



CONGREGATION *of the* MISSION

THE VINCENTIANS
WESTERN PROVINCE

APOSTOLIC PLANNING PROCESS | DISCOVERY REPORT



*“Make us attentive to the call of Providence
and bold in finding new and creative ways
of following Christ evangelizing the poor.”*

- Prayer for Apostolic Planning

INTRODUCTION

The Apostolic Planning for the Congregation of the Mission Western Province is **an invitation into dialogue and prayer, for our community to deepen internal relationships and courageously reimagine the future of our apostolic mission, faithful to the teachings of our founder, St. Vincent de Paul.**

The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This is achieved when, individually and collectively, the confreres:

1. Make every effort to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation;
2. Work at evangelizing the poor, especially the most abandoned;
3. Help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor (Constitutions no.1, 1984)

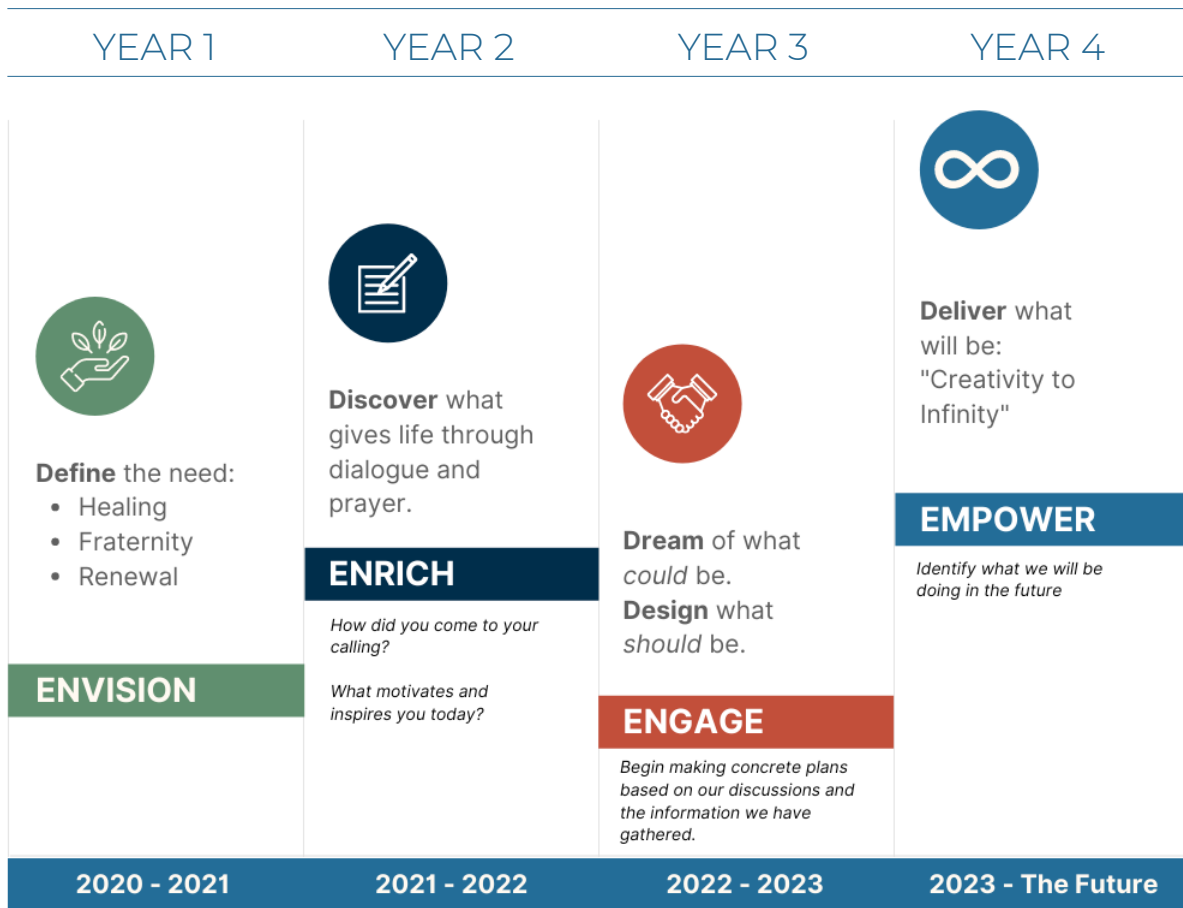
Through this apostolic planning process, we seek to develop the provincial priority of mission effectiveness and mission advancement, supported by apostolic leadership formation, while focusing on the pastoral aspirations of healing, fraternity, and renewal.

Phases of Apostolic Planning

Our Apostolic Planning is a *Colloquia Fraternalis*, a fraternal conversation, to create a shared vision for the future. The Appreciative Inquiry process being followed is rooted in positive questions that will lead to positive change, helping confreres build relationships and trust. This is an iterative process which will engage the Province in a renewal effort to:

1. Deepen relationships
2. Excite confreres' commitment to mission
3. Generate actionable ideas related to mission advancement and lifelong formation
4. Stimulate healing, fraternity, and renewal

Below is an outline of how this process will unfold:



We are here: Reviewing input from the **Enrich Phase** and continuing dialogue, which will help set our course in the **Engage Phase**.

CONFREERE FEEDBACK

KP Consulting Group conducted approximately 75 interviews and meetings with provincial leadership, confreres (individual and community houses) and lay leaders in Chicago, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Perryville, Dallas, Patterson (via Zoom), and New Orleans (via Zoom) from October 2021 - April 2022. To see a list of the questions presented for discussion, see Appendix B.

Below is a summary of the high-level themes mentioned frequently during these visits. This report does not and is not meant to encompass every concern and/or comment that was shared.

To review the more thorough community reports with additional raw feedback, please consult the individual community reports posted here:

Website: www.CMWestern.org/apostolic-planning

User name: vincent

Password: confrere123

Please scan this code on your phone to easily access the mobile version:



Theme I: HEALING

In this section, confreres identified areas of pain. Naming it is a beginning step towards healing. Embracing a synodal process, the Province is called to continue this dialogue and grow as a community that feels heard and validated.

Many confreres have experienced a loss of identity over the years for various reasons. It was suggested that this may be more deeply rooted in missing “institutional structures” to work within - a need for corporate works, rather than individual apostolates. Some wonder if that is why parish ministry has become so popular even though it is not a core Vincentian work. There is a need to recognize past pain and/or loss and take time to mourn together as a community.

The Province could benefit from a formal structural process for healing to help the confreres move forward to new practices and processes that build trust. The idea of appointing a “Promoter of Fraternity” to focus on establishing a formal process for healing was suggested.

Anger is an emotion that many of the confreres are carrying with them. There is not one specific cause for this, but rather various causes, which have not been addressed among the community. For example:

- Confreres feel uninvolved in decisions happening currently in “St. Louis” or in the past by the Province, such as the Province merger many years ago.
- There is a lack of closure regarding pulling out of seminary work and a desire to be thanked for their contributions to seminaries. Some feel as though they were “kicked out” of seminaries and never told “thank you.”

- The abrupt ministry suppression in some areas was mentioned as being painful for more than a few. There is a need to heal from past ministries that were vacated prior to today before moving to new ministries and models.

Multicultural and multi-generational needs are different throughout the Province, and there is a need to take time to identify each respective group and respond in ways that promote healing and growth.

There is a desire and a need for ongoing formation. Ideas include building personal and house plans and reinforcing “Apostolic Leadership Formation.

Each confrere should develop an intense, intentional focus on:

- Vocational calling and personal call to holiness rather than career mindedness
- Common life for the sake of the mission
- Personal and house plans that have communal accountability and visibility

There is a need to revisit and redefine retirement and elder status in the community.

Several confreres expressed concern about whether they are truly being heard. There is a desire and need to help each other in dialogue realize that each party is truly listening.

THEME II: FRATERNITY

As a community of men that are meant to “live in common as brothers by following their own rule of life” (Constitutions no. 3, 1984), the Province must prioritize opportunities to build fraternity among the confreres, which is only possible through the healing.

The current reality of the housing situation requires further assessment. There is a need for better operations and structures that are (1) fit for purpose, (2) facilitate healthy community life and (3) offer effective apostolic activities (multicultural, poor, etc.). In addition, it will be important to keep the houses intergenerational.

There is a need for new models of living and ministering together in order to break down silos and fragmentation. The idea of forming Mission Teams / Centers in some capacity is very energizing for many confreres but needs to be further defined.

The confreres remain best informed about what is happening throughout the Province through community meetings. As such, there is an opportunity to redefine the work of the Superiors as animators of communal life and to help keep connections across geographical areas.

The confreres have a deep desire to come together more frequently to talk and get to know one another better. There are many different ideas about what this could look like in the future.

When it comes to communal decision making, it is important to keep the whole Province engaged. It can be difficult for some confreres to be honest and critique what is going on without feeling they appear divisive.

There is a desire to create better relationships, not only between confreres, but also more formally with the Vincentian family, including the Daughters of Charity, Vincentian Marian Youth, Colorado Vincentian Volunteers, DePaul University and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

There were suggestions from more than a couple of confreres that the Western and Eastern Provinces should find ways to collaborate, especially around vocations.

THEME III: RENEWAL

“The Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstance of time and place. [I]t should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal.” (Constitutions no. 2, 1984)

To reinforce the Vincentian charism in the Western Province, there is a need to recommit to the foundational identity/purpose of the Congregation. There is a particular need to prioritize mission over individual works.

The Province must define what is the core of who the Vincentians are called to be: What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor? There is currently no universal agreement as to the work of the community. It is important to define how specifically the Vincentians evangelize the poor and for every confrere to feel comfortable in that space. In reference to the *Prayer for Apostolic Planning* (see Appendix A), the confreres are called to be “bold in finding new and creative ways of following Christ evangelizing the poor.” The Vincentians do not have a collective vision for what they are here to do; they need a common mission that all CMs can identify with in their ministry.

The visibility of the Vincentians has obviously decreased substantially over the years, but the confreres also appear fractured and absent. Young people don't see the Vincentians as a religious life where the community is attractive or vibrant. There is a need to develop a Vincentian Presence Plan that builds community, gives flexibility and enhances sponsorship, not just a manpower plan for current ministries. To enhance the presence plan, the Province should consider new ways to engage the laity, the Vincentian Family, ex-CMs and the elders (reimagine retirement).

In interviews, when confreres recalled their personal vocation story, they typically identified a past confrere(s) by name and recalled his positive energy and joy in ministry. That same “joy” is not evident throughout the Province today. The confreres are called to rediscover the “joy” in becoming a Vincentian

and to be creative about the future recognizing there is hope. Through strategic partnerships, identify areas of hope throughout the Province and work to leverage and/or replicate them, such as VMY, College Prep, AMM, etc. The Province could send teams of two to explore new collaborations and create energy.

The vocations model requires a paradigm shift. The Congregation must learn how to accommodate the multicultural reality as well as a team-based approach to vocations. In relation to the Vincentian identity and charism, what are discerners truly being invited into?

The Province seems to keep going to the familiar when there are opportunities to minister in the peripheries. However, multicultural formation and training is needed to prepare more confreres to serve in core mission areas adequately.

Parish Missions provide an opportunity to reach places with new hearts, new methods and new models. It was suggested to take the current success of the Parish Missions and evolve it into a new model that introduces a longer engagement with a parish community.

There is not a lot of shared vision for the future among the community. The Vincentians need to identify a way to work together in creating a future for the Province. It was asked how the Vice Province of Kenya might help in the growth of the Western Province.

The confreres at St. Mary of the Barrens are willing to help with the Province's renewal.

There is a lack of focus, continuity, and follow through in the Province. It was stated that the Provincial Office can seem disconnected from the rest of the communities and the Province as a whole forgets a lot of things, is disorganized, and lacks processes. Things are not always done in the same way by the same people - structures have changed and need to be redefined.

SURVEY RESULTS

In addition to leadership interviews, regional visits, and conversations with confreres, KP Consulting shared a survey with donors, stakeholders and other partners in mission to learn more about their connection to the Congregation’s mission and vision for its future.

The survey was live from February - April 2022 and produced a 58% response rate, with 52 people responding out of the 90 recipients. To see a list of the questions presented, see Appendix B.

Summary of Results

FIGURE 1

How do you know the Vincentians? (51 Responses)

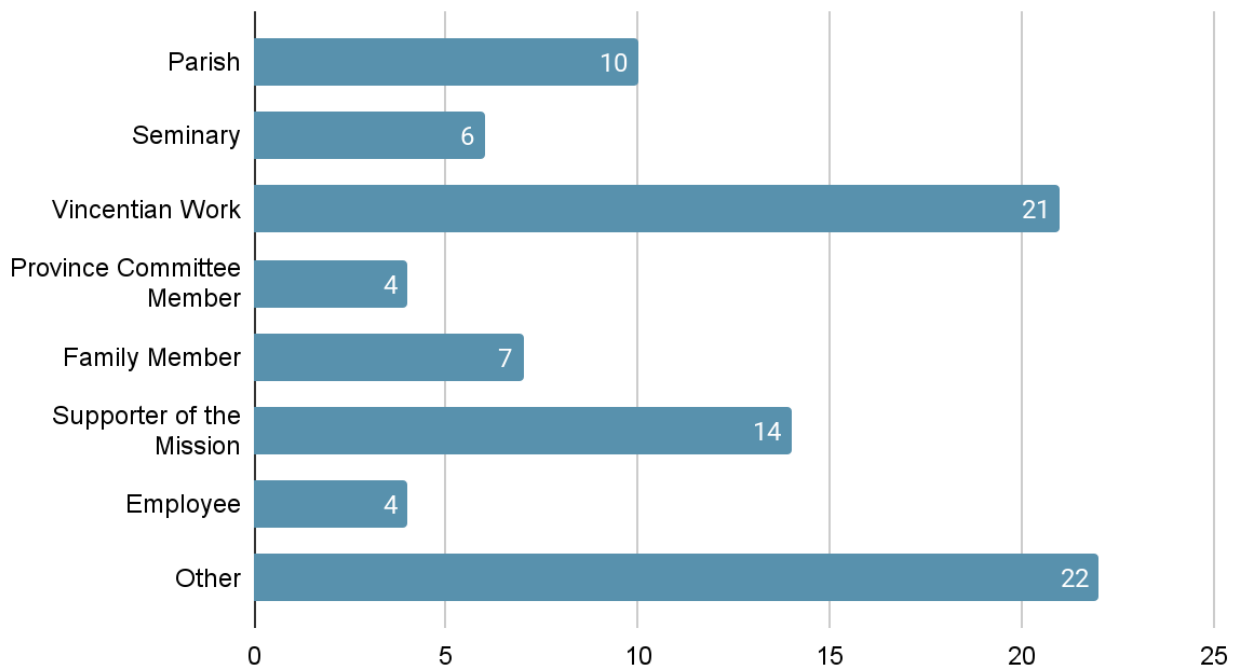


FIGURE 2

How would you rank each of the Vincentian mission priorities? (50 responses)

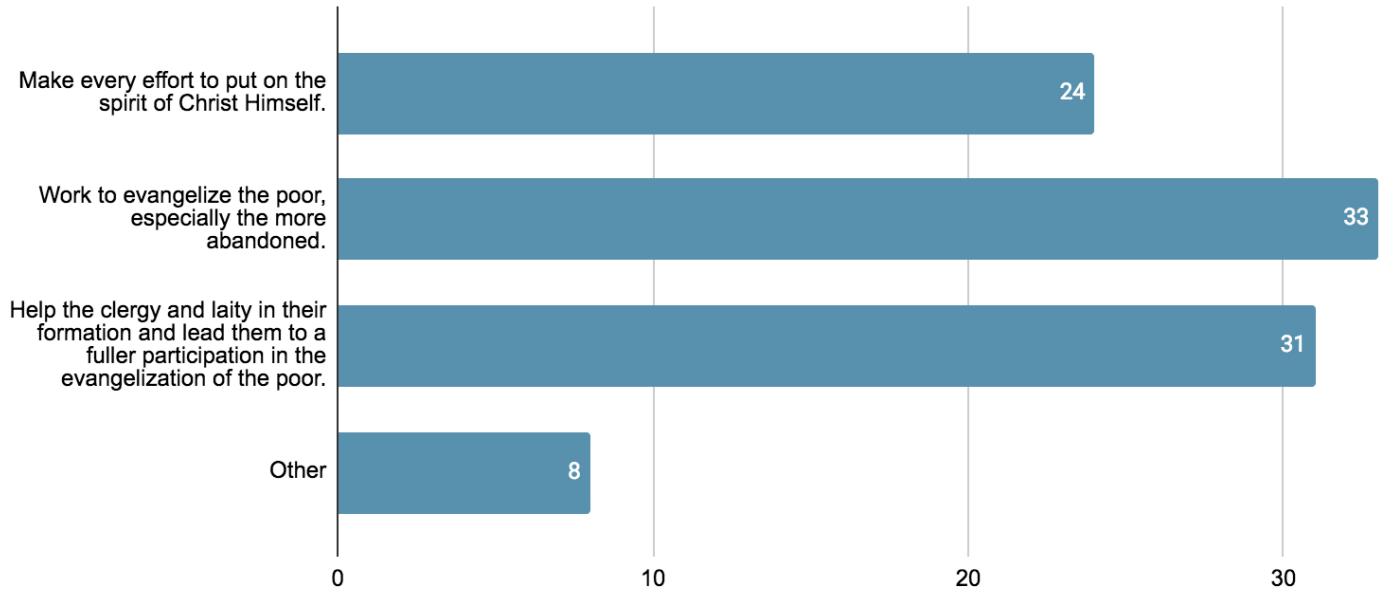


FIGURE 3

What is your sense of the overall mission awareness of the Congregation of the Mission among active supporters? (51 Responses)

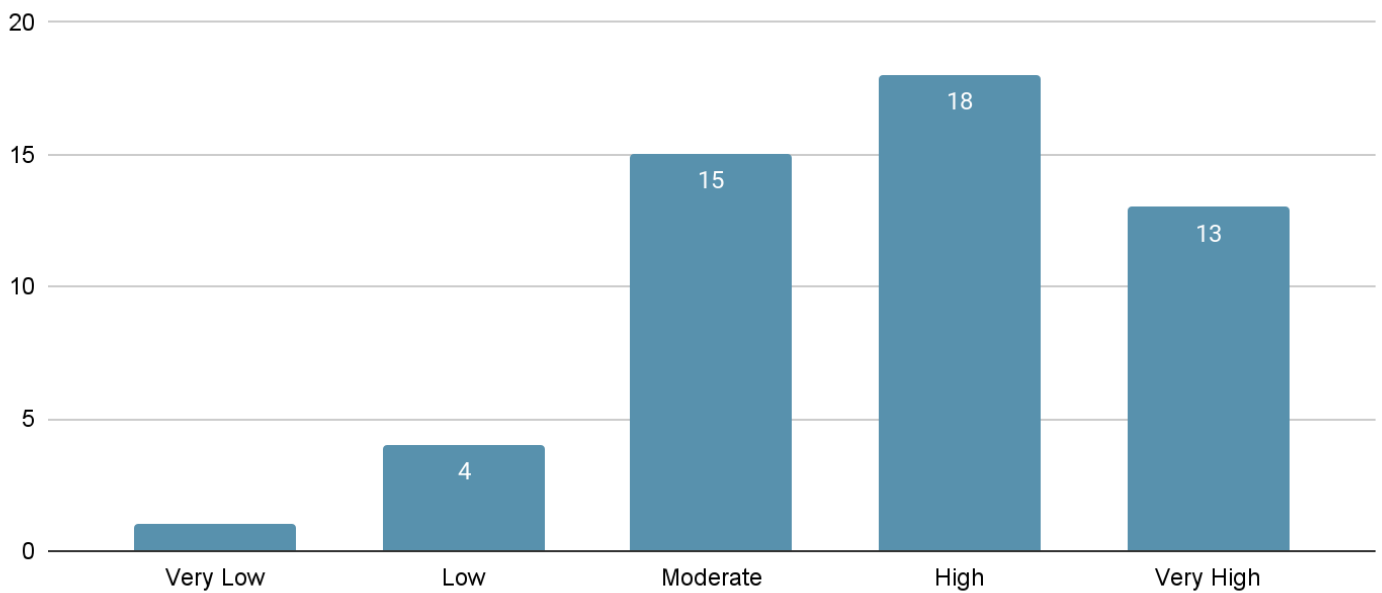


FIGURE 4

What works do you believe inspire new and deepen continuing support for our mission? (51 Responses)

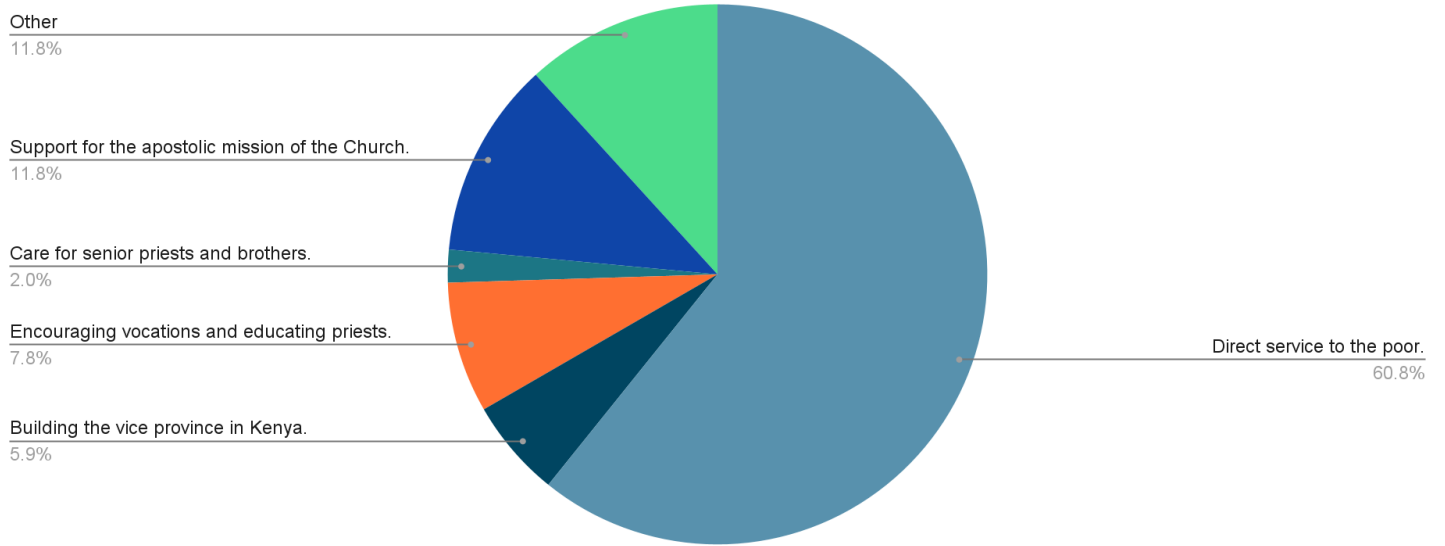
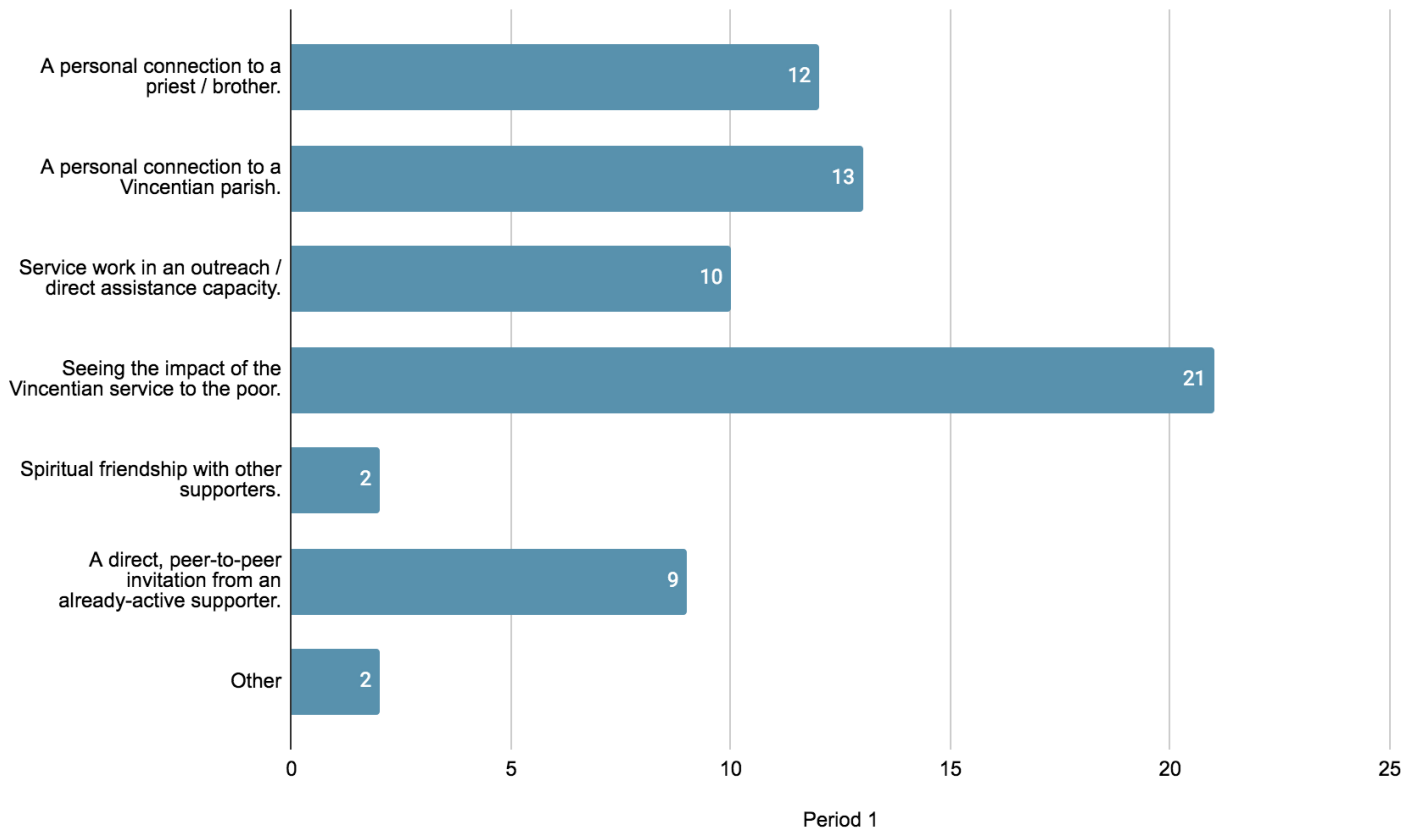


FIGURE 5

What do you believe is the single most significant factor influencing a person's decision to participate in the work of the Congregation of the Mission? (51 Responses)



Key Themes

- Overwhelmingly, respondents were attracted by the Vincentians' service to the poor. That remains their primary reason for continued involvement. The work in Kenya was cited in a few responses.
- A significant characteristic of what makes a work Vincentian in nature is "seeing the face of Christ" in the poor. The Vincentian charism is lived in service to the poor through personal encounter and presence.
- There are diverse opinions on what might keep people from getting involved. These opinions include but are not limited to a lack of awareness of the mission and works.
- Direct service to the poor remains the most inspiring way to secure new and continued support.
- Respondents frequently cited their financial support as the means by which they carry the Vincentian charism forward.
- Many visions of the future center on the youth. Respondents note the need to provide physical and spiritual help to struggling young people, and they also note the need to harness the enthusiasm of young people to help carry out the Vincentian mission in the future.

ANALYSIS OF THE FEEDBACK

With a renewed focus on missionary conversion as a community over individual works, and as new *models* of ministry are explored, we would recommend the formation of strategic “Mission Teams” as advisory groups/task forces to explore the greatest areas of opportunity Province-wide as it relates to the Vincentians’ core charism of **evangelization of the poor.**

The proposed Mission Team breakdown would consist of five verticals (See Table A):

1. Confrere Formation / Training
2. Confrere Vitality
3. Infrastructure
4. Mission Renewal
5. Vocations

A guiding principle calls for strategic partnerships to be explored as crucial for the success of these conversations.

Each vertical consists of specific priority areas that each Mission Team would be tasked with addressing, which are prioritized based on conversations up to this point.

Upon reviewing this *first draft* of the Mission Team verticals, our next steps include the need to:

- Review draft breakdown of Mission Teams, adjust as needed, and prioritize areas of greatest opportunity/need.
- Identify small advisory groups/task forces for each identified core Mission Team (laity & confreres).
- Provide a framework for Mission Team function/format and measurements of success.
- Clarify role and future need for Mission and Lifelong Formation Commissions.

CONCLUSION

As the Apostolic Planning Process moves forward, the essential question to explore is **“Where do we go from here?”**

There is a desire across the Province to achieve conversion, greater fraternity, and a common vision but how is this best accomplished? The data would seem to suggest that certain paradigm shifts are needed among the confreres including:

- The need to move from managing decline of our historical works and life to a new emphasis on opportunity and commitment to mission as we move forward to intentional focus on Provincial apostolic “mission”
- The need to emphasize less confreres working alone and more confreres working in teams
- The need to think of ourselves not merely as coexisting in a community house but truly engaged in community living
- The need to recommit ourselves to the spiritual life individually and in community
- The need to move from a kind of generic sense of ourselves as Vincentians to a life of joyful, growing development in the charism, a way of life which communicates the “joy of the Gospel”
- The need to move into greater collaboration with the Vincentian Family
- The need to move from our “comfort zone” of clerical living and service to greater collaboration with lay ministry leaders
- The need to strengthen our vocation work in new areas of the Province

In the coming months we assume that the Apostolic Planning Process will move forward using both short-term and long-term strategies.

Table A - Mission Team Verticals

	RENEWAL				
	Lifelong Formation		Mission Effectiveness and Mission Advancement		
Mission Team Verticals	Confrere Vitality	Confrere Formation / Training	Infrastructure	Vincentian Mission Renewal	Vocations
<p>Priority Areas</p> <p><i>NOTE: Strategic Partnerships to help implement these priority areas may include: Ex-CMs, the Laity, Vincentian Family (Daughters of Charity, Society, etc.), Other Religious, and International Collaborations.</i></p>	Fraternity/ Communal Life	Apostolic Leadership Formation	Housing	Parish Missions	Vocation Ministry Model - regional teams
	Personal Call to Holiness (province needs vs. confrere wants)	Multi-cultural Formation	Personnel / Resource Allocation	Mission Centers (“Seminaries for the Poor”) – a nexxus of ministry that is bold and attractive; formerly parish ministry?	Discernment Retreats
	Elder Status - reimaging retirement		Strategic Mission Integration and Ministry Model - relies on collaboration with laity and focus on Vincentian formation of leaders.	Vincentian Advocacy Network (Multicultural Ministry / Racial Justice / Immigrants)	Formation House
	Intergenerational Relationships			Vincentian Young Adult Corps.	
				Formation leading clergy and laity to “fuller participation in evangelization of the poor”	

One immediate short-term strategy would be to send forth members of the Provincial Council and Executive Team to various regions of the Province, meeting the confreres, visiting their works, and conducting council meetings and visitations onsite.

The Planning Process will also seek to establish long term priorities and strategies. These will be discerned during the calendar year 2022-2023 and address core areas such as **Confrere Formation / Training, Confrere Vitality, Infrastructure, Mission Renewal, and Vocations**. During this time, new models of ministry may be piloted to test future opportunities. This will be approached in a way that supports the communal nature of the Vincentians, identifies strategic partnerships, and leverages the talents and promise throughout the Province to honor what is present and build upon it.

As the Planning Process moves forward, confreres will be invited to participate through a variety of ways including:

- Monthly Town Halls (via Zoom)
- Discussion Forums (Intranet)
- Community Meetings (In-Person/Local)
- Provincial Q/A (White Paper and/or Video)
- Annual Gatherings - retreat, Convocation, etc. (In-Person/Province-wide)

In discerning how the Vincentians can best respond to the needs of today's Church, there is great hope. The core identity of the mission to evangelize the poor is a ministry that resonates with many but must be more clearly defined in the context of today's world. As the Province recalibrates its mission, the confreres will need to put the past behind them in order to move forward. Success will require the community to lean into the heart of the Vincentian charism, truly understanding who the poor are and always strive to see Christ in those they serve.

APPENDIX A

Prayer for Apostolic Planning

Leader: Our founder, Saint Vincent, desired that his brothers and sisters go forth with apostolic zeal: “Let us ask God fervently for the spirit for the whole Company, a spirit that will take us everywhere, with the result that, when someone sees one or two Missioners, they can say, ‘Those are apostolic persons ready to go to the four corners of the world carrying the word of God.’”

Let us pray (All): O Most Holy Spirit, stir up in us that apostolic zeal that moved St. Vincent de Paul to send out missionaries to the ends of the earth. Accompany us as we discern and plan the apostolic future of the Province. Open our hearts to hear your promptings in the events and peoples of our day, especially the poor. Make us attentive to the call of Providence and bold in finding new and creative ways of following Christ evangelizing the poor. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

All: Pray for us.

Leader: St. Vincent de Paul.

All: Pray for us.

Leader: St. Louise de Marillac.

All: Pray for us.

Leader: All the saints and blessed of the Vincentian Family.

All: Pray for us.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Topic #1: Why the congregation of the mission?

The Congregation of the Mission is committed to making Christ present in the world through our evangelization of the poor. We, individually and as a community, put on the spirit of Christ to acquire holiness appropriate to our vocation.

We work at evangelizing the poor, especially the abandoned. We help the clergy and laity in their formation. We lead them to fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor. Keeping this in mind, let's explore how we can harness the legacy of the Congregation of the Mission Western Province to take us into the future.

Think back to when you first became involved with the Vincentians. What was it that attracted you? What is it about the work of the charism that appeals to you today?

What do you value about yourself and your growth in the Vincentian charism? How are you continuing to grow in the Vincentian spirituality and charism?

Topic #2: Extraordinary impact

The Vincentians strive to make an extraordinary impact by putting on Christ, evangelizing the poor, and forming clergy and laity in fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor. A confrere contributes to the greater good of the community and, in particular, to the Congregation of the Mission Western Province.

Think of a time when you felt the Congregation had made a significant difference in either the community we serve or in the life of the Vincentian community. Think of one specific time when you noticed such bold work or real impact. Would you please describe in detail what was substantial or truly Vincentian about that work?

Looking forward into the future to 2027, what impact could the Congregation of the Mission Western Province have on the future of our community--locally, regionally, and Province-wide--if it succeeded to the utmost? Describe the impact and your involvement in rich detail.

Topic: #3 Valuing Diverse Perspectives

Our work as a community is becoming much more diverse and ever-changing, adding new members to our community, assisting in new ministries, new ways of leading and partnering, and new ways of organizing. When ministries are at their best, they capitalize on the strength of their diversity. They appreciate individuals or groups that bring different experiences, expertise, and ways of thinking to the work and ministry. They build teamwork and cooperation on the strength of diversity--the ability to honor differences in service to a shared vision.

The ability to value diverse perspectives allows people and groups to maintain their separate and unique identities while at the same time contributing to the achievement of a larger common purpose.

Describe a time when you worked on a team that benefited from its diversity. What strategic advantages can the Congregation of the Mission Western Province claim for itself and others that embrace the importance of valuing diverse perspectives and inclusion? How might the Congregation develop, structure, or capitalize on this strength? How can you participate in this?

Topic #4: Vibrant Future

Imagine that you can design the most inspiring, vibrant future for the Congregation of the Mission Western Province without monetary or personal limitations.

Describe the results or outcomes that would occur as a result of this vision.

Describe the actions that your vision would inspire.

Describe the relationships that would develop in support of this vision.

What would the impact be on your relationship with God and with the community?

APPENDIX C

Survey Questions

1. How do you know the Vincentians?
2. Think back to when you first became involved with the Vincentian mission. What was it that attracted you? What is it about their work that appeals to you today?
3. Think of a time when you felt the Congregation of the Mission--The Vincentians had made a significant difference in the community. Think of one specific time when you noticed such bold work or real impact. Please describe in detail what was truly "Vincentian" about that work.
4. How would you rank each of the Vincentian mission priorities?
5. What is your sense of the overall mission awareness of the Congregation of the Mission among active supporters?
6. What do you believe is the single most significant factor influencing a person's decision to participate in the work of the Congregation of the Mission?
7. What might keep people from becoming involved and/or making a gift?
8. What works do you believe inspire new and deepen continuing support for our mission?
9. How do you see yourself as a participant in carrying the Vincentian charism forward into the future?
10. Imagine that you can design the most inspiring, vibrant future for the Congregation of the Mission Western Province (without monetary or personal limitations). Describe this vision in detail.