

NGO NEWS

Sisters of Charity Federation

The Vincentian Family in Africa

by Caroljean Willie, SC

More than 100 members of the Vincentian Family gathered in Yaoundé, Cameroon to learn about how to engage in systemic change in their ministries with those living in poverty.

This is one of several continental workshops sponsored by the Vincentian Family to train local leaders in the art of systemic change. Other workshops have been held in Mexico and Brazil. Future ones are planned for Bangkok, Europe, and North America.

The Commission for Promoting Systemic Change is composed of members of the different branches of the Vincentian Family.

Many of the strategies that the Commission has identified for promoting systemic change flow from the gospels and the Vincentian Traditions, such as:

- Involving those living in



Celebrating Eucharist—African Style

poverty themselves at all stages: the identification of needs, planning, implementation, evaluation and revision.

- Having a holistic vision—addressing a series of basic human needs: individual and social, spiritual and physical, especially jobs, healthcare, housing,

education, and spiritual growth—with an integral approach toward prevention and sustainable development;

- Placing particular emphasis on self-help and self-sustaining programs and identifying the root causes of poverty.

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President Obama at the United Nations

The following are excerpts from President Barack Obama's first address to the General Assembly:

"Like all of you, my responsibility is to act in the interest of my nation and my people, and I will never apologize for de-

fending those interests. But it is my deeply held belief that in the year 2009—more than at any point in human history—the interests of nations and people are shared."

"No longer do we have the luxury of indulging our differ-

ences to the exclusion of the work that we must do together."

"In an era when our destiny is shared, power is no longer a zero sum game. No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation. No world order

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Dates to Remember

- 10/20-22/09—SC-UN Orientation
- 2/02-12/10—Commission for Social Development
- 03/01-12/10—Commission on the Status of Women
- 04/06-08/10—SC-UN Orientation
- 04/19-30—Permanent Forum on the Rights of the Indigenous
- 05/03-14/10—Commission for Sustainable Development

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President Obama cont'd

that elevates one nation or group of people over another will succeed. No balance of power among nations will hold. The traditional division between nations of the south and north makes no sense in an interconnected world. Nor do alignments of nations rooted in the cleavages of a long gone Cold War. The time has come to realize that the old habits and arguments are irrelevant to the challenges faced by our people... They build up walls between us and the future that our people seek, and the time has come for those walls to come down."

"Now it falls to us—for this institution will

be what we make of it. The UN does extraordinary good around the world in feeding the hungry, caring for the sick...but it also struggles to enforce its will, and to live up to the ideals of its founding.. I believe that those imperfections are not a reason to walk away...they are a calling to redouble our efforts...We have reached a pivotal moment. The United States stands ready to begin a new chapter of international cooperation—one that recognizes the rights and responsibilities of all nations. With confidence in our cause, and with a commitment to our values, we call on all nations to join us in building the future that our people deserve.



President Barack Obama with Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon at the United Nations.

Books

Novogratz, Jacqueline. *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World*. Rodale Books, 2009.

This is a true story of a woman who leaves a very lucrative corporate banking position to work with women's groups in micro-finance, the pioneering banking strategy that won Muhammad Yunus a Nobel Prize in 2006.

Eisler, Riane. *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economy*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008.

Resources

Eisler offers a clearly written and compelling account of how the masculine "dominator" mentality brought us to our present juncture, and how a feminine "partnership" mentality can help us redefine key concepts such as "value" and "needs."

Websites

www.clubmadrid.org

The Club de Madrid is an independent organization of 70 democratic former Heads of State and Governments from 50 countries. They have developed a "Shared Societies Project" as a model of social inclusion for

present world leaders. Read the Ten Commitments leaders can make to create a shared society. The shared societies booklet can be downloaded from this site.

www.grameenfoundation.org

This site of the Grameen foundation offers a wealth of information about micro-financing. It gives an overview of what it is as well as specific examples of successful projects.

www.ec.gc.ca/

This is the official Canadian website on environmental issues and offers a wealth of information on multiple environmental topics.

Microfinancing: A Tool for Achieving the MDGs by Caroljean Willie, SC

I serve on the Board of Directors for Micro-financing Partners in Africa (MPA) and this summer I had the opportunity to travel with several board members to Jamii Bora in Kenya, one of our partners.

Jamii Bora (Swahili for "better families") is a microfinancing project started by Ingrid Munro of Sweden as a way to help street beggars lift themselves out of poverty. Ten years ago she challenged 50 street beggars to save some money and to begin a

process of bringing themselves out of poverty. It took more than six months, but the group saved approximately \$100. Ingrid found a donor to double their money.

Today Jamii Bora has 97 branches, 150 outlets, 235,000 members, and a record of giving out over 3 billion shillings (\$40,290,00) in loans.

During our two weeks in Kenya, Susan Saiorri, the Jamii Bora National Outreach

Coordinator, took us to visit the slums of Kibera and Mathare. There we saw the small businesses that the loans have made possible.

I was struck throughout the trip as I talked with many Jamii Bora members of the immense pride and ownership they take in what they have accomplished.

Former thieves and muggers, prostitutes and other societal outcasts shared the sto-

The Vincentian Family in Africa cont'd

The Vincentian Family commits itself not only to serve the immediate needs of those living in poverty, but also to assist them in developing strategies by which they can emerge from poverty.

The members of the Family gathered in Yaoundé included representatives from Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo—Brazzaville, Cameroon, Madagascar, Chad, South Africa, Mozambique, and other countries.

The AIC (International Association of Charities) held their continental meeting for a week before the systemic change

workshops. I was fortunate to be able to attend several days of their gathering, also, and learn of the incredible work these women are doing in their home countries.

Nkiru Aronu, the President of the Ladies of Charity of Nigeria, gave me a ten-page spiral-bound report with pictures of how the money which we gave through our Alternative Gift Giving program last Christmas was used. The report included testimonials from several of the women who received micro-loans.

To learn more about the Vincentian Family and its systemic change initiatives around the world, go to



Sister Cj in African dress, a gift from Nkiru, (on my right) with Nigerian AIC leaders.

www.famvin.org

United Nations News

- H.E. Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki of Libya is the President of the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly. In his acceptance speech he stated: "We should work together to avert war through the administration of justice in order to safeguard human lives and preserve human dignity. The only war worth relentlessly fighting, with the participation of all, is that against fatal diseases, poverty, hunger and illiteracy."
- Main issues before the 64th General Assembly include: the Millennium Development Goals, the world financial and economic crisis and its impact on development, climate change, disarmament, UN reform, and a review of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council.
- On 24 September 2009 the Security Council, chaired by President Barack Obama, affirmed its commitment to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and established a broad framework for reducing global nuclear dangers.
- The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (October 17th) will be celebrated at the United Nations on Monday, October 19th. The activities will include a commemoration celebration at the UN followed by an interactive panel with children and young adults.

UN Summit on Climate Change

More than one hundred leaders from around the world gathered at the United Nations Summit on Climate Change on September 22, 2009. This was the largest gathering ever of world leaders on climate change and Secretary General Ban Ki-moon noted that their presence "bears witness to the gravity of climate change."

The Secretary-General said climate change negotiations are moving too slowly and noted that there are now only 15 negotiating days left until the world conference

on climate change in Copenhagen.

He urged world leaders to provide direct political support to their negotiators to make a deal in Copenhagen saying a successful deal will mean more prosperity, security and equity and improve the quality of life for all.

"Instead of demanding concessions from others, let us ask how we can contribute to the greater good. Today, I call on the lead-

ers of the industrialized countries in this room to take the first steps forward. If you do so, others will take bold measures of their own. I also call on leaders from developing countries to accelerate their efforts. All countries must do more now," the Secretary General stated.

The Copenhagen Conference is scheduled for December of this year. The purpose of the conference is to design a treaty which will replace the Kyoto Protocol when it expires.

Sisters of Charity Federation

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Father Sy Peterka, CM (top right) invited Sr. Cj to give a presentation on "The Vincentian Family at the United Nations" to priest formators from throughout Africa gathered in Nairobi for their annual meeting.

Sisters of Charity Federation

Mission Statement

Impelled by Christ's love and joined together in the mission of Charity, we, the Sisters of Charity Federation, respond to the cries of those who are poor and marginalized.

Vision Statement

Impelled by the Gospel charism of Charity, we commit ourselves to be in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who are poor and marginalized. We will use the energy of our love, the gifts and talents of the members of our communities, and our material and spiritual resources to collaborate in the creation of systemic change locally and globally for the common good of all.



Microfinancing cont'd

ries of what Jamii Bora has done in their lives. They proudly showed us their small businesses and spoke of their hopes and dreams for themselves and their children who could now attend school.

Membership in Jamii Bora is built on the principle of borrowing double the amount that the borrower has saved. It operates on a group model which supports the design and operation of a business plan for those applying for loans. This community cohesion is part of the power of this model. Membership includes the benefits of health insurance, disaster insurance and life insurance.

At the end of our second week we drove to Kaputei, the incredible housing development that Jamii Bora members are building outside of Nairobi. Out of desert lands



the members are raising a new town of homes and businesses; a place where their children can go to school and play safely. They proudly turned on faucets to show running water recalling the days in the slums when they had to carry water.

The first seven of the Millennium Development Goals are dedicated to improving the lives of those living in poverty. Through microfinancing projects such as Jamii Bora the people themselves participate in lifting themselves out of poverty. This is the essence of systemic change. To learn more go to: www.microfinancingafrica.org

Jane, a former prostitute, proudly shows us how far she has come from the slums of Mathare (above) to owning her own home with loans from Jamii Bora.