



Journeying Together

2021 Synod 2024

Our vision is “that everyone has a place to call home and a stake in their community”

Editorial

By Denise El-Khoury

In 2021, the Catholic Church began a synodal process - a journey that has the whole Church reflect on the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission”.

The word “synod” indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. It means “journeying together” while simultaneously everyone has a role to play (Ephesians 4:7). Three verbs characterize this Synod: encounter, listen and discern. The Church is calling us to become experts in the art of encounter, to listen to the world and to the challenges and changes that it sets before us. We are asked to walk together under the guidance of the Word and in the strength of the Spirit, animated by the hope of seeing this world transfigured into the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of peace, justice and joy.

One of the Synod’s key words is communion, a word that Saint Paul VI defines as “cohesion and interior fullness, in grace, truth and collaboration...”. This definition speaks to us, Vincentians, who have chosen to be united and to work well together, to journey together. We know that when we come together in support of a common purpose amazing things happen. We know that every collaborative effort leads to a transformation.

In this editorial, I would like to stress on the theological meaning of Communion and Collaboration for us Vincentians, as part of the People of God.

Created in the image of the Divine Communion, united in Christ, together, we form one family and we are called to live in a communion of love, in a communion of a multitude of brothers and sisters who have but “one heart and one mind” (Acts 4:32). Both communion and collaboration have their roots in the very nature of the Triune God, in His *Koinonia*. It is a matter of synergy between God and the faithful that extends to be a synergy between all the members of this universal body. It is a matter of co-action.

Vincentians, we are called, today and more than ever, to be united in our diversity and to work together while journeying along the path towards a “synodal community”.

We are called to put together our gifts, charisms and resources, to co-act, to be a response to forgotten and neglected crises; to provide housing to and uplift the lives of the people we are here to serve; to acknowledge and address challenges such as climate change; and to establish relief programs to those who are most in need.

Vincentine Responses to Forgotten Crises

By Natalie Monteza

Every day, journalists and editors make decisions about which stories to cover. They generally prioritize those that are more sensational or trending in social media feeds, or those taking place closer to their audience. Therefore, many humanitarian crises around the world are overlooked and under-reported.

These so called “forgotten” crises are usually protracted humanitarian crisis situations, which have severe consequences on the affected populations such as death, famine, displacement and homelessness. Often the cause is conflict, although sometimes it is the cumulation of recurring natural disasters. But the main common denominators are that there is a lack of political will or capacity to solve the crisis, and that the populations affected are minorities, or people living in extreme poverty, receiving insufficient or no national or international aid. As a result of the lack of attention to those crises, people may feel forgotten and lose hope.

Below are two examples of how the Vincentine presence in what Pope Francis would call peripheries is a source of hope.



Photo Credit: Yasuyoshi Chiba, AFP

The first concerns the war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. A peace deal in November 2022 has interrupted the two-year fighting between pro-government forces and Tigrayan fighters. Besides the large number of casualties, the conflict has left nearly three million people displaced. According to the Vincentine Family branches who are active in different cities in the area¹, present-day peace is hanging by a very light thread.

Making use of this truce and re-established communications, the FHA decided to collect funds for their initiatives through its Christmas Appeal. We were able to send a little bit over \$5000 to contribute to their food distribution efforts. In addition to looking after the food security of the internally displaced people (IDPs), one of the branches has confirmed that they provide many other services in their health center or directly within IDP camps. Psychosocial support to children and survivors of gender-based violence, and the provision of hygiene kits to pregnant and lactating women are only a couple of examples.

The second IDP-generating situation has received even less media coverage. As in many parts of the Sahel region, villagers in the North of Burkina Faso are facing violent mass evictions provoked by armed groups. The Daughters of Charity were running schools in the city of Nouna before the displacements started. They were concerned by the situation and designed a 13 Houses project, to provide shelters for IDPs and to improve access to water for all. At the same time, they welcomed displaced children into their schools. All these measures have the purpose of easing the tension of the situation – both for those who have been displaced, and the welcoming population.

Their latest report speaks for itself. Here’s a short extract:

“During the first two months of 2023, the security situation in the province of Kossi and Banwa that made up the Diocese of Nouna, deteriorated particularly with the eviction of several villages. Indeed, the capital of the commune of Sanaba was attacked on the night of January 19 to 20, resulting in the death of civilians. This led to the departure of the population from the capital of the commune. Indeed, after the attack, a 72-hour ultimatum was given to the populations to liberate the commune. After Sanaba, it was the turn of the villages located on the Dédougou-Nouna axis, whose populations were ordered to clear out. Thus many villages were emptied of their populations to join Dédougou and Nouna (...). The city of Nouna alone has more than 70,000 internally displaced people according to the provincial directorate of humanitarian action. About 40 villages have vacated their homes in the province”.



Photo Credit: AFP

The FHA highlights these two emergency situations that are causing many people to be displaced and therefore lose their homes. However, it is also important to mention that, like in many other places in the world, the Vincentine branches are present accompanying the survivors. This shows that although emergency situations may be ignored by the media, IDPs matter and are not forgotten.

1 For their security we are not naming them. Indeed, one of the branches decided not to send us any information as they consider their situation as delicate, and sending any information to the outside world could compromise the work they do with the survivors of the war.

The impact of climate change on global homelessness

By Laura Hillier



Climate change is one of the greatest issues facing humanity. As global temperatures rise, devastating effects – such as the impact of rising sea levels and droughts – mean that vast swathes of the earth are rapidly becoming uninhabitable. The UN¹ estimates that over 20 million people each year (on average) are forced to leave their homes as a result of extreme weather events. Climate change will not only cause more people to become homeless, but those who are already homeless will be particularly vulnerable to the impact.

Sadly, there are already numerous instances of communities becoming displaced following extreme weather events. For example, Cyclone Idai displaced over 128,000 people in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi in 2019, resulting in an enormous humanitarian crisis. In 2022, Pakistan saw severe flooding due to heavy rainfall and the melting of glaciers, which resulted in over 2.1 million people becoming homeless. People who have been displaced then face further risks when provided with inadequate emergency shelter, or if population density in lesser-affected areas suddenly increases – essential resources can become limited, and rent potentially skyrockets.

Those already homeless – such as people living on the street – face greater impacts of climate change, since as a population they are also more likely to be experiencing chronic health conditions. Extreme temperatures mean a more significant impact on their immediate health, when people are unable to access appropriate shelter. For example, high temperatures present a greater risk of heat stroke and dehydration, and uncharacteristically cold winters increase the risk of hypothermia.

What are the solutions to this global crisis? Emergency aid

provided to displaced people should be high quality, to reduce the risk of further hardship and to support them in rebuilding their lives. More homes for people facing homelessness are required, but these should be built to standards that make these homes resilient to future climate change, and in a way that does not exacerbate carbon emissions. A brilliant example of this approach can be seen in the “Ecohood” sustainable housing project in Los Angeles, USA – microhomes with solar power and other energy performance features have been built, which are intended to be affordable and house those in need quickly. At a local and national level, we can also advocate for procedures to protect homeless people during severe weather – as well as greener policies in general – to be adopted.

Regarding the role of the Vincentian Family, the FHA works to identify creative solutions to homelessness, including via its “13 Houses” campaign. For example, the De Paul House project in New Zealand (a campaign member) expanded into rural areas of North Auckland in 2019, to provide housing to migrant workers facing challenges relating to the climate, among other difficulties. More widely, the Vincentian Family can raise awareness of the complex relationship between homelessness and climate change – as Pope Francis said in *Laudato Si'*, “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.” We should all start conversations about attempting to limit the environmental impact of our own work, and look towards what we can do to support communities who are disproportionately at risk from climate change.

¹ [UNHCR, Climate Change & Disaster Displacement](#)



In 100 countries by the end of 2023

The 13 Houses Campaign is currently present in 62 countries. The FHA aims to reach homeless people in all countries that have active Vincentians wishing to work to end homelessness.

If you are in one of [these countries](#) and would like to participate, contact us!

Unveiling the shadows: a Conference shedding light on the global reality of slums

By Anna Mosca



During the tumultuous times of the 17th century, Saint Vincent de Paul emerged as a guiding light and a beacon of compassion, long before the dark shadows of slums consumed our world. His dedication to those forgotten by society resonates with a profound truth: today, he would have made slum dwellers his foremost priority. During the wars in Lorraine, Vincent provided assistance to thousands of displaced people. In response to poverty in Paris, he established relief programs to those most in need.

In the present day, the issue of homelessness perseveres as a stark reality: an estimated 1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing globally, of which 1 billion live in slums and informal settlements¹.

The challenge of slum dwelling continues to afflict numerous regions and perpetuating poverty for millions of individuals across the globe. Although the definition of slums varies, they are always associated with some sort of deprivation and

characterized by overcrowded living conditions, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to basic services, posing significant challenges to the well-being of their inhabitants². The causes are multifaceted, including rapid urbanization, poverty, land tenure insecurity, limited access to basic services, social exclusion and discrimination³.

To effectively address this complex challenge, a multidimensional approach is essential. This entails implementing a range of key strategies, including but not limited to: upgrading and renewing slum areas; empowering individuals through social and economic means; and implementing governance practices⁴.

Today many Vincentians help slum dwellers achieve a dignified life. Just think of the many 13 Houses projects addressing slum dwelling such as: the work of the Congregation of the Mission and the [SSVP](#) in India; the project [Akamasoa](#) in Madagascar; or the joint Vincentian efforts in [Nigeria](#). Each of these and other 13 Houses projects represent just a fraction of the amazing work that the Vincentian Family is doing worldwide at the service of the poorest.

Inspired by the work of many Vincentians, the FHA has organized a series of Conferences relating to its core mission of serving homeless people. In 2018, the conference focused primarily on street homelessness. In 2022, we brought together speakers to raise awareness of the plight of refugees,

internally displaced people and victims of human trafficking. The FHA eagerly anticipates hosting a conference in January 2024 in Manila, Philippines, specifically dedicated to slum dwelling.

The Vincentian Family actively works with slum dwellers in the Philippines through local and international organizations.

Esteemed educational institutions like Adamson University (venue for the 2024 conference) and the Saint Vincent School of Theology play a vital role in addressing the challenges faced by slum communities. They offer community initiatives to provide education, skills development, and essential social services.

The conference is an opportunity to delve more deeply into the inspiring work of the Vincentian Family in the Philippines and across the globe. It will be a gathering of diverse practitioners and individuals with lived experiences, coming together to share their insights. We are thrilled to announce that approximately 60 participants from around the world will be able to exchange practices and learn from one another. To all Vincentian practitioners dedicated to uplifting the lives of slum dwellers, we extend a heartfelt invitation to contact us via email (fha.info@famvin.org) and express your interest in participating.

Together, we will put the spotlight on the harsh realities of slums worldwide, and strive towards sustainable solutions that bring hope and dignity to those in need.

1 [UN HABITAT, 2016](#)

2 [Gray zones: on the causes and consequences of slums](#)

3 [UN HABITAT, 2018](#)

4 *ibid*