



GREETING TO THE CONFERENCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Paris, September 2026

It is an honour for me, on behalf of the General Council, to send you this greeting on the occasion of the 170th anniversary of the creation of the Conferences in South Africa, since the Scotsman Alexander Wilmot founded, in St Mary's Cathedral in Cape Town, the first Conference on 17 November 1856.

Today, the 250 Conferences of South Africa continue to carry out a wide variety of social works. I would like to highlight especially your educational support, nutrition programmes and the reconstruction of housing and accommodation for children and elderly people, especially in areas affected by conflict. A silent and generous work, recognised in the eyes of God and which constitutes a true testimony to our Vincentian charism.

This anniversary invites us to renew our spiritual and organisational commitment, with humility and also with boldness. But, above all, it reminds us that we must not forget that second network of charity: that network of love, friendship, fraternity and help, which is woven among us.

From our Conferences, and faithful to the spirit of our founders, we continue to work actively for a more just, reconciled and merciful future. We do so through fraternity and by offering the world a testimony of faith from our Vincentian charism, a charism that we carry imprinted on our hearts. That is why we can say that we are "a single Conference moving throughout the world".

Only by the grace of God can we face this service with hope. Only through His love poured into our hearts and through our example of mutual love can we manifest the joy of our faith and our Christian commitment. And thus we can also motivate, strengthen and foster a healthy growth of our Conferences.

We are in this institution to become better friends, to help those in front of us and, at the same time, to improve ourselves. We are here to evangelise by serving those most in need, both materially and spiritually. Because, if we lose this essential dimension of our service, the Conferences will remain in the eyes of men, but will disappear in the eyes of God.

It was a real pleasure, exactly a year ago, to hold the Board meeting of the General Council there. I took away from that visit an extraordinary memory and, above all, a deeply emotional memory that still lives in my heart, of your closeness, your fraternity, your kindness and your attentions.

From the General Council, and also on my own behalf, I offer you all our support so that this beautiful Vincentian work may continue for many years and so that the Conferences of South Africa may continue to be a reference of service, fraternity and charity for Africa and for the whole Confederation. Let us remain united in this great adventure of love that is the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

With this I conclude.

I want to thank most especially the National Council of South Africa, its President, my brother Vincent Williams, my friend Peter Keshwar, and my prayer and remembrance for all the South African brothers who preceded us and departed to the House of the Father. Thank you to all our South African fellow members, brothers and sisters, for your dedication, your friendship and your contribution to making the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul ever greater, more united and healthier each day, always at the service of the most disadvantaged.

May these 170 years of history be not only a reason for celebration, but also a call to continue building the future together, with the same passion, the same humility and the same trust in God that inspired our founders.

Receive a fraternal embrace in Saint Vincent de Paul and in Frederic Ozanam, and my personal gratitude for your friendship.

Your servant and President,

Juan Manuel B. Gómez. XVII International President General