

## Speech of June 5th

*Good afternoon, my dear brothers and sisters, leaders of the SSVP!*

The emotion is truly very strong, my friends. I never thought that one day I could be here, in this position, elected International President General of the SSVP in order to lead this work of divine inspiration, following the footsteps of our co-founders, above all of the beloved fellow member Emmanuel Joseph Bailly, the first President General.

I am very happy and moved, and I hope that I will never disappoint you! It is a great honour for me!

When I joined the SSVP, in 1986, I simply wished to help the families in need, seeking to create a better world, with more equality and more opportunities, bringing hope to those who were sad. Just that! Now, you have made me "the servant of every one", of you and of the poor!

As we know, works of charity for the poor belong to God. Therefore and first of all, I want to thank God for our being here together, attending this Extraordinary General Assembly and voting for a new International President General.

Every six years, our association meets to renew itself, looking at the future with hope and generosity. For this reason, it is always worth repeating the maxim that "this work belongs to God", and therefore, we must do what pleases most the Lord: love and service to the poor. This is our vocation and mission!

Without God's blessing, we could do absolutely nothing. The Holy Spirit guides us and inspires us to make the best decisions for the sake of our Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The forces that I, and the new leaders of the International General Council, need to work correctly in order to fulfil the institutional role of the Council come from God.

My gratitude to the Holy Mary, through Our Lady of Aparecida (Patron Saint of Brazil) and to Our Lady of Fatima (the patron saint of Portugal) for the strength that She gave us to get here.

On Tuesday, June 7th, I will share with you a deeper reflection on the 20 points of our work programme and I will speak about my ideas for the international structure.

Before concluding, I wish to express my opinion about the changes in our young Rule from 2003. I consider many of the proposed adjustments as "significant progress" for the implementation of the Vincentian works. On the other hand, there are extremely complex and sensitive issues, which will require major, irrevocable decisions that will cause a deep impact on the future of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul all over the world. We cannot leave this Assembly divided.

Therefore, I ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you to make the best decision. You have to reflect deeply on the decision that you will make! This is what your elected President is asking you, with love!

This is what I had to say at this moment. Thank you for your trust and for your support! THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

## Speech of June 7th

*My dear brothers and sisters, good afternoon.*

It is with great joy that I address you this official speech, as 16th President General of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, elected last Sunday, June 5th, 2016.

Shortly after the announcement of my election, as you remember, I have thanked God for everything He has done in our lives, as well as in appreciation of our election. Now, in this speech, I would like to speak about the work programme that we intend to carry out until the year 2022.

But before I would like to state some important expressions of gratitude.

I want to thank my **family** that has always supported me, at all times, especially in the more difficult ones: my wife Andrea, companion of the journey since 1997, the year of our marriage; my children Gustavo and Bianca; my parents, siblings and relatives. You are the pillars of my faith and my life, and you were those who prepared the foundations of my growth as a person, professional and Christian.

I am also grateful to the fellow members **Alexandre Soares** and **Paulo Rocha**, the brothers who held the Presidency of the Conference Saint Thomas Aquinas, in Campinas, province of São Paulo, Brazil, in 1986, when I joined the institution. They were who invited me to join the SSVP, when I was still very young, only 16 years of age. I was seeking to participate in a Catholic group where I could serve, practice charity, grow spiritually and improve as a person; and they suggested that I joined the SSVP.

Paulo and Alexandre, you were the instruments of God in my life! Thank you! Without you, I would not be here.

I thank all the countries that have given me the necessary votes to be elected as the new International President General. I thank as well those who perhaps did not vote for me, since they had the option of voting for an excellent candidate: our sister Maria Geralda Ferreira of Brazil, to whom I request everyone a **round of applause**.

I am sure that we will continue working together for the vincentian unity and for the growth of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul!

I believe that we must always appreciate the existence of candidates who put themselves at the disposal of the elections, in Conferences and Councils, since without them we cannot have elections! Without the generous availability of candidates, there are no elections! The candidates are as important as the elected ones, although the human culture tends to value only the elected officials.

I also thank several leaders who work currently in the International General Council, from whom I have obtained, in these 10 years of intense and fraternal coexistence, many teachings and life lessons that will allow us to continue in the Presidency of the Council with renewed vigour. I will mention a few of these:

- the fellow member **Michael Thio**, for the examples of spirituality and for his full trust in the Holy Spirit. You are an example for me.
- the fellow member **Amin de Tarrazi**, for his great generosity and for his vision of the future, especially as “visionary of the young”.
- our dear **sister Maureen**, the spiritual advisor of the General Council, for the gentleness with which she served so well at the CGI during the last four years.
- the fellow member **José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha**, for having been the person that invited me to be part of the General Council in 2001, and for the motivation and trust that he has always inspired in all the Vincentians in the world.
- the dear friend and teacher **Huáscar Nabuco**, of Brazil, who taught me, and still does, a lot about the management of the SSVP.

- the fellow member **Brian O'Reilly**, for the full commitment and for his impressive dedication to the Vincentian cause.

- the fellow member **John Lee**, from whom I have learned so much about the organization and structure of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. You are also an example for me.

- **other leaders of the General Council**, whose coexistence and closeness in the last 10 years have been crucial to forge my way of acting as a Vincentian.

- **my dear friends the Territorial Vice-presidents**, fine faithful companions, from whom I have learned a lot, observing your practice in the missionary service for the General Council, in situations that were not always favourable to come to grips with serious difficulties in some countries.

I could not forget my gratitude to:

- the **presidents of Superior or National Councils**, of course for their favourable votes, but above all for the task that we will carry on from now on for the growth of our “international association of lay Christians”, especially in joint projects and in the spreading of our Society to the countries where she is not yet present.

- the **staff of the head office in Paris**, for their dedication and zeal with the Vincentian work. We can do it even better, especially in the provision of services to the National Councils.

- the dear friends, leaders in **South America**, my home, where we had the opportunity to work in harmony as a team, promoting an important progress in the Vincentian journey.

- the **Vincentians in Brazil**, who may now speak Portuguese directly with the President General. I hope to represent you well. Count on me, but pray for me also.

- the **Vincentian brothers and sisters of Brasilia**, my city, who have known me for 30 years and believed in me without restrictions.

- the **branches of the Vincentian Family** all over the world, since together and united we make the difference and we are much stronger when we act in common, in an efficient collaboration, even more so now, for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vincentian charisma.

I will do my best not to disappoint you. I will honour the position that you entrust me now. Our inspiration will be the following biblical passage: *“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and the servant of all” (Mk 9, 35).*

This is how this president general wishes to be seen and understood by all. This is how I am going to work, with generosity, respect, affection and serenity! This will be our way of acting as a "servant leader", as our International Rule lays down.

This General Council, since 1840, has gone through many difficult moments in the history of humankind, such as wars, natural disasters, diseases, economic crises, calamities, social conflicts, revolutions and other political, environmental, social and economic adversities.

And nowadays, we witness new crises, such as migrations, the increase of poverty, regional disparities, the ageing and lack of renewal in the Conferences, the crisis of family, abortion and criticism of Christian values and of the Church. However, blessed by God, the new leaders of the General Council will certainly manage to go through this period as difficult and challenging as the previous ones.

Our main concern is to face, successfully, the many challenges of the present times. To do this, we will make small adjustments in the structure of the General Council to provide it with greater efficiency, but at the same time without increasing the annual budget or the number of members who work currently in the different services of the structure. Austerity will remain, because the cost control is essential in any institution. We will act with **creativity and innovation** to obtain much-needed additional resources to these new challenges.

The names of the Vincentians that will assume functions in the Structure will be announced in due course. Until then, all those who hold positions in the CGI, please remain in your positions until we can implement the changes and make the necessary appointments.

Many people today, who are already supporting the Structure, will be invited to fulfil other tasks in the Council, in different areas. Therefore, we will be opening spaces for new talents, i.e. new fellow members who can collaborate in various sectors. I already thank all that accept my invitations.

I think that you all know our work programme for the next six years. It is made of 20 objectives, quite feasible, which, if they are applied and fulfilled, will ensure that the General Council makes an important progress. We cannot rest on our laurels. The challenges are enormous, and we should never go backwards.

*My dear and kind friends,*

I come from Brazil, a wonderful nation, the land of the 2016 Olympic Games, a country full of history, culture and joy, but which is going through a very complex period, both in economics and in politics. Nevertheless, little by little, the country is resolving its crisis and its problems.

The election of a Brazilian International President General is auspicious news at this delicate situation that affects the Brazilians, and we are sure that we will overcome all these difficulties.

The "vincentian Brazil" is a reference in several sectors in which the SSVP has gradually grown and developed both in quality and quantity. Let me mention some examples: training, youth, communication, children and adolescents, heritage and works, structure and organization of the Zone (/Particular) Councils, among others.

I am sure that the Brazilian Vincentians will continue sharing, with charity and generosity, their human and financial resources, as well as their successful experiences so that the rest of the world can benefit too, from all that wealth. I count on you, Brazil!

*My dear friends,*

As you know, I am not retired and I am far from that, because I am only 45 years old and a public official of the Brazilian Government. Therefore, to face all the appointments, journeys and other international events that will take place in the next six years, we will have a work team that will share with me the huge responsibility of leading the General Council. This is one of the pillars of the primitive spirit of our organization: the "collegial management", which is part of our DNA.

My presence will not always be possible everywhere, because only God is omnipresent. Therefore, I hope that everyone will understand the limitations and difficulties of the president general. After all, I am not the first president general "not retired". In fact, most of my predecessors were still professional, in full working activity.

In these moments, I recall the impressive person of Bailly, who was 47 years old when he was elected President of the General Council of Paris, in 1840. He was a very busy man, a true "hyperactive", with various professional, academic, and commercial activities (owner of a guesthouse and a newspaper). However, Bailly had the unconditional support of the other members, which allowed him to fulfil the role as president general very successfully.

I only ask you this: the same treatment given to Bailly and to other general presidents who were still in full professional activity when they were elected. I thank you with all my heart! In truth, we must be prepared or more accustomed to have general presidents who still work in the professional field, since this is a global trend, and retirement comes later and later in all Nations.

My dear friends, I do not want to tire you, as you obviously have already noticed, I love speaking and writing. I inform you, nonetheless, that there will be other opportunities to address to you, especially through the **CIRCULAR LETTERS**, which we are going to send again, because it is a tradition of general presidents.

All of us here present, have a dream, or several dreams for the SSVP. Let us dream together! Let us have faith that our dreams can become true. It is enough with believing in it and wanting it. There is still much to do, both in the General Council and in our Superior Councils.

The challenges are enormous. The service to the poor, supported by faith, hope and charity, which promotes the encounter with the "Christ incarnated" in the figure of the poor, as Ozanam believed, depends on us! Let us continue together in the journey of services and initiatives that could give more speed and efficiency to our Councils and Conferences!

I invite you all to the inauguration ceremony on September 9th, in Paris. May God help me in the election of the new members who will assume key positions in the CGI structure! I am going to need all of you and all your talents at the service of the structure!

May Our Lady, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, Catherine Labouré, Rosalie Rendu and Ozanam enlighten us on the road that we start today! Be with God, and God bless us.

Moreover, do not forget: your President General is and will always be available to meet and talk to all the fellow members around the world, on any subject, except football!

**Renato Lima de Oliveira**

**XVI International President General – elect**