Brothers of the Christian Schools

La Salle

IN MEMORIAM

Brother Vincent de Paul Rabemahafaly

"A life dedicated to God, Education and Fraternity"

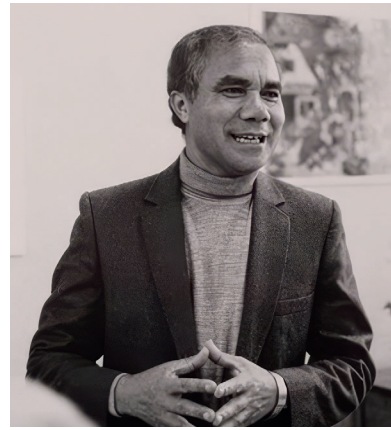
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Brother Vincent de Paul Rabemahafaly

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General Council
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Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Circular No. 480

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INDEX

INTRODUCTION *5*

CHAPTER I:
SEEDS OF FAITH *7*

1. Deeply Christian family roots *7*
2. A faith passed on by his mother *8*
3. The early roots of his Christian vocation *9*
4. The awakening of a Lasallian vocation *11*

CHAPTER II:
INITIAL FORMATION IN THE INSTITUTE *14*

1. Entry into the Aspirancy: the first steps of a vocation *14*
2. From the Novitiate to perpetual vows: the deepening of the vocation *16*
3. The formators who shaped Brother Vincent *18*

CHAPTER III:
A VOCATION IN THE SERVICE OF EDUCATION *21*

1. Formator at the Aspirancy: the beginnings of an educational mission *21*
2. Brother Vincent, formator of the novices at Analabe *23*
3. Director or the Scholasticate: training future Lasallian educators *25*
4. A mission expressed in presence and guidance *27*

CHAPTER IV:
ACADEMIC STUDIES AND INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH *29*

1. Formation in Rome: an opening to the universal Church *29*
2. Memorable encounters: spiritual and intellectual mentors *31*
3. An openness to the universality of the Church and the mission *33*

CHAPTER V:
APOSTOLIC MISSION AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE INSTITUTE *36*

1. Stella Maris – Tamatave: the early days of a young missionary director *36*
2. Visitor of the District of Antananarivo: fraternal and participatory leadership *38*
3. Participation in General Chapters: at the heart of the Institute's renewal *40*
4. General Councillor: an international mission in the service of the Institute *42*
5. Brother Vincent and his contribution to the development of the Lasallian Mission in Africa *44*

CHAPTER VI:
SERVICE TO THE CHURCH IN MADAGASCAR *47*

1. Coordinating Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Madagascar (2000-2009) *47*
2. Editor-in-Chief of Lakroan'i Madagasikara: a mission in the service of truth *49*
3. Brother Vincent in the service of ecclesial and educational reflection in Africa *51*

CHAPTER VII:
LAST MISSIONS AND RETREAT HOUSE *54*

1. Tireless fidelity in the service of communities and the mission *54*
2. Brother Vincent, formator and spiritual guide to the young Brothers *56*
3. Brother Vincent in the service of the spiritual legacy of Blessed Rafiringa *58*
4. The final years: a testimony of faith, simplicity and fidelity *59*

CONCLUSION *62*

APPENDIX *64*

INTRODUCTION

Brother Vincent de Paul Rabemahafaly was an outstanding figure in the Lasallian Mission in Madagascar, in Africa and within the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. A religious deeply rooted in the faith, an educator, a formator and a man of the Church, he devoted more than seventy years of his life to the service of God, young people and the educational mission. This biography aims to pay tribute to his exceptional life's journey, marked by fidelity, fraternity and a constant commitment to the service of others.

From his childhood, shaped by the example of a deeply devout mother, Brother Vincent developed a strong spiritual life as well as a great sense of service and compassion. Very early on, his human and intellectual qualities were recognised, leading him to take on significant responsibilities: formator of young Brothers, Director of communities and schools, Visitor of the Antananarivo District, General Councillor of the Institute, Collaborator with the Bishops' Conference of Madagascar and a committed advocate of the Lasallian Mission in Africa. Despite these many responsibilities, he always remained a humble man, approachable and deeply committed to the spirit of fraternity.

Beyond a chronological account of his life, this book seeks above all to highlight the spiritual and human legacy he leaves behind. Through his witness of faith,

service, humility and missionary commitment, Brother Vincent continues to inspire the generations of Brothers, students and colleagues whom he accompanied. His life reminds us that a life lived with fidelity and simplicity can become a true source of hope for the Church, for young people and for the Lasallian Educational Mission.

CHAPTER I:
Seeds of Faith

1. Deeply Christian family roots

Brother Vincent de Paul RABEMAHAFALAHY was born to RAFARALAHY Benoît, a rice farmer in Ambohibary-Fahizay and later in Tapano, in the district of Ambositra, and to RASOA Marie Madeleine, originally from Salakaina–Maharivo, in the district of Fandriana. Both belonged to the Northern Betsileo ethnic group, in the Haute Matsiatra region, formerly part of the province of Fianarantsoa.

He grew up in a rural environment deeply moulded by working the land, family solidarity and the Christian faith. The family first lived in Ambohibary, before settling in Tapano, a village founded by his father on ancestral lands inherited from his family, on the other side of the Imady River. Surrounded by rice fields and the simple life of farmers, the young Vincent was introduced at a very early age to the values of hard work, perseverance, humility and a sense of duty, which would have a lasting influence on his character and his future religious life.

Faith played a central role in this family. Prayer, participation in the life of the Church and respect for Christian values were an integral part of daily life. This spiritual atmosphere contributed greatly to the awakening of his vocation and to the formation of a man deeply devoted to God, to simplicity and to the service of others.

Vincent was one of six children in the family. The siblings were: RAMARIAVAO, the eldest daughter; RAITASY, the eldest son; RAKATY, the second daughter; RANANDRO, one of the three sons; BRIGITTE, mother of the late Brother Roger RAJAONASARY, nephew of the future Brother Vincent, who died in 2013; and finally, Brother Vincent RABEMAHAFALAHY, the youngest of the family.

The deep bonds that united the members of this family had a decisive influence on the young Vincent's human and spiritual development. In this family atmosphere, characterised by affection, solidarity and mutual respect, he learnt at a very early age the meaning of brotherhood, a sense of belonging and service to others.

2. A faith passed on by his mother

Among the figures who left a deep mark on his childhood, his mother held a significant place. Brother Vincent spoke of her with emotion and admiration, describing her as a deeply devout woman, wholly devoted to God and to the service of others.

Despite the difficulties of the time, the long distances to be travelled and the sometimes-arduous conditions, she remained faithful to prayer and to attending Sunday Mass. Nothing seemed able to weaken her determination to live out her faith to the full. This quiet faithfulness made a deep impression on the young Vincent, who saw in her a living testimony of trust in God.

His mother did not confine her faith to her private life; she expressed it in practical ways through her service to others. She regularly visited the sick, caring for the most vulnerable with compassion and sensitivity. Vincent often accompanied her on these visits, discovering at a very early age not only human suffering but also the value of comfort, presence and a listening ear.

It was in this way, through her example, that he gradually learnt compassion for those who were suffering, a sense of selfless service, concern for the poorest and most vulnerable, and fidelity to the Christian faith despite trials.

Together, they also spent time with Father Profita, a faithful friend of his mother's, who devoted his life to reconciling people and resolving conflicts. This closeness to committed church figures helped to shape in Vincent a deep spiritual sensitivity as well as a strong sense of fraternity.

Later, Brother Vincent would acknowledge that these childhood experiences were decisive in defining his religious vocation. Through his mother's example, he discovered that authentic faith always manifests itself through service, charity and practical care for others.

3. The early roots of his Christian vocation

Very close to his mother, Vincent took an active part in the life of the local Church from a very young age. He accompanied her to celebrations, community gatherings and the various Church activities in the village. This

early immersion in Christian life gradually helped to nurture a genuine spiritual sensitivity within him.

He often spoke with gratitude of the role his mother played in the development of the Catholic community in Fahizay: *"My mother was one of the founders of the Catholic Church in Fahizay..."*.[1]

At that time, the Christian faith was still taking root in certain villages where traditional beliefs remained very much alive. Brother Vincent recounted that there were then *"vatolahy masina"*,[2] large stones believed to be inhabited by the spirits of ancestors and which instilled great fear amongst the inhabitants.

Despite this context, catechists and Christian families courageously committed themselves to helping the local Catholic community grow. A certain Mr Benoît, accompanied by the *"Ray aman-dreny"*,[3] had a house built to bring the faithful together for prayer and Christian celebrations. The community placed this work under the protection of Saint Benedict, the name that would later be given to the Catholic church in Fahizay.

The young Vincent thus grew up in an environment where faith was lived out in a communal, courageous and missionary spirit. He retained very vivid memories

1 Words spoken by Brother Vincent, as recounted by Brother Michel TOLOJANAHARY in 2021, whilst Brother Vincent was in hospital.

2 This expression refers to large stones that signal the presence of ancestral spirits.

3 The parents.

of the moments of prayer shared with his mother: *"My mother never missed Sunday Mass and was one of the community's leaders. I remember very clearly praying with her every Sunday".*[4]

His mother also introduced him to visiting the sick in the Imerina region, the administrative centre for the villages of the Imady sub-region. Through these visits, he got to know Father Julien de Croix, Father Ofman and Father Profita, all close friends of his mother and deeply committed to evangelisation and the spiritual guidance of the local people.

These encounters and these experiences within the Church left a deep impression on the young Vincent. They gradually shaped his Christian identity and quietly laid the groundwork for the awakening of his religious vocation.

4. The awakening of a Lasallian vocation

Brother Vincent's Lasallian vocation began to take shape within the context of his school life and his daily contact with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Very early on, he was struck by their way of life, their infectious joy and their closeness to the pupils.

He particularly remembered the atmosphere that prevailed within the community: *"There were ten Brothers in the community who caught my attention with*

4 Brother Michel TOLOJANAHARY, 2021.

their joy. They joked with the pupils, despite the discipline that intimidated us".[5]

Despite the strictness of school discipline, the Brothers knew how to create an atmosphere of closeness and fraternity that made a deep impression on the young Vincent. This simple, brotherly joy aroused a quiet admiration within him.

Of all the Brothers, the one who made the greatest impression on him was Brother Louis Robert. Brother Vincent acknowledged that he made a great impact on him and even inspired a certain fear. Yet it was precisely this Brother who would play a decisive role in the awakening of his vocation.

One day, whilst he was still a pupil in Year 8 and was going to the toilet, he came across Brother Louis Robert in the playground. The Brother asked him what he was doing there and what his plans were for the future. Vincent simply replied that he still needed to think about it.

The Brother then asked him this direct question: *'Do you want to be a Brother'?* Taken aback, young Vincent replied spontaneously and with humour: *"I would never want to become a 'Trimobe'"*.

In the popular imagination of the Malagasy people, the term '*Trimobe*' referred to a figure that frightened children. This reply reflected both the respectful awe he felt towards the Brothers and the imposing image he still had of religious life.

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5 *Ibidem.*

Yet this seemingly innocent conversation marked a decisive turning point. By the following Saturday, his name had been entered – without his knowledge – amongst the young aspirants to become Brothers of the Christian Schools.

From that moment on, he began to take part in the meetings for aspirants. Little by little, quietly and almost in spite of himself, the path of his vocation began to take shape. What had begun as a simple encounter in a school playground was now becoming the starting point of a spiritual and missionary journey that would shape his entire life.

CHAPTER II:
Initial Formation in the Institute

1. Entry into the Aspirancy: the first steps of a vocation

At the age of fourteen, in 1948, Vincent walked through the gates of the Aspirancy at Soavimbahoaka for the first time. This entry marked a decisive stage in his life: he was gradually leaving behind the family environment of his childhood to embark on a path of discernment and religious consecration.

At that time, he was still a pupil in Year 8 and outwardly differed little from his classmates. Yet, deep within him, a spiritual sensitivity was already maturing, nourished by the faith he had received from his family, by his mother's example, and by the witness of the Brothers who had awakened in him a desire for religious life. The invitation to join the Aspirancy therefore represented much more than a simple change of school: it carried within it the sense of an inner calling and the opening up to a new life.

The journey to Soavimbahoaka was in itself a first experience of detachment and learning. Nothing went smoothly. The car that was to take the young aspirants broke down in the middle of the road, causing anxiety and uncertainty for the young Vincent. For this teenager, leaving his family home for the first time, this difficulty took on almost the character of a rite of passage.

The journey eventually had to continue by train – a train still powered by coal. Vincent remembered this memorable experience in great detail: the thick smoke filling the carriages, the burning embers flying onto the passengers, and clothes sometimes damaged by the embers. He recounted it simply: "*Our clothes were even burnt".*[6]

Looking back, this arduous journey seemed almost like a symbolic image of his vocational journey: leaving the comforts of childhood, accepting the unexpected, and pressing on despite the obstacles towards the unknown to which God was calling him.

On his arrival at the Aspirancy, Vincent discovered a completely new world. The community comprised nearly a hundred aspirants living together within a framework structured by prayer, study and religious discipline. For him, it was a mixture of astonishment, admiration and, at times, intimidation. Yet, at the heart of this demanding environment, he also discovered the richness of brotherhood and community life.

Very quickly, he formed deep friendships with some of his fellow aspirants, notably Brother Ferdinand, nicknamed "*Raolomasina" – "the saint*" – because of his piety and seriousness, as well as with Brother Irénée, Brother Octave's nephew. Together, they shared their studies, prayers, daily tasks and moments of relaxation, building fraternal relationships that helped to shape his religious identity for the long term.

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6 Brother Michel TOLOJANAHARY, 2021.

Thus, entering the Aspirancy was not merely a change of location or pace of life. For Vincent, it was a truly formative experience, marked by his first acts of renunciation, his first experiences of brotherhood, and his first concrete steps towards the consecrated life.

2. From the Novitiate to perpetual vows: the deepening of the vocation

Between 1951 and 1958, Vincent undertook the various stages of his initial formation within the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: first the Novitiate at Soavimbahoaka, where he took the religious habit on 15 September 1951, then the Scholasticate from 1952 to 1955.

These years were decisive in shaping his human, spiritual and religious character. For him, they constituted a true school of the inner life, of personal discipline and of the gradual learning of the consecrated life.

Daily life at the novitiate was highly structured. The days were governed by a demanding timetable that alternated between times of communal prayer, study, manual labour, moments of silence, spiritual exercises and fraternal life.

This rigorous discipline made a deep impression on the young novices. It demanded constant efforts at adaptation, self-control and perseverance. For Vincent, this formation represented a slow process of inner transformation: learning to discipline his character, gradually letting go of certain attachments and deepening his personal relationship with God.

However, behind the strictness of the rules, fraternity played an essential role. The young men in formation found in community life a valuable source of support in the face of the difficulties of religious training. Together, they shared the joys, the struggles, the doubts and the hopes that accompany any budding vocation.

Gradually, Vincent came to realise that a religious vocation did not rest solely on initial enthusiasm or on the admiration for the Brothers he had felt during his adolescence. It was now becoming a conscious commitment, freely undertaken and deeply rooted in the faith.

These years of formation were also marked by a gradual deepening of Lasallian spirituality. Through prayer, study and community life, he gradually discovered the fundamental values of the Institute: the spirit of faith, educational zeal, fraternity, a sense of service and a special focus on the education of young people.

On 16 September 1952, after several years of discernment and preparation, Vincent took his first religious vows. This commitment marked a decisive stage in his life. Through these vows, he officially consecrated his life to God within the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and entered fully into Lasallian religious life.

Following this important step, he continued his formation at the Scholasticate from 1952 to 1955. This period helped to deepen his intellectual, pedagogical and spiritual preparation for the educational and community responsibilities that lay ahead.

On 24 August 1958, he took his perpetual vows, thereby becoming a permanent member of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Thus, these years of initial formation profoundly shaped Brother Vincent. They laid the solid foundations for a religious life characterised by fidelity, a sense of duty, brotherhood and service to Christian education.

3. The formators who shaped Brother Vincent

During his years of formation, Vincent had the good fortune to be guided by several formators who exerted a profound influence on his human, intellectual and spiritual development. Each, through their own personality and style, helped to shape the religious and the educator he would later become.

Among them, Brother Polycarp Marie held a prominent place. As head of the Scholasticate, he led the community with firmness and high standards, yet always imbued with genuine paternal care. Vincent would remember him as an attentive formator, capable of combining authority, a sense of discipline and fraternal closeness. Under his guidance, the young scholastics learnt to take their religious commitment seriously whilst developing a solid inner life.

Brother Michel Crousharga, of Spanish origin, also had a profound influence on the young Vincent. He impressed others with his intellectual rigour and spiritual depth. Demanding in his work and attentive to the quality of formation, he instilled in the young Brothers a taste

for hard work, reflection and fidelity to their religious vocation. His example helped to develop in Vincent a strong sense of responsibility and a personal discipline that would characterise his entire life.

Brother Liandre Victor, a Frenchman renowned for his teaching skills, exerted a particular influence on the way young people were taught and supported. His approach to education, his ability to listen and his humane approach to formation deeply inspired Vincent, who would take from him the importance of a teaching method based on both high standards and kindness.

Finally, Brother Henri, nicknamed "*Banga*",[7] held a special place within the community. As an older Malagasy Brother, he represented a figure of stability, wisdom and deep local roots. His reassuring presence and experience offered the young religious a role model who was close to them both culturally and personally.

Through these different figures, Vincent discovered various ways of living out the Lasallian vocation: spiritual rigour, fidelity to the community, a pedagogical approach, fraternal authority and dedication to the service of young people.

These formators were not merely academic tutors or those responsible for discipline. They became, for him, true witnesses to religious life, concretely embodying the values they imparted. Their example left a lasting mark on his character and profoundly influenced the

7 A person who has lost their teeth.

way in which he himself would later carry out his responsibilities for the formation of young Brothers.

Thus, Brother Vincent's years of initial formation appear as a formative period during which, through trials, community life, prayer and the guidance of his formators, the solid foundations of a long-standing religious and missionary fidelity were gradually laid.

CHAPTER III:
A Vocation in the Service of Formation

1. Formator at the Aspirancy: the beginnings of a mission that promised to be rewarding

In the life of Brother Vincent RABEMAHAFALY, the role of formator took centre stage very early on. No sooner had he completed his own initial formation than his superiors recognised in him qualities that were particularly valuable for accompanying young people on their vocational journey. His attentive listening, his natural rapport with young people, his pedagogical skills and the depth of his spiritual life already marked him out as a religious capable of guiding and training others.

Thus, from 1955 to 1958, he was sent to the Aspirancy at Soavimbahoaka to take on the role of formator. This appointment was a significant mark of trust, all the more so as he was still young himself. Yet, despite his age, he already displayed remarkable maturity and a great sense of responsibility.

Brother Vincent was part of the first generation of Malagasy Brothers called upon to play an active role in the formation of young religious in an environment still largely led by French missionary Brothers. This situation made him a true bridge between cultures: rooted in the Malagasy reality whilst being deeply grounded in the universal Lasallian tradition. His presence was already a

testament to the local development of the Institute and the trust gradually being placed in the local Brothers.

Alongside his work at the Aspirancy, he also taught at the Blessed Rafiringa School in Faravohitra, the third Lasallian school founded in the capital. Every day, he travelled faithfully and unpretentiously between the two places of mission. This dual responsibility demanded a great deal of energy, organisation and discipline from him. Yet he carried out this task with generosity and serenity, convinced that formation and teaching were part of the same educational and spiritual vocation.

What was most striking about him was his closeness to the young people. Both at the Aspirancy and in the classrooms, he knew how to establish a simple, fraternal and deeply human relationship. In his presence, the young people felt listened to, understood and encouraged. His way of guiding them was based neither on harshness nor on authoritarianism, but on a presence that was at once discreet, attentive and demanding.

When he had to correct or reprimand a young man in formation, he did so with tact and discernment. His aim was never to punish in order to humiliate, but to help each person grow both as a human being and spiritually. This attitude fostered an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect around him, in which the young people could develop their personalities and deepen their vocation in a spirit of inner freedom.

More than just an educator, Brother Vincent was already emerging as a true spiritual companion. Through the

consistency of his life, his religious fidelity and his sense of fraternity, he became a credible witness to the Lasallian vocation for the young people. His whole manner of being already revealed the qualities of a guide and leader that would characterise the important responsibilities he would later assume within the Institute.

2. Brother Vincent, formator of the novices at Analabe

From 1958 to 1961, Brother Vincent continued his formation ministry at the Analabe Novitiate in Ambositra. This place played a vital role in the preparation of young men called to the Lasallian religious life. In an environment characterised by silence, prayer and discernment, he devotedly supported many novices in their human and spiritual growth.

His mission was not merely to impart religious knowledge or to ensure compliance with community discipline. He understood deeply that a religious vocation must be nurtured with patience, discernment and a personal touch. That is why he made every effort to follow the novices personally, attentive to their difficulties, their questions and their inner development.

With particular responsibility for teaching catechism, he went far beyond the mere doctrinal framework. For him, teaching the faith meant awakening consciences and forming hearts capable of encountering God personally. His teaching method was based on simplicity, patience and spiritual depth. He sought not so much to have the

novices memorise formulas as to lead them towards a living, personal and incarnate faith.

Through his teachings, he introduced the young religious to the foundations of Lasallian spirituality and to the richness of the Lasallian charism, characterised by a spirit of faith, zeal for education, a sense of service, community fraternity, and a special concern for young people, especially the most impoverished.

But his true influence extended even beyond the content of his lessons. Through his way of life, his faithfulness to prayer, his simplicity of living and his religious earnestness, he himself became a real model for the novices. They saw in him a man deeply rooted in his vocation, consistent in his commitments and faithful to the call he had received from God.

Brother Vincent thus exercised a genuine spiritual fatherhood. Without ever seeking to impose himself, he knew how to listen, encourage and guide gently. He helped the young men to gradually discover their own vocational path, whilst inviting them to develop sound human and spiritual maturity.

During those three years at the Analabe Novitiate, he made a profound contribution to training not only well-educated religious, but above all men capable of living out their vocation with generosity, fidelity and a spirit of service. Many will cherish lasting memories of a humble formator who was approachable and deeply imbued with the spirit of the Gospel.

3. Director of the Scholasticate: Training Future Lasallian educators

The trust that the Institute placed in Brother Vincent was demonstrated even more clearly when he was appointed, from 1965 to 1966, Director of the Scholasticate at Soavimbahoaka. This responsibility represented an important stage in his journey, as it placed him at the very heart of the formation of young Brothers called to become educators and religious in the service of the Lasallian Mission.

As Director, he was required not only to ensure the organisation of the community and the smooth running of daily life, but also to closely support the spiritual, intellectual and personal development of the scholastics. This mission demanded great discernment, patience and personal balance.

Brother Vincent carried out this responsibility with great approachability and simplicity. He did not seek to impose his authority through rigidity or aloofness, but through the consistency of his life and the quality of his fraternal relationships. His door remained open to the young Brothers who came to him seeking advice, a listening ear or support.

His style of leadership was deeply characterised by a spirit of discernment. He knew how to take the time to listen before making a decision, respecting each person's inner freedom and their own pace. This way of leading the community fostered a climate of trust, responsibility and personal growth.

However, this closeness in no way meant a lack of determination. Brother Vincent attached great importance to the quality of the scholastics' human and spiritual formation. He encouraged diligence in studies, faithfulness to prayer, a sense of community discipline and a deepening of the religious vocation. He sought to form strong Brothers, capable of uniting inner life, educational competence and apostolic commitment.

His kindness was ever-present in the way he guided others. Even when he had to correct or remind them of certain requirements, he did so with respect and tact, always seeking the good and growth of the individuals rather than the mere application of rules. This attitude revealed a deeply balanced personality, capable of combining authority with gentleness, firmness with compassion.

Through his work at the Scholasticate, Brother Vincent helped to form an entire generation of young religious. More than merely providing intellectual or disciplinary training, he sought above all to help each individual become a man deeply rooted in his vocation and ready to serve the Church and young people faithfully.

4. A mission expressed in presence and guidance

Throughout all the responsibilities entrusted to him, Brother Vincent remained, above all, a man of presence and accompaniment. His way of living out his mission went far beyond the mere transmission of knowledge or the fulfilment of an institutional role. For him, education meant, above all, accompanying people in their human, spiritual and vocational growth.

He believed deeply that the quality of a vocation depended not only on the skills acquired or the responsibilities undertaken, but above all on the depth of one's inner life and human maturity. This is why he attached great importance to the personal guidance of the young people entrusted to his care.

His mission was based first and foremost on his presence. Brother Vincent knew how to be close to people without ever becoming intrusive. His approachability, his simplicity and his discreet attentiveness created an atmosphere of trust and serenity around him. Many testified that he knew how to listen patiently and welcome everyone with respect, whatever difficulties they might face.

Listening also played an essential part in his approach to accompany others. He did not merely give instructions or advice; he took the time to understand people, their vulnerabilities, their aspirations and their questions. This ability to listen enabled him to exercise sound and deeply human discernment.

Fraternity was another pillar of his mission. In communities as well as in houses of formation, he always sought to foster simple, fraternal and respectful relationships. He believed deeply that religious life should be a place of communion, mutual support and shared growth in the faith.

Finally, his influence stemmed above all from his personal example. Brother Vincent taught as much through his life as through his words. His faithfulness to prayer, his simplicity, his humility, his sense of duty and the consistency of his life lent credibility to his teaching. Without seeking honours or recognition, he bore daily witness to a vocation lived with authenticity and generosity.

Thus, throughout his life, Brother Vincent embodied a profoundly human and evangelical way of living out the educational mission. Through his discreet yet fruitful presence, he left in the hearts of many young Brothers a lasting image of an attentive educator, a spiritual guide and an authentic witness to consecrated life.

CHAPTER IV:
Academic Studies and International Outreach

1. Formation in Rome: an opening to the universal Church

After several years devoted to the formation of young men at the Aspirancy in Soavimbahoaka and then at the Novitiate in Analabe, Brother Vincent was sent to Rome to pursue postgraduate studies in Theology at the *Jesus Magister* Institute. This new stage signified much more than mere academic advancement: it constituted a decisive opening to the universal dimension of the Church and the Lasallian Mission.

Between 1961 and 1964, he thus undertook a full three-year course of theological studies in a particularly demanding and stimulating intellectual environment. The *Jesus Magister* Institute, managed by the Union of Major Superiors, was at that time home to numerous religious men and women from various religious Institutes and several continents. This international context provided an ideal setting for exchange, reflection and spiritual deepening.

For Brother Vincent, this period was above all a time of intellectual maturation. There, he deepened his understanding of theology, religious life and the Church's educational mission. His studies enabled him to consolidate the doctrinal foundations of his vocation

and to develop a broader reflection on the challenges of religious formation in the contemporary world.

But this period in Rome was not confined to the academic field. It was also a profoundly formative spiritual experience. Living at the heart of the universal Church enabled Brother Vincent to discover, in a tangible way, the richness of catholicity: the diversity of peoples, the plurality of cultures, the multiplicity of ecclesial sensibilities, but also a profound unity in a single faith and a single mission.

Through daily contact with religious from all over the world, he gradually learnt to take a more universal view of the Lasallian Mission. Having already gained solid experience in formation, he now discovered that Christian education took various forms depending on the cultural, social and ecclesial realities of each country. This discovery considerably broadened his vision of the Institute and of educational service.

This experience in Rome also helped to strengthen his own vocation. Against a backdrop of intense intellectual work and life within an international community, he matured both personally and spiritually. He became increasingly aware of the responsibilities that the educational mission demanded of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in a world undergoing profound change, particularly in the years following the Second Vatican Council.

Thus, the years spent in Rome were, for Brother Vincent, a true school of inner maturation. They quietly but

profoundly prepared him for the many international responsibilities he would later assume within the Institute and the Church.

2. Memorable encounters: spiritual and intellectual mentors

One of the most defining aspects of his time in Rome was undoubtedly the wealth of human and spiritual encounters he had there. Brother Vincent liked to speak with gratitude of the important figures within the Institute whom he had the opportunity to meet at *Jesus Magister*. These individuals had a profound influence on his thinking, his vision of the mission and his way of living the religious life.

Among them, Brother James Lehy held a special place in his memories. A doctor and professor, he made a profound impression on Brother Vincent through the depth of his teaching and his intellectual rigour. Through his guidance, he discovered a rigorous and serious approach to theology and religious reflection. This influence helped to foster in him a lasting love of study, reflection and a sound intellectual education.

Brother Michel Sauvage, then Director of *Jesus Magister,* also exerted a significant influence on him. Brother Vincent admired his great spiritual authority, his capacity for discernment and his enlightened vision of religious formation. Through his style of leadership and guidance, he discovered a demanding yet profoundly human way of leading people and institutions.

He also spoke of Brother Félix del Hoyo, head of the Institute's secretariat. The latter was distinguished by his rigour, his organisational skills and his efficiency in community service. Brother Vincent was deeply impressed by this ability to serve the mission humbly through administrative responsibilities that were often unassuming but essential to the smooth running of the Institute.

Brother Neri, originally from Brazil, embodied the Institute's missionary zeal in Latin America. Through his witness and commitment, Brother Vincent discovered another way of living out the Lasallian charism in different cultural contexts, marked by specific social and pastoral challenges. This missionary openness profoundly broadened his perspective on the universal scope of the Brothers' educational work.

Finally, Brother Maurice Auguste also left a strong impression during his time with him. A Belgian national and Postulator General of the Institute, he demonstrated a deep attachment to the history and memory of the Institute. Through his contact with him, Brother Vincent became more aware of the importance of preserving and passing on the Lasallian spiritual heritage to future generations.

These encounters were not merely academic or institutional contacts. They genuinely helped to shape Brother Vincent's thinking and vision. Through these international figures, he discovered different ways of living out the Lasallian charism: theological

insight, spiritual authority, humble service, missionary dynamism and fidelity to the Institute's heritage.

In this atmosphere of international fraternity, he gradually came to realise that the Lasallian Mission extended far beyond the borders of Madagascar and was part of a universal movement in the service of the Church and young people throughout the world.

3. An openness to the universality of the Church and the mission

Brother Vincent's time in Rome entailed also a particularly fruitful intercultural experience. By living day-to-day with religious men and women from different continents, he gained a concrete experience of the universality of the Church and the richness of human diversity.

His exchanges with Brothers from Africa, Latin America, Europe, Asia and other parts of the world enabled him to discover realities very different from those he knew in Madagascar. Each culture expressed the faith, religious life and educational mission in its own particular way, whilst remaining deeply united in the same evangelical and Lasallian spirit.

This cultural diversity awakened in him a deeper understanding of the universal Church. He realised that the Church could not be reduced to a single culture or a single way of living out the faith. On the contrary,

its richness lay in the communion between different peoples, called to walk together in fidelity to the Gospel.

Brother Vincent also discovered the variety of forms that the Lasallian Educational Mission could take, depending on social and cultural contexts. In some countries, the Brothers were involved in traditional school education; elsewhere, they worked more in contexts of poverty, human development or evangelisation. This missionary diversity strengthened his conviction that the Lasallian charism must always adapt to the real needs of young people and societies.

Gradually, this international outlook profoundly transformed his understanding of the religious vocation. He realised that the educational mission could not bear full fruit without a sound intellectual formation, a deep spiritual life, a genuine spirit of universal brotherhood, and an openness to different cultures.

This experience in Rome also fostered in him a strong sense of ecclesial and missionary responsibility. He realised that every Brother, even when rooted in a local context, was part of a much broader mission in the service of the universal Church and the youth of the whole world.

Thus, his time in Rome marked a decisive turning point in his vocational journey. It harmoniously combined academic formation, spiritual maturation, intercultural experiences and openness to the Institute's universal mission.

This period would prepare Brother Vincent to later take on significant international responsibilities within the Institute, with a profoundly open, fraternal and universal vision of the Lasallian Mission.

CHAPTER V:
Apostolic Mission and Responsibilities Within the Institute

1. Stella Maris – Tamatave: the early days of a young missionary director

Following his three years of theological studies in Rome, Brother Vincent was sent in 1964 to the Stella Maris community in Tamatave. Fresh from graduating from the *Jesus Magister* Institute and driven by a deep apostolic zeal, he was given the task of supporting the early stages of an educational enterprise that was still in its infancy and in the process of being established.

This appointment represented a real missionary challenge. The school had only just been founded by the Institute and everything remained to be built: the practical organisation of the school, the development of a coherent educational ethos and the establishment of a stable community dynamic. In this pioneering context, Brother Vincent demonstrated a great sense of responsibility and a remarkable capacity for organisation.

Appointed Director of the school, he did not limit his role to administrative duties alone. True to the spirit of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, he believed that educational authority should be exercised through closeness, simplicity and service. He therefore became fully involved in the day-to-day life of the school, sharing the teachers' concerns and remaining close to the students.

Alongside his managerial responsibilities, he was directly involved in teaching, particularly in the field of catechesis. For him, Christian education consisted not only of imparting academic knowledge, but also of forming consciences, awakening faith and developing a sense of human and Gospel values in young people.

Brother Vincent gradually helped to establish an educational environment deeply characterised by fraternity, closeness to young people, attention to each individual, rigour in work and a spirit of service.

This educational approach, based on listening and attentive presence, already reflected the great human qualities that would characterise his entire religious life: interpersonal skills, discernment, simplicity and concern for the common good.

Although this mission at Stella Maris lasted for only one academic year, from 1964 to 1965, it was particularly significant. It enabled Brother Vincent to demonstrate his leadership abilities and his aptitude for guiding educational communities in demanding and evolving contexts.

His superiors quickly recognised in him a man capable of taking on broader responsibilities in the service of the Institute. This brief but intense apostolic experience was already preparing him for the important mission that would soon be entrusted to him: that of Visitor of the Antananarivo District.

2. Visitor of the District of Antananarivo: fraternal and participatory leadership

At the age of just thirty-five, Brother Vincent was appointed Visitor of the Antananarivo District following consultation with the Brothers of the District and a visit by the Assistant Brother. This appointment made him the Institute's second local Visitor in Madagascar, marking an important milestone in the Institute's local establishment.

This responsibility was entrusted to him within an ecclesial and institutional context marked by profound changes, particularly under the influence of the Second Vatican Council. Despite his youth, Brother Vincent demonstrated great maturity in the exercise of his leadership and a clear understanding of the challenges associated with this mission.

Aware that such a load could not be borne alone, he chose to set up an authentic *"Visitor team"* comprising three other Brothers. This decision already revealed his profoundly fraternal and participatory conception of authority. He prioritised collegiality, shared discernment, consultation and shared responsibility in decision-making.

This style of governance was innovative for its time. Brother Vincent thus developed a vision of leadership closely resembling what would later be termed a synodal approach: governing with others rather than alone, listening before deciding, and encouraging everyone's participation in the common mission.

Together with his team, he regularly travelled throughout the District to visit the Brothers' communities and schools. These visits were not merely administrative assessments. Above all, they were opportunities for listening, offering encouragement and providing fraternal support. He attached great importance to maintaining close ties with the Brothers and to gaining a practical understanding of the realities on the ground.

Under his leadership, the District experienced a climate of greater participation and apostolic dynamism. Brother Vincent took care to maintain unity amongst the communities whilst encouraging local initiatives and the development of the educational mission. His authority was characterised less by imposition than by persuasion, listening, mutual trust and attention to individuals.

He also paid particular attention to the formation of young Brothers and the development of local vocations. For him, the future of the Institute in Madagascar depended largely on the ability of the Malagasy Brothers to gradually take on significant responsibilities within the Institute.

Thus, his term as Visitor contributed significantly to consolidating the identity of the Antananarivo District and to preparing a new generation of Lasallian leaders rooted in Malagasy culture whilst remaining open to the universal dimension of the Institute.

3. Participation in General Chapters: at the heart of the Institute's renewal

As the Visitor of the Antananarivo District, Brother Vincent took part in the 39th General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, held in Rome between 1966 and 1967. This assembly was of particular historical importance for the future of the Institute.

This Chapter took place against the backdrop of the renewal spurred by the Second Vatican Council. The Institute was then called upon to rethink its mission, spirituality and structures in order to respond to the new challenges of the contemporary world. Brother Vincent thus had the opportunity to participate directly in the major reflections that would shape the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools for years to come.

The Chapter was notably marked by the election of Brother Charles Henry Buttimer as the Institute's first American Superior General. This event symbolised the Institute's growing openness to its international dimension and the gradual diversification of its governing bodies.

This assembly also gave rise to an essential text: "*The Brother of the Christian Schools in Today's World: A Declaration*". This document offered an in-depth reflection on the identity and mission of the Brother in a rapidly changing world. It invited the religious to renew the way they lived out their Lasallian vocation in the light of the Gospel and the conciliar guidelines.

Brother Vincent took part in this period of ecclesial discernment alongside many prominent figures of the Institute, including Charles Henry Buttimer, Maurice Auguste, Michel Sauvage, José Pablo Basterrechea, Bernard Mérian and several other key leaders of the Institute.

These international exchanges further strengthened his ecclesial openness and his understanding of the challenges facing the educational mission in a changing world.

Following his term as Visitor, he was sent once again to Rome to undertake training at the Lasallian International Centre (CIL). Shortly after his arrival, he was called upon to help prepare for the 40th General Chapter as a member of the Preparatory Committee.

The 40th General Chapter, held in 1976, marked another significant milestone in his career. Brother Vincent played an active role, contributing to discussions on the future of the Institute and the development of the Lasallian Mission in various cultural and social contexts.

At the conclusion of this Chapter, he was elected General Councillor, a sign of the trust that the Institute now placed in him at an international level. This election marked the beginning of a new phase in his commitment to serving the universal Institute.

4. General Councillor: an international mission in the service of the Institute

Brother Vincent's election as General Councillor in 1976 marked a major milestone in his religious and missionary journey. Now a member of the General Government of the Institute, he took on a role of international significance that was to profoundly shape his life and work.

His term of office was renewed several times until 1993, bearing witness to the enduring trust that the Superiors and the Brothers placed in his competence, wisdom and discernment. For nearly seventeen years, he played an active part in shaping the major directions of the Institute throughout the world.

Within the General Council, he was entrusted in particular with responsibility for several key areas, including Northern Belgium, Southern Belgium and various Lasallian areas in Africa.

This role involved frequent travel, regular visits to communities and close support for local leaders. Brother Vincent devoted himself fully to this task, taking care to maintain close fraternal relations with the Brother Visitors of the Districts under his responsibility. His style of leadership was characterised by simplicity, a willingness to listen, dialogue and closeness to people. He believed that authority should, above all, be a service rendered to the mission and to the Brothers.

During his time in Rome, he was also appointed President of the Malagasy community in Rome,

comprising Malagasy priests, religious Brothers, religious Sisters and laypeople living in the Eternal City. Through this role, he helped to strengthen fraternal ties amongst his compatriots and to support their integration into an international context.

Always keen to further his own training and keep his skills up to date, he was sent to England between 1993 and 1994 for refresher and updating formation. This initiative illustrated his constant desire to remain attentive to developments within the Church, in pedagogy and in the educational mission.

Subsequently, from 1994 to 1998, he was called upon to serve as a formator at the Lasallian International Centre (CIL). In this role, he supported Brothers from many countries, sharing with them his experience, his vision of the Institute and his deep commitment to the Lasallian charism.

Throughout this long period of service to the General Council, Brother Vincent gradually became a recognised figure within the international Institute, valued for his intelligence, his ability to engage in dialogue, his knowledge of African and Malagasy realities, his intercultural openness, and his deep fidelity to the educational mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

5. Brother Vincent and his contribution to the development of the Lasallian Mission in Africa

Among the many responsibilities he assumed as a General Councillor, Brother Vincent's commitment to the development of the Lasallian Region of Africa held a particularly prominent place. Tasked with overseeing all aspects of the Institute's work in Africa, he devoted a great deal of his energy to supporting the growth of the Lasallian Mission on the continent.

He played a decisive role in the promotion and structuring of RELAF (*the Lasallian Region of Africa*). This Regional organisation aimed to strengthen cooperation between the various Districts, Sub-Districts, Sectors and Delegations in Africa.

Under his leadership, RELAF gradually developed coordination structures; forums for consultation; inter-African collaborations; and links with other Lasallian Regions around the world.

Brother Vincent maintained a wide network of correspondence to facilitate financial support, staff exchanges, reciprocal visits and international cooperation projects.

He also paid particular attention to houses of formation. Convinced that the future of the mission depended on the quality of the religious and human formation of the young Brothers, he actively supported formators, the provision of spiritual books, formation programmes and the accompaniment of formation communities.

On certain occasions, he himself agreed to take on the role of formator on an ad hoc basis when the need arose.

He was also one of the organisers and facilitators of the CLAF (*African Lasallian Centre*) sessions, designed in particular to prepare young African Brothers for their perpetual vows. In this capacity, he frequently acted as a speaker and spiritual guide.

Very close to the Visitors and leaders of the African Districts, he fostered a relationship based on trust and dialogue. He was always available for personal discussions, to offer advice and to help discern the sometimes-complex situations faced by the communities.

Brother Vincent also undertook numerous pastoral visits to the Districts, Sub-Districts and Delegations across Africa. Despite the heavy responsibilities of the General Council, he made a point of being present on the ground during major events: local Chapters, assemblies, vow ceremonies, emergency situations or formation meetings.

He also showed great concern for the gradual autonomy of the African Districts. In his addresses and recommendations, he encouraged the preparation of the Brothers for local responsibilities, institutional planning, the search for funding and the development of a system of governance suited to African realities.

A visionary and a man of initiative, he was also involved in the planning and management of new Lasallian foundations in Africa. He supported innovative projects

capable of meeting the continent's new educational and pastoral needs.

Furthermore, he maintained close relations with African ecclesiastical authorities, dioceses, academic institutions and various educational organisations.

Thanks to his open-mindedness, his command of several languages and his understanding of international affairs, he gradually became a key figure in the Lasallian Educational Mission in Africa.

Thus, through his many commitments, Brother Vincent contributed significantly to the establishment of the Lasallian charism in Africa, the consolidation of regional structures, the formation of young Brothers and the development of an African and universal vision of the educational mission.

CHAPTER VI:
Service to the Church in Madagascar

1. Coordinating Secretary to the Bishops' Conference of Madagascar (2000–2009)

After many years of service within the General Government of the Institute and numerous international responsibilities, Brother Vincent was called upon to place his experience at the direct service of the Church in Madagascar. This new stage of his mission began in the year 2000, on the occasion of the *ad limina* visit of the Bishops' Conference of Madagascar to the Holy Father John Paul II in Rome.

The Bishops' Conference of Madagascar, which at that time had no secretary within its delegation, expressly requested Brother Vincent's assistance. Following consultation, Brother John Johnston, Superior General, gave his approval for him to accompany the Malagasy bishops on this important ecclesial mission.

During this official visit to the Vatican, Brother Vincent meticulously took minutes of the meetings, provided administrative support, co-ordinated communications with the various Dicasteries, and managed the organisational aspects of the meetings with the Holy Father and the Roman Congregations.

His organisational skills, discretion and interpersonal skills were quickly noticed and appreciated by the Malagasy bishops. This experience marked the beginning

of close collaboration with the Episcopal Conference of Madagascar.

Shortly after this *ad limina* visit, the Bishops' Conference officially requested his permanent return to Madagascar so that he might continue his service to the local Church. With the approval of the Superior General, Brother Vincent returned to his home country and was appointed Coordinating Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Madagascar.

He held this post from 2000 to 2009, during nine years of intensive service at the Bishops' Conference headquarters in Antanimena, Antananarivo. This role required a high degree of availability as well as an in-depth understanding of ecclesiastical and administrative matters.

As Coordinating Secretary, Brother Vincent was responsible, in particular, for the administrative coordination of the Bishops' Conference's services, the preparation of meetings of the Bishops' Conference, the follow-up on decisions taken by the bishops, the drafting of documents and correspondence, and the day-to-day support of the bishops in their various pastoral responsibilities.

Thanks to the international experience he had gained at the Institute's General Council, he brought valuable expertise to the organisation and management of files, institutional relations and the coordination of ecclesiastical activities.

His command of several languages and his knowledge of African and Roman contexts also facilitated relations with international ecclesial organisations.

During this period, he resided at the episcopal community in Antanimena whilst remaining attached, in turn, to several Lasallian communities in the capital:

- Sainte-Famille de Mahamasina (2003-2005);
- Saint-Joseph d'Andohalo (2005-2006);
- And then Blessed Rafiringa in Faravohitra (2006-2009).

Through this discreet yet essential service, Brother Vincent helped to enhance the quality of the collegial work of the Malagasy bishops and to support the Church's pastoral mission in Madagascar. His loyalty, diligence and spirit of service made him a colleague who was held in high regard and respected by the entire episcopate.

2. Editor-in-chief of *Lakroan'i Madagasikara*: a mission in the service of truth

Alongside his responsibilities with the Bishops' Conference, Brother Vincent was appointed Editor-in-Chief of the weekly Catholic publication *Lakroan'i Madagasikara*[8] ("The Cross of Madagascar").

8 This is the official weekly newspaper of the Catholic Church in Madagascar. Translated literally into English, its title means "The Cross of Madagascar".

This media role entailed a significant responsibility in a social and political context that was at times tense, where the media played a major role in informing the public and in public debates. Brother Vincent regarded this role not merely as a journalistic task, but as a genuine service to the truth and to the Church.

Under his leadership, the journal strove to promote honest reporting, responsible discourse, respect for human dignity and the defence of Gospel values.

He took particular care to ensure that the Church's communications remained faithful to its prophetic mission whilst avoiding ideological or partisan manipulation.

Brother Vincent showed great courage, in particular, during the 2002 political crisis in Madagascar. In an article published by *Midi Madagasikara* on 2 October 2002, he publicly denounced certain disinformation campaigns targeting the Catholic Church and several Church leaders.

In the face of accusations and media manipulation, he took a clear stand to defend the truth of the facts, the honour of the Church, the dignity of bishops and priests, and Christian discernment in the use of information.

In his statement, he firmly reiterated that the Catholic Church did not support any particular political power, but that it defended, above all, justice, truth and respect for the choice of the Malagasy people.

He also denounced attempts at media manipulation seeking to create divisions within Church institutions.

His intervention demonstrated great clarity of thought and a deep commitment to ethical journalism.

Through his commitment to journalism, Brother Vincent demonstrated that the Lasallian Educational Mission could also be carried out in the field of social communication. For him, informing meant enlightening consciences, fostering discernment, promoting social peace and defending the dignity of the person.

His work as Editor-in-Chief once again revealed his moral courage, his loyalty to the Church, his commitment to truth and his deep sense of public responsibility.

3. Brother Vincent in the service of ecclesial and educational reflection in Africa

Beyond his administrative and media responsibilities, Brother Vincent remained deeply committed to the intellectual and pastoral reflection of the Church in Africa. His international experience, his theological training and his knowledge of ecclesial realities made him a particularly valued figure in religious and educational circles.

In particular, he took part in the first Synod of Bishops for Africa, a major event in the life of the African Church. This assembly enabled bishops, religious and experts from across the continent to reflect together on the pastoral, social and spiritual challenges facing contemporary Africa.

On that occasion, the Secretary-General of the African Bishops personally asked Brother Vincent to give a talk on religious life in Africa.

Although he humbly felt ill-prepared for such a responsibility, he accepted this task with simplicity and a spirit of service. His address was very well received and warmly applauded by many consecrated persons present at the Synod.

This recognition bore witness to the depth of his reflection and his extensive knowledge of African religious life, the challenges of formation, the cultural realities of the continent, and the future of the Church's educational mission in Africa.

Throughout these years, Brother Vincent also took part in various conferences, ecclesial meetings and reflection sessions. He frequently spoke on the Lasallian Mission, religious formation, Christian education, the place of religious in the African Church and evangelisation in contemporary contexts.

Through his articles, lectures and contributions to certain media outlets, notably Vatican Radio and various African media, he helped to raise awareness of the Lasallian educational work, the mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the challenges of evangelisation in Africa.

His intellectual commitment was never limited to theoretical reflection. For him, thought was always linked to concrete mission and service to people.

Above all, he sought to help the Church respond more effectively to the expectations of young people, to educational challenges, to social changes and to the spiritual needs of the African continent.

Thanks to his intelligence, his analytical skills and his intercultural openness, Brother Vincent gradually became a respected figure in ecclesiastical and Lasallian circles.

Thus, through his commitment to serving the Church in Madagascar and Africa, he demonstrated, right to the end, a profound fidelity to his religious vocation, placing his experience, knowledge and wisdom at the service of the Church, the educational mission and the formation of future generations.

CHAPTER VII:
Last Missions and Retreat House

1. Tireless fidelity in the service of communities and the mission

After several decades of holding international, ecclesial and educational responsibilities, Brother Vincent continued his mission with the same fidelity in the service of the communities of the District. Even in his later years, he remained available to meet the needs of his District and to continue to support his Brothers with wisdom and discretion.

In 2009, he was appointed Director of the Saint-Joseph community in Ambohimangakely, a house primarily home to elderly or retired Brothers. This community also ran agricultural and livestock operations which contributed to the day-to-day running of the house.

Brother Vincent held this position until 2014. In this particular role, he was able to bring to bear his experience of leadership, his fraternal closeness and his practical organisational skills.

He encouraged the members of the community to remain active and involved in daily tasks, thereby fostering a spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility.

Despite the more secluded nature of this mission, his community remained a place of passage and counsel for many Brothers. Thanks to his exceptional career

as a Visitor, General Councillor and Collaborator with the Church in Madagascar, many came to him seeking advice, spiritual guidance, a sympathetic ear or simply a testimony drawn from his experience.

Brother Vincent particularly enjoyed sharing the lessons he had learnt from his many missions in Africa, Rome and Madagascar. His stories and reflections inspired the younger generations of Brothers and helped to pass on the living memory of the Lasallian Mission.

Owing to his age, wisdom and experience, he was also a member of the District Council. His words were listened to with respect, and his contributions always demonstrated a great sense of discernment and balance.

In 2014, he was entrusted with a new mission: that of Director of the Saint Louis de Gonzague community in Ambositra. He held this position until 2025, demonstrating once again his total dedication to the service of the Institute despite his advancing age.

In this community, he was particularly committed to supporting the young school leaders and the young Brothers engaged in the educational mission. Through his calm presence and experience, he offered support, guidance, encouragement and wisdom in important decisions.

His manner of exercising authority remained profoundly fraternal. He prioritised listening, dialogue, trust and empowering others.

Even in roles of lesser responsibility than those he had held previously, Brother Vincent remained just as faithful

to the spirit of service and the educational mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

2. Brother Vincent, formator and spiritual guide to the young Brothers

Right up until the final years of his active life, Brother Vincent remained deeply committed to the formation of young Brothers. This mission had been a constant throughout his religious life and was one of the guiding principles of his vocation.

Even during his years of initial formation, he had been recognised for his qualities as a teacher, mentor and formator. Over time, this experience had been enriched by profound human and spiritual wisdom, making him a respected figure within the District.

Even after stepping down from major international and ecclesiastical responsibilities, he continued to be actively involved in religious formation, teaching, spiritual guidance and the transmission of the Lasallian charism.

Through personal conversations, fraternal counsel and periods of formation, he helped young Brothers to deepen their vocation, their spiritual life, their sense of mission and their fidelity to the spirit of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Brother Vincent attached great importance to the quality of the interior life and to fidelity to religious commitments. A deeply spiritual man, he took times of communal and personal prayer very seriously.

Testimonies emphasise that he was demanding of young Brothers in formation when it came to observing spiritual exercises, fidelity to prayer, community discipline and taking their religious vocation seriously.

However, this demand was always accompanied by great kindness, a deep respect for others and genuine humility. He knew how to listen patiently and guide with tact those who came to him seeking support or discernment.

Brother Vincent also contributed to the intellectual formation of the young Brothers. Thanks to his command of several languages and his long international experience, he taught, in particular, English and courses on the life of the Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

His guidance was never limited to theoretical teaching. Through his personal example, he bore witness to a simple life, great religious fidelity, a deep sense of community and a genuine spirit of service.

The young Brothers saw in him a man of profound integrity, whose words were underpinned by a whole life of prayer, mission and devotion.

Thus, right up to a very advanced age, Brother Vincent continued to carry out this discreet yet essential mission as a custodian of memory, a spiritual guide and a living witness to the Lasallian tradition.

3. Brother Vincent in the service of the spiritual legacy of Blessed Rafiringa

Between 2015 and 2018, Brother Vincent was entrusted with a mission of particular importance for the spiritual and historical memory of the Institute in Madagascar: that of Vice-Postulator for Blessed Brother Rafiringa.

As part of this role, he was posted to the Provincialate in Soavimbahoaka. This mission was deeply in keeping with his spiritual sensibility and his attachment to the history of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Madagascar.

Brother Vincent was actively involved in promoting the spiritual legacy of Blessed Rafiringa, a leading figure in the Malagasy Church and the Lasallian Mission.

Through this work, he sought to make known Brother Rafiringa's holiness, his witness to the faith, his commitment to education and his role in establishing the Lasallian charism in Madagascar.

Brother Vincent wrote several articles and reflections devoted to Blessed Rafiringa. Thanks to his in-depth knowledge of the history of the Institute and of Lasallian spirituality, he was able to present this figure with depth and simplicity.

He also led numerous talks for pilgrims, young people in formation, religious communities and laypeople keen to learn more about Blessed Rafiringa.

Through his teaching skills and his ability to communicate, he was able to make the Blessed's spiritual legacy accessible and to demonstrate its relevance to the Church and to the youth of Madagascar.

Brother Vincent also took part in several radio programmes, notably on Don Bosco Catholic Radio. These appearances played a major part in spreading the memory and message of Blessed Rafiringa to a wide audience.

This role as Vice-Postulator was, in a sense, the natural culmination of a whole life devoted to education, formation, the transmission of the Lasallian charism and service to the Church.

Through this work of preserving his memory and spreading the Gospel, Brother Vincent continued to serve the educational and spiritual mission of his Institute with passion.

4. The final years: a witness to faith, simplicity and fidelity

Brother Vincent's final years were marked by the trials of illness, but also by a particularly luminous witness to faith, simplicity and surrender to God.

During the last seven years of his life, he lived at the retirement home for elderly Brothers in the Saint-Joseph community in Ambohimangakely, surrounded by other Brothers of advanced age.

Gradually, osteoarthritis severely weakened his health and restricted his mobility. Despite the physical suffering and fatigue associated with old age, he always retained a great sense of serenity, a spirit of prayer and a profoundly simple way of life.

Faced with the prospect of hip surgery requiring costly medical evacuation abroad, Brother Vincent made a decision that left a deep impression on those around him. He chose to forego this option so that the financial resources set aside could be used for the formation of the young Brothers of the Institute.

This choice powerfully revealed his spirit of sacrifice, his personal detachment, his love for the mission and his constant prioritisation of the Institute's future.

Even whilst physically frail, he continued to demonstrate great fidelity to community life, a deep sense of fraternity and an intense spiritual life.

On several occasions, particularly between 2023 and 2025, his health deteriorated severely and he had to be admitted to the Ankadifotsy Polyclinic. Despite these periods of suffering, those who visited him were struck by his calmness, his lucidity, his gratitude and his inner peace.

Brother Vincent remained deeply committed to prayer and to faithfully observing the community's spiritual exercises right up until the very end of his life.

On the morning of Saturday 27 September, he was called home to the Father's House at the age of 92, after 73 years of religious life.

This date held special significance: on that very day, the Church was celebrating the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, whose name he had received at baptism. Many saw this as a providential sign and the peaceful fulfilment of a life wholly dedicated to God, to the Church and to the educational mission.

Thus came to an end the long journey of a religious who left a profound mark on the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Church in Madagascar, the formation of young Brothers, and several generations of young people and colleagues.

Through his faithfulness, wisdom and humility, Brother Vincent leaves behind a lasting spiritual and human legacy, which continues to inspire all those who had the grace to know him.

CONCLUSION

The life of Brother Vincent Rabemahafaly remains a profoundly moving testimony for the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, for the Church in Madagascar and for all those who had the grace to know him. Through the many responsibilities he undertook, he left a legacy that is at once educational, spiritual, human, ecclesial and Lasallian.

Throughout his life, he devoted himself with faithfulness and humility to the service of the mission. An attentive formator, a passionate educator, an enlightened leader and a deeply committed man of the Church, he left his mark on several generations of Brothers, young people in formation, pupils and colleagues through his wisdom, his willingness to help and his spiritual depth.

His life's journey reveals a well-balanced personality, capable of combining intelligence with simplicity, authority with fraternity, rigour with kindness. Those who lived alongside him remember him as a deeply humane man, attentive to people, exacting in matters of truth, yet always respectful and driven by a desire to help everyone grow.

Brother Vincent was also a man of universal openness. His numerous international missions, his responsibilities on the General Council, his commitment to the Lasallian Region of Africa and his service to the Church in Madagascar bear witness to a life entirely devoted to the educational and evangelical mission.

Right up until the end of his life, despite the ordeal of illness, he remained faithful to his spirit of service, even going so far as to forego certain costly treatments so that the available resources could be devoted to the formation of young Brothers. This gesture alone sums up the depth of his detachment, his humility and his love for the Institute.

His passing to the Father's House on 27 September 2025, on the feast day of Saint Vincent de Paul, whose name he bore, was seen by many as a providential sign crowning a life given to God in faithfulness and simplicity.

Even today, his influence lives on through: the Brothers he accompanied, the young people he trained, the communities he served, the institutions he guided, and the many people he inspired through his witness of faith and fraternity.

Dear Brother Vincent, your life was a shining witness to faithfulness, service and missionary commitment. Thank you for all that you have given to the Institute, to the Church and to young people.

May the Lord now welcome you into his eternal peace and joy. And may your spiritual legacy continue to inspire future generations on the path of faith, fraternity and service.

APPENDIX

Testimonies, Tributes and Messages

A man of faith

Brother Vincent was deeply imbued with faith and remained faithful throughout his life to prayer, spiritual exercises and the interior life. Introduced at a very early age to this relationship with God by his mother, a devout woman deeply involved in the Church, he always maintained a strong commitment to communal and personal prayer, as well as to the service of the sick and the most vulnerable. As a formator and community leader, he attached great importance to the quality of the spiritual life of the Brothers and young people in formation, convinced that fidelity to the religious vocation rests above all on a deep relationship with the Lord. His high standards, which were never harsh or rigid, were driven by a sincere inner conviction and a love of religious life. Even in the final years of his life, marked by illness and suffering, he continued to show great serenity, a deep trust in God and an inner peace that impressed all who visited him.

A man of fraternity

Brother Vincent attributed great importance to community life and religious fraternity. Throughout his life, he remained close to people, attentive, respectful and

deeply committed to the quality of human relationships within the communities. Demanding without being authoritarian, he ensured that community times were observed and encouraged a spirit of listening, sharing and fraternal communion. Even in his most senior roles, he maintained a simple and benevolent attitude, always prioritising dialogue, collegiality and mutual trust in the way he supported the Brothers.

A man of high intelligence

Brother Vincent was renowned for his great intellectual qualities, his open-mindedness and his vast cultural knowledge. Trained in Rome at the *Jesus Magister* Institute, he developed a sound theological, spiritual and pastoral understanding, as well as a profoundly universal vision of the Church and the educational mission. Inquisitive, well-read and multilingual, he was able to engage in dialogue with people from different backgrounds and always placed his intelligence, discernment and sense of responsibility at the service of formation, governance and the Lasallian Mission. His Brothers particularly admired his ability to combine spiritual depth, human wisdom and competence in supporting the Brothers and the Districts, particularly in Africa.

A man of integrity and honesty

Brother Vincent was renowned for his integrity, his honesty and his deep commitment to the truth. Demanding of both himself and others, he refused to

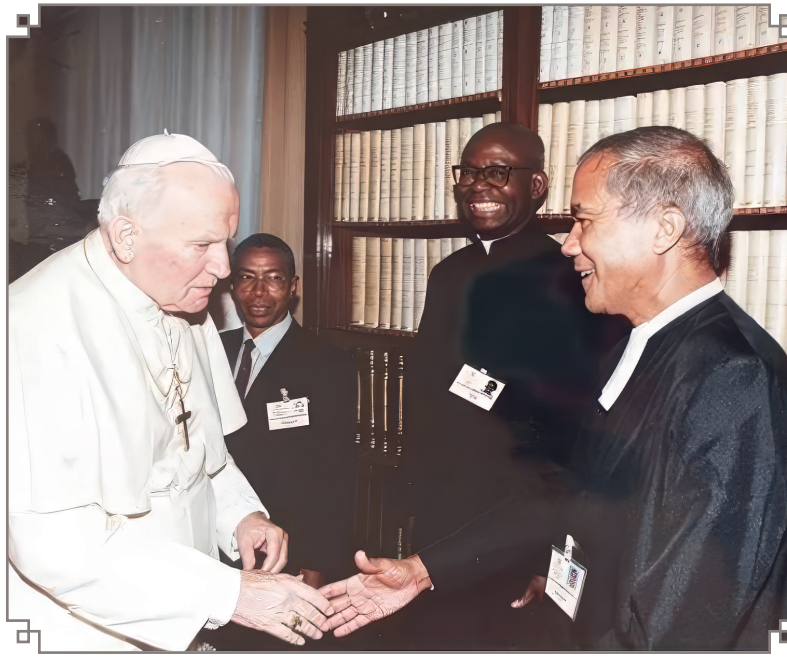
compromise with injustice or to adopt ambiguous attitudes. In his leadership roles as well as in his public engagements, he always acted with transparency, discernment and fidelity to Gospel values. This integrity was particularly evident when he edited the Catholic newspaper **Lakroan'i Madagasikara**, where he courageously defended the honour of the Church and denounced certain instances of media manipulation during Madagascar's political crises. His firmness, always balanced by prudence and concern for the common good, revealed a man of profound integrity, committed to enlightening consciences and restoring the truth.

A humble man

Despite the many responsibilities he held throughout his life, Brother Vincent remained a profoundly humble, unassuming and discreet man. He sought neither honours nor personal recognition, always sharing his experiences with modesty and a desire to serve others. Accounts particularly highlight his ability to acknowledge his mistakes and to ask for forgiveness, even from those under his authority, thus revealing great human authenticity. His humility was also evident in his spirit of sacrifice, notably when he declined a costly medical evacuation abroad so that resources could be devoted to the formation of young Brothers. Through this attitude, he bore witness, right up to the end of his personal detachment, to his selflessness and his fidelity to the Institute's mission.

Tributes and messages

In the days following his death, numerous tributes and messages of solidarity poured in from Madagascar, Africa and the entire Institute. The highest authorities of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools – the Brother Superior General, the Brother Vicar General, the Brother Secretary General, the General Councillor for Africa, and the Visitors of Africa – expressed their deep communion in prayer and their gratitude for Brother Vincent's exemplary life. Brothers, former students, colleagues, family members and leaders of the Institute paid an emotional tribute to a man of faith, intelligence and brotherhood, valued for his wisdom, his openness to others, his ability to engage in dialogue and his courage in defending the truth. Through these farewell tributes, the memory emerged of a humble and deeply human religious, whose influence and legacy will continue to leave a lasting mark on the Institute and especially the Lasallians of Madagascar.



A warm handshake between Pope John Paul II and Brother Vincent RABEMAHAFALY during the Synod of Bishops of the Church in Africa.



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