see us take a new initiative in this regard.

A table quiz, a blessing of pets or a valentine balloon may seem far from the coal face of human poverty but they are tiny episodes in one chapter of the history of Mission in this province and they bear testa-

ment to a fidelity to the tradition of St. Vincent – "Your challenge is to be creative – even to the point of infinity."

Much ink has been spilled, many words have been spoken – both temperate and intemperate – about our mission as Vincentians. For each of us, in a culture we cannot change, Bob Maloney's words to us in Dax last year may serve as a timely boost to our morale whatever our field of endeavour "…over the course of the church's history, mission has taken on many forms: preaching, teaching, witnessing, crusading, dialoguing, counselling, accompanying, liberating … there is no doubt about our calling… all of us are missionaries…"

Reflections of a Vincentian Mother

Maureen Treanor

The work of mission has been central to the vision of the Vincentian Family since its foundation by Vincent de Paul. Mission and renewal was his work. Bringing good news to the poor was and is central to the life not just of the Congregation of the Mission but to the whole Christian family.

In Ireland, the Mission Team has seen many changes in the work of Parish mission over the past years. Parish life is changing and evolving and is quite different to what it was twenty years ago. The future of many parishes may lie in having small groups of committed people similar to the small Christian communities of Latin America. The days when a team of priests arrived in a parish to give a mission with perhaps just a week's notice have long since gone.

In the culture of our time, parish mission is no longer a package neatly worked out by a small team and delivered within the walls of the Church to a listening, receptive crowd. It can now be described as a process of renewal which is entered into by a community, working together with their priests to bring about renewal both in individuals and in the community. This process is carefully planned and prepared for by the people of the parish and its success or failure cannot be quantified by numbers attending church services.

It is into this style of evolving mission that I came in 1994.1 had just completed the Lay Ministry course and the B.A. in All Hallows. I had first hand experience of mission in my own parish. In 1992, the team came to Portmarnock to celebrate mission with us. My experience then was as a member of the Parish planning group who prepared for the mission. In the history of our parish it is remembered as a very special event where we came together to celebrate our Faith in a new and relevant way which touched the lives of many people in our community. It was indeed a time of personal and parish renewal and the fruits of renewal are still visible today in the life of our parish.

Having studied in All Hallows, I was well grounded in Theology and pastoral ministry. My involvement with my own parish and the P.D.R (Parish Development and Renewal), process in the Dublin diocese and the Laity Commission gave me an insight into the diversity of parish life. The invitation to join the Mission Team was for me a challenge to live and practice the theory that I had studied over six years. As a wife and mother of a family of five, I am very well aware of the realities which

touch life today. I struggle to make sense of my Christian faith in a world which does not give much value to matters of faith or the spiritual.

As a woman entering a domain which had been a reserve of the ordained minister I was greatly challenged. In the past the work of mission was seen as being very much sacramental. I have heard many wonderful stories about missions in the past: the phrase 'No mission without confession' is one repeated again and again. If this is the model of mission there is no place for the non-ordained. At the heart of mission today is a call to all of the baptised to participate fully in the life of the church and to work together to build up the kingdom.

Our call as a team is to work in a spirit of collaboration; if we ourselves do not model this in our own working lives how then can we invite others to do so? I have met great support in parish as a woman working in this ministry. I can relate very well to the people I meet and work with. There have been one or two occasions when my presence as a woman speaking during a service has caused difficulty with some priests. On one occasion a young priest refused to be the celebrant at Mass if I spoke after the Gospel: his parish priest presided at the Mass and I spoke after the Gospel.

The process of change can be difficult for some and a great deal of understanding, patience and respect is needed. When I began to work with the team one of the main needs I saw was to involve laity in the life of the church. Over the past four years I have come to understand that there is much work to be done with the Irish clergy in the area of education, support and renewal before they can begin to work in a spirit of true collaboration.

As we move from place to place the team is often referred to as "The Vincentian Fathers"; as a mother who ministers in the spirit of Vincent, I will sometimes introduce myself as a "Vincentian Mother". I am a woman who has worked with Vincentians for the past four years. My studies and much of my pastoral formation was in the spirit that is Vincentian. It has given new meaning to my Christian faith and how I live out that faith in my life and work. I have had nothing but the greatest support and encouragement from the Congregation of the Mission. My faith has been strengthened and renewed by the many committed people I have met in parishes and it has been a privilege to journey with them in Faith. The future for the Church will be very different to that which we have known in the past; so too the future for the Congregation of the Mission. The future may well be in a spirit of collaboration with the many people who hold with the vision that was Vincent's. In his own day his approach was indeed radical, new and vibrant. His spirit is very much alive in many people working to bring about change and renewal in the Church and in Irish society. It was a new experience for me to be

included as a member of the Vincentian Family at the Assembly in June 1997. To understand that I was part of a wide network of committed people was inspiring and gave me renewed hope for the future. In July, I had the privilege of representing the team with Fr Jay Shanahan in Paris at the Vincentian Month devoted to the work of mission. It was a wonderful experience to listen and to share with so many people who are engaged in the work of mission all over the world. The way forward is for all laity, religious and priests to work together in the work of renewal and mission.

Mission work is central to the Vincentian family. It was to the needs of the people of his time that Vincent responded and gave his first mission. Having the opportunity to visit all of the sites associated with Vincent was something special which will remain with me for ever. The world has changed in many ways since the time of Vincent but the needs of people on a spiritual level are similar to what they were in the days of Vincent. There is a deep hunger in the hearts of people to experience the loving presence of God in their lives. How we respond to that need is the challenge which faces all of us as we face into the new millennium.

Fr James Johnston

When choosing the Readings for Fr. James' Requiem Mass, his brother, Fr. Kevin, could hardly have been aware that the Gospel he chose was that of St. Vincent's Feast., the Beatitudes – i.e. in the new recension. We recall that in previous years the Gospel for St. Vincent was the one in which Jesus is recalled as "going through all the towns and villages, preaching the Word of God". By a pleasing coincidence, it seems to me, an amalgam of these two texts has a message for us – we are called to "preach the good news"; but we must first live it. If we are to place the message of the Gospel before our hearers, we must be sustained by Gospel values. Who amongst us on the level of our natural instincts, would be willing to be despised or vilified or seek hardship or distress? Our function in the Community is a wholehearted following in our holy Founder's footsteps. Our only passport to preaching the Gospel lies in this. Likewise, where will we come to terms with real Gospel values except on the basis of the precepts enunciated in the first Reading, where true Wisdom is highlighted. Can we survive as preachers of the Gospel except on the basis of St Paul's ringing challenge, in the second Reading of the Funeral Mass, "nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even death itself. I like to think that James found the basis for a ready acceptance and adherence to these Gospel values, firstly in his home, in his environment, and finally, in an acceptance of the Vincentian model during his time of formation.

James was a native of Cloonacool, Co. Sligo, which is just one parish from the one in which I had the privilege of being brought up. He was educated in St. Nathy's, Ballaghadereen, the Diocesan Seminary of Achonry, whose President at the time was a brother-in-law of my aunt; so it was with a great deal of interest that I learned that amongst the eight newcomers to the Seminaire at the start of our second year were three pupils of the College, Kevin Condon, Padraig Doherty and James Johnston. So, there they were on our door-step on the very day in which the second World War was declared in 1939. I heard the College President (mentioned above) speaking with great enthusiasm of the merits of the three entrants, though the loss of three such potential stalwarts must have been a blow to the Diocese. I expect that he was pleased on my account that the little company had benefited. Why that particular year had so enriched us was a mystery. It was assumed to be attributable to a Retreat given in the College that year by a confrere. However,

Padraig told me that while that Retreat-giver made a great impression on him, he assumed him to have been a Jesuit. So, I suppose you could say in footballing terms – "Vins, 3: SJs, Nil!".

Amongst us, his fellow seminarists and students, James soon made his mark as a practical man, one to whom you turned in order to get a job well done; reliable, careful – especially if a meitheal was being formed or if a crisis was about to develop. I was surprised to hear that some of his acquaintances regarded him as an organiser, motivator, but not a "hands-on type". Those of us, however, who recall the great saga of the "kicking-cow" would have none of that. In any event, as in all circumstances of his post-student career, he was reluctant to take fools gladly. Slackers or scoffers beware! What a shock it was therefore, when we first learned that our indestructible contemporary was seriously ill. We felt it especially on the night that the Provincial announced that we should pray fervently for "Mr. Johnston"… that he would survive the night. That he did so was attributed widely to the prayers of the Daughters of Charity through the intercession of Blessed Catherine, at that time not yet canonised but recently appointed Patroness of Dunardagh. James had to battle against ill-health throughout his University course and the years of Theology; a heavy burden on one preparing for the Priesthood.

After ordination in 1947, with an appointment to St. Patrick's Training College, and a subsequent return to UCD for his H.Dip., he was given the arduous task of Dean in the College. In Summer 1949 he came with us to the Gaeltacht, not like some, for a cheap and restful holiday, but with the single-mindedness that marked all his endeavour, brushing-up on his spoken Irish, making an endless collection of prayers and seanfhocail, immersing himself, in Saoitheacht na Gaeilge, to the amazement of Muintir na h-Aite. This, of course, was in the days when Irish was much more important in the Training College than it now is.

As always, he took no prisoners. If a job was to be done, it was done with no deviation, no concessions. It is recalled that in the course of a football match, where in a Dublin Championship Match, the College Team (Erin's Hopes) were, in James' view, being unfairly treated, he went on the field and threatened to withdraw the team if the ref. would not give them fair play. In this context, it may be pertinent to add that on that occasion a supporter of the opposing team, feeling that, from his perspective, his team was being hard done by, was berating the College vociferously as follows – "Yiz are nothing but a gang of bowsies, edumacated bowsies". Happy endings – in 1956 he had the satisfaction of seeing the "Hopes" win the Dublin Championship.

In his periods spent in Secondary Schools (St. Paul's, and later as Chaplain in Coolmine and Portmarnock) James displayed the same zeal that had been his throughout his life. However, it could be fairly claimed

that his greatest contribution to the Community was the setting-up of the Retreat Centre in St. Joseph's, Blackrock; later transferred to All Hallows, where you will still find a remnant of those who backed his Retreats in the early 70s, still loyal to the Vincentian mould. Confreres and many others who attended his Retreats will remember that he would normally finish a Conference with a stanza from Robert Frost. For him the lines had a special significance in that they will always be associated with the heroic life and work of Dr. Tom Dooley;

> *"The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep*
> *And miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep ".*

They would both have been conscious, as James so often said, that there was a huge amount of work and yet so few to do it and such a short time in which to do it. Most of the time in his final years James was able to "keep his many promises", in the harsh reality of much pain. When St Bernadette eventually reached the Convent she was asked "Now that your life-work (i.e. the Apparitions) is over, what is to be your role?". She answered quite simply, "My role is to be sick", the role of Simon of Cyrene.

It has always remained a matter of wonderment to us all how James, with his frail health and frequent pain could manage, not only to survive, but accomplish an immense amount of vigorous toil with great personal courage and contempt of danger – witness the dreadful occasion of the death of Fr James Murphy. It will be recalled that James, (Johnson) coming unwittingly on the two youngsters whom he had judged to be victims, and preferring them help, almost became a victim himself for his pains. Though severely wounded, he went directly to say Mass in St Vincent's, before he sought any medical assistance. All in a day's work!

I don't think that he had any hobbies. In the Seminaire, he had been quite good at hand-ball. He probably didn't read very much and was assumed not to have a sparkling sense of humour, though the following episode might give the lie to that – when his great friend and fellow County-man, Fr Kevin Condon, was in Rome for his Scriptural Degree, he found great difficulty in assuring a reasonable supply of tobacco, a problem heightened by his being the victim of a Sting by an entrepreneurial street-vendor on the way back from the University. To remedy the situation, two of us (James J. and this scribe) were angariated to assure supplies of the weed by an ingenious method not germane to this issue. In endeavouring to send Kevin foreknowledge of the arrival of the supply, James sent off a cablegram. It was approaching Easter and with a deft sense of Liturgical appropriateness, James worded the cable as follows – "Alleluia, Alleluia McQuaid travelling, Alleluia". The

McQuaid in question was, of course, Mick McQuaid of tobacco fame. We heard subsequently that a certain amount of consternation, not to say panic, was engendered in External Affairs on the assumption that the then Archbishop of Dublin (John Charles McQuaid) was on his way to Rome without reference to Diplomatic channels.

Many people, especially Religious, will be conscious of his contribution as a wise and down-to-earth anam-chara; as a preacher he was forceful and practical with the extraordinary gift of 'unction'; that indefinable quality which makes one's words resonate within even the hardened heart. Many of his penitents here in St. Peter's have remarked on the peace of mind engendered by his words and counsel in the confessional. Likewise, a particular impression was made by him, when, after a public Mass he would always finish with, "Moladh agus buíochas mór le Dia na Glóire". (Praise and great thanks to the God of Glory)

The many whom he helped in his life-time would wish to make that his epitaph.

Andrew Spelman CM

JAMES JOHNSTON CM

Born;	Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo, 11 March 1920
Entered the CM;	7 September 1939
Final vows;	8 September 1941
Ordained priest;	31 May 1947 in Clonliffe College, Dublin by John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin.

APPOINTMENTS

1948-'60;	St. Patrick's, Drumcondra
1960-'66;	St. Paul's, Raheny
1966-'72;	St. Joseph's, Blackrock
1972-'80;	St. Peter's, Phibsboro' (chaplain, Coolmine Community School)
1980-'83;	St. Peter's, Phibsboro' (chaplain, Portmarnock Community School)
1983-'89; St. Paul's, Raheny	
	(Supply in Achonry diocese, September-Christmas '87 Supply in Elphin diocese 1987-'88)
1989-'98;	St. Peter's, Phibsboro'
Died;	3 March 1998
Buried:	Glasnevin

Fr. Patrick Quinn CM

I first met Fr. Pat on 7 September 1945 when he arrived in St. Joseph's, Blackrock, to commence his preparation as a Vincentian priest. He was accompanied by a fellow Corkman, Tom Lane, who was also presenting himself with the desire to become a Vin. Both of them got into the same carriage in Cork Railway Station but they soon discovered that they had a common goal; – St. Joseph's – and, no doubt, the conversation became animated! "We have a dream".

The end of September, 1949, was a red-letter day for St. Joseph's. The seminarists and the university students continued residing there but the students of theology went down the country to St. Kevin's, Glenart Castle, Arklow. In due time, Pat Quinn joined this new foundation and proved himself to be a genuine member of the Vincentian community. In his own quiet way he was solidly dedicated and earnest. Dag Hammarskgold, in "Markings", (spiritual reflections) has a beautiful way of encouraging God's daily presence; "Each morning, we must hold out the chalice of our being to receive, to carry and to give back". Pat's prayer life was not shallow. He worked hard at his studies which he found difficult at times, and perhaps a 'cross' occasionally, but he was a man of tenacity and perseverance.

When in St. Joseph's, years ago, we had to do "corporals" each day (tidying up the grounds, sweeping etc); a sort of exercise without puffing or panting. Glenart, however, was a real challenge; keeping up the gardens, the lawns, the harvest, the chickens etc! Pat came from a rural scene and, along with other students, kept everything in good shape; he was a man accustomed to the scythe and the plough.

Pat was ordained a priest on 25th May 1952. His ministry was almost totally on the parochial scene in Ireland and England. Down the years, I have heard his praises sung as being a true shepherd of the flock, generously dedicated, uncomplaining and reliable. Whether he was inside his presbytery or visiting homes in the parish, he was ever held in grateful admiration for his devotion.

I served with him for nearly fifteen years in St. Mary's parish, Dunstable. Health problems began to intrude in the early 1990s. The Congregation owes a tremendous debt to the Daughters of Charity in Packard House, Blackrock. They stood lovingly and devotedly at Pat's cross, which surely has passed to a crown. I often thought that his spirituality had the flavour of St. Thérèse of Lisieux in her 'Little Way' and the flavour of St. Vincent in the five virtues.

"O precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful Patrick". Amen.

Desmond Cleere, CM

PATRICK QUINN CM

Born:	Ballyfeard, Co. Cork, 2 March, 1920.
Entered the CM:	7 September, 1945.
Final Vows:	8 September, 1947.
Ordained priest:	25 May, 1952 in Clonliffe College by John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin.

APPOINTMENTS

1952-68	St. Vincent's, Sunday's Well.
1968-72	St. Peter's Phibsboro.
1972-77	Hereford.
1977-81	St. Stephen's, Warrington.
1981-95	St. Mary's, Dunstable.
1995-98	St. Peter's, Phibsboro.
Died:	12 April, 1998 in Rickard House.
Buried:	Cork.