



# **SPIRITUAL ADVISOR HANDBOOK**

**THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL  
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES**

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# **PART I**

**THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR IN THE SOCIETY**

# THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR IN THE SOCIETY

The Spiritual Advisor within the Society of St. Vincent de Paul holds a key role in helping Vincentians to achieve their primary purpose within the Society: growth in holiness. From the beginning, when Monsieur Bailly arranged for the first members of the “Conference of Charity” to go to Sr. Rosalie Rendu for advice and instruction, the Spiritual Advisor has assumed responsibility for the spiritual growth and development of each member as well as the group as a whole.



Bailly, who was the first conference president, is also considered to have been the first Spiritual Advisor. Knowing the depth of Sr. Rosalie’s devotion to the poor, he guided the young Vincentians towards her example and mentorship. She formed them in the spirit of St. Vincent, teaching them how to serve the poor with respect and compassion, seeing in each person the face of Christ.

By entrusting to Sr. Rendu the spiritual formation (through works) of the original members, Bailly shows us that the Spiritual Advisor serves best as a *facilitator*, not an *instructor*. The Spiritual Advisor is a spiritual animator, acting as a guide along the Vincentian Pathway, leading members into a vocation and lifestyle which draws them into an ever-deepening relationship with our Lord, promoting the mission of the Society with full knowledge and understanding of the Vincentian Charism. The Spiritual

Advisor helps Vincentians strive to see the face of Jesus in the poor and needy whom they serve. This is the essence of Vincentian spirituality.

The Spiritual Advisor can be clergy or laity. The primary qualification is a dedication to studying the Vincentian charism, with a commitment to form others in Vincentian spirituality, serving as guide and mentor.

Through their own example, they help members come to understand the role of spirituality in Vincentian life, and how to form themselves in that same fashion. The Spiritual Advisor provides for the spiritual needs of each member, as well as for the group as a whole. Through prayerful discernment, the Spiritual Advisor will lead individual members and the group to greater understanding and trust in God’s Providence in decisions and direction.

Finally, the Spiritual Advisor should be an inspirational force within the group. They should participate in discussions, as well as in person to person service to those in need. Leading by example, they should help to create and foster an environment of prayer and discernment.

When appropriate, they should challenge members and the group to new works and approaches, embracing those opportunities God places before us to grow in holiness through trust and charity in new and courageous ways.

***The Spiritual Advisor helps Vincentians strive to see the face of Jesus in the poor and needy whom they serve. This is the essence of Vincentian spirituality.***

### The Beginnings of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Frédéric Ozanam left his home in Lyon, France, in the autumn of 1831, for Paris. He registered in the School of Law at the Sorbonne.

Frédéric collaborated with Mr. Emmanuel Bailly, editor of the *Tribune Catholique*, in reviving a student organization which had been suspended during the revolutionary activity of July 1830. They called their new association "The Conference of History." The group met on Saturdays to discuss various topics, primarily philosophy and history.

In the course of these meetings, Frédéric and his friends often found themselves in debate with another group of students who were adherents to the Saint-Simonian philosophy. At one of their meetings, a member of this group challenged Frédéric and the practicing Catholics. He admitted that the Catholic Church had done much good work in the past, but "what do you do now?"

Frédéric called for a meeting of five of his friends; they agreed to meet at Mr. Bailly's office. The date was April 23, 1833, Frédéric's twentieth birthday. Frédéric had taken the challenge very seriously, and admitting to himself that it was valid, declared that "we will go to the poor."

The group agreed to found a "Conference of Charity." Emmanuel Bailly, the married layman, was chosen by the six students as their first President. In a short time, they changed their name to The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in honor of their patron, the 17<sup>th</sup> century "Apostle of the Poor."

From these beginning times, spirituality was central to the Vincentian vocation. It is manifested through the service to the poor and vulnerable – and, through them, to God. As Vincentians, this service to God is manifested as a journey toward Holiness and called out in the Rule, which says:

*"Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity. Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their ideal is to help relieve suffering for love alone without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves.*

*They draw nearer to Christ, serving Him in the poor and one another. They grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and to one another... Their journey towards holiness will be all the more fruitful if the members' personal lives are characterized by prayer, meditation on the Holy Scriptures and other inspirational texts and devotion to the Eucharist and to the Virgin Mary, ...and to the teachings of the church.* (Rule, Part 1, Section 2.2)

## The Rule of the Society

The Rule of the Society does not bind us with excessive, prescriptive detail, but grounds us in the spirituality of our vocation. The Rule embodies the charism of St. Vincent as its guide in charity. Monsieur Bailly, who co-wrote the first Rule in 1835, emphasized the source of our Rule in a letter to the whole Society in 1842:

*“They are not the word of man, or at least they are the word of a man who was made a Saint, a man whose sayings and whole life God has crowned with heavenly glory. You are aware, of course, that those thoughts are taken from the most intimate writings of St. Vincent de Paul, from the Rules which he drew up after many years’ experience for the holy societies of which he was the father.”*

As Spiritual Advisors, we carry the responsibility to be the caretakers of the Rule and the spirituality it calls us to as individuals and a Society. We look to our founders, our Patron St. Vincent and our Patroness the Blessed Virgin Mary for inspiration and guidance to form our members and ourselves through the Vincentian charism to draw nearer to Christ and grow in holiness.

As Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, CM, once explained “Take your Rule seriously. All the parts of it. But especially the parts that call you to pray and grow closer to Christ. This Rule is a great gift precisely because it keeps you from becoming mere social workers. You are followers of Christ. And this Rule is your Way.”

He further explained an approach to interpreting the Rule that is helpful in avoiding legalistic parsing of the Rule’s various provisions. He suggested that we should imagine that all copies of the Rule have been lost, and that we must re-create it. To do so, we will observe our Conferences. With this in mind, ask yourself in each instance where you are not certain what the Rule means to say:

Could our  
**Rule**  
*be rewritten*  
just from observing  
*your*  
**Conference**



For example, in considering how our members visit and discuss the poor, would we describe it this way:

*“Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God’s image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ.”*

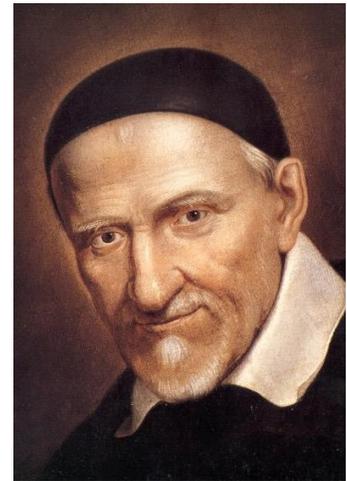
## St. Vincent de Paul

He was known as the “Apostle of Charity” and “Father of the Poor.” He is the patron saint of charitable institutions and founder the Congregation of the Mission, Confraternities of Charity, and Daughters of Charity.

He worked tirelessly for the poor. He is our inspiration and model as Vincentians. His Rule and spiritual charism with a preference for the poor and vulnerable, in the model of Jesus Christ, is the very foundation of who and what we are as Vincentians. He was the inspiration to a young man 200 years later – Frédéric Ozanam.

*“After the love of God, your principal concern must be to serve the poor with great gentleness and cordiality, sympathizing with them in their ailments and listening to their little complaints...for they look on you as people sent by God to help them. You are therefore intended to represent the goodness of God in the eyes of the poor.”*

St. Vincent de Paul, 1657



## St. Louise de Marillac

She is the patroness of Christian social workers. She was a contemporary of St. Vincent, and was inspired and directed by Vincent's spiritual leadership. She was Vincent's collaborator in founding the Daughters of Charity, after organizing hospitals, schools, orphanages, and homes for the elderly. Her attitude toward the sick and poor remains the model for all members of the Vincentian Family today.



It is from her spiritual lineage that 200 years later Sr. Rosalie Rendu would guide young college students in Paris in their efforts to serve the poor.

*“As for your conduct toward the poor, may you never take the attitude of merely getting the task done. You must show them affection; serving them from the heart, inquiring of them what they might need; speaking to them gently and compassionately; procuring necessary help for them without being too bothersome or too eager.”*

St. Louise de Marillac, 1647

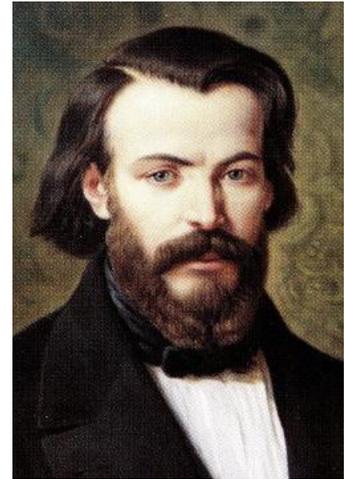
## Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

Frédéric was the founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He was a writer and social justice thinker as well as a devout Catholic. When challenged about his beliefs and how well they were lived out, he joined with other college students to create the Society as a response to the needs of the poor and vulnerable, and so that Catholics could grow in spirit as visible symbols of the Church.

A college professor, historian, and lawyer, he continued to dedicate himself to personally serving the poor throughout his life, and his vision of a “worldwide network of charity” inspired the formation of many new Conferences. He spoke often and widely on the Society.

*“Knowledge of the poor and needy is not gained by pouring over books or in discussions with politicians, but by visiting the slums where they live, sitting by the bedside of the dying, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes.”*

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, 1845



## Blessed Rosalie Rendu

She was a Daughter of Charity, and is considered a mentor of Frédéric and of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as she taught the first members the art of helping the poor and the sick. She served the poor of Paris for 54 years and was known throughout the city for her work. In



all kinds of weather, Sr. Rosalie walked the streets of the Mouffetard, her rosary in her hand and heavy basket of bread on her arm, visiting the homes of those in need. Sr. Rosalie’s example reminds us of the importance of the home visit as the means towards spiritual growth.

*“Because you see Christ in his poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility as His servant. Always remember, that if we had been through the hardships they have had to meet—if our childhood had been one of constant want—perhaps, we too, would have given away to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter.*

*But be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you bring them.”*

Blessed Rosalie Rendu, 1833

***Patroness of the Society***  
**Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception**  
**Feast Day: December 8th**



St. Vincent and Frédéric Ozanam both were especially devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Vincent focused his attention on three mysteries in particular: Immaculate Conception, Annunciation, and Visitation.

Inspired especially by St Catherine Labouré, whose vision of the Miraculous Medal in 1830 took place just blocks from where he would live as a student, Frédéric insisted the Society take Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception as its Patroness.

The Society chose December 8 as a Special Marian Feast - 20 years before the formal proclamation of the Dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

## Our Vincentian Organization

### The First Conference

The Conference of History was a weekly gathering of college students originally organized by Professor Emmanuel Bailly to discuss social issues of the time. At one of their meetings, a student challenged Frédéric and the practicing Catholics. He admitted that the Catholic Church had done much good work in the past, but "what do you do now?" Frédéric called for a meeting of five of his friends; they agreed to meet at Mr. Bailly's office. The date was April 23, 1833, Frédéric's twentieth birthday. Inspired by their words, Frédéric decided to found the "Conference of Charity" to assist the poor. Emmanuel Bailly, the married layman, was chosen by the six students as their first President. In a short time, they changed their name to The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in honor of their patron.

The six college students were led by the words of Frédéric, *"Let us go to the poor."* Bailly served as their President, guide, and mentor. He enlisted Blessed Rosalie Rendu to provide them training and spiritual guidance. This gathering, which set the foundation for an entire organization of charity and spiritual growth, was clearly the work of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

*"The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charism of each one. Among them, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam was a radiant source of inspiration."* (Rule, Part I, section 1.1)

### Growth of Society

St. Vincent de Paul's organizational influence can be clearly seen within the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. By 1835, at least 200 Vincentians were serving the poor. How could they stay one Society, and keep the spirit that they all loved going? They decided to capture the organization, structure, and most especially charism and principles in a Rule. The Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul captures the Vincentian philosophy which Sr. Rosalie taught the young students, and the passion which the students had for their mission as a group of laymen, and some of the practical nuts and bolts for keeping the original spirit alive across a large group.

*"As we've seen, St. Vincent de Paul was a great organizer, and believed a reasonable level of organization was critical to helping the poor."* –St. Vincent (SV XIII, 423)

From its beginning in 1833, the Society quickly grew, expanding throughout Europe from Paris to Italy, England, Belgium, Scotland and Ireland all within twelve years. In 1845 the Society was established to the United States at the Basilica of St. Louis in St. Louis, Missouri. Today it is a worldwide organization with over 850,000 members in more than 150 countries.

The poor are the reason our Society exists. We grow in holiness by serving Christ in the person of the poor. The poor are the focus of our organizational structure. The Conference serves as the center of our Vincentian lives. It is in the Conference that we grow in friendship, service and spirituality, activating our faith in person to person service to the poor. Every level "below" the Conference exists to support the Conference, and in turn, to serve the poor.



## Vincentian Spirituality

### The Way of Vincentian Spirituality – the Vincentian Charism

Pope John Paul II told us that “*spirituality means a mode or form of life in keeping with Christian demands. Spirituality is ‘life in Christ’ and ‘in the Spirit,’ which is accepted in faith, expressed in love, and inspired by hope.... By spirituality ... we mean not a part of life, but the whole of life guided by the Holy Spirit.*” (The Church in America, #29)

The theological virtue of faith is the foundation of a Vincentian’s spirituality, while the theological virtue of charity is the motivation, and the theological virtue of hope allows us to face up to suffering – both our own and others, but recognizing that suffering is temporary and not the final word. It is a way of approaching the present because of what we believe about the future recognizing and trusting in the fulfillment of God’s plan through the work of God in the world.

The word “charism” is used to describe a particular spiritual orientation, and any special characteristics of its mission or values. **Vincentian charism** refers to the teachings of St. Vincent de Paul. The Vincentian way of spirituality is a certain way of being. As Vincentians we are called to:

- Study, understand and follow the example of the lives of our founders and patrons
- Show the love of God in action
- Through **Person to Person** service to the poor, to see the presence of God in each person and their challenges
- Be attentive to the inspiration of the Spirit; trusting that God will provide the means for what is asked of us
- Live by the fundamental principles of Vincentian Spirituality, growing in holiness through the five Vincentian Virtues.

### Fundamental Principles of Vincentian Spirituality

The following fundamental principles can be found in the Manual and are foundational to Vincentian Spirituality.

### The Essential Elements

The Essential Elements of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul were established by Emmanuel Bailly together with the founding members. The Essential Elements are Spirituality, Friendship and Service (Rule Part III, Statute 1).



**Spirituality:** To bear witness to Christ and to his Church by showing that the faith of Christians inspires them to work for the good of humanity.

**Friendship:** To bring together people of good will and to assist them by mutual example and true friendship in drawing nearer to the Divine Model by fulfilling his essential precept, namely, the love of God in the person of others.

**Service:** To establish a personal contact between its members and those who suffer and to bring to the latter the most efficacious and charitable aid possible.

## **Vision of the Society**

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam said *“Let us go to the poor.”* St. Vincent said *“There is no charity that is not accompanied by justice, nor does it permit us to do more than we reasonably can.”* Out of these concepts, Blessed Frédéric had the vision for the organization *“To establish a network of charity and social justice to encircle the world.”*

## **Mission Statement**

A Mission Statement answers the who and what of an organization. It states in precise and concise language the composition and chief purposes of a group. The Society’s mission statement is simple and clear:

**A network of friends, inspired by gospel values,  
growing in holiness and building a more just  
world through personal relationships with and  
service to people in need.**

## **Core Values of the Society**

The following are the Cultural Beliefs that make up the Society’s creed and therefore define our Ministry so that as Vincentians we are committed to:

### **Spiritual Growth**

Grow in holiness through prayer, service, friendship and formation.

### **One Society**

Contribute to the success of our Vincentian work when we support One Society

### **Servant Leaders**

Develop ourselves and others to become Servant Leaders.

### **Today’s Society**

Strengthen the Society by embracing new and diverse ideas and people.

### **Embrace Accountability**

Build a strong Society by holding each other accountable to our Mission, to the Essential Elements of the Society and to good Governance.

### **Inclusive Planning**

Foster ownership by involving all members in planning and decision- making.

### **Advocate for Justice**

Advocate along with the poor for just policies and practices at the local, state and national levels.

## The Vincentian Virtues

Vincentians seek to imitate and emulate St. Vincent in the five “Essential Virtues” that promote love and respect for the poor:



Focused on developing these virtues – these habits or ways of life with a firm disposition to do good – Vincentians work as servants of God caring for the poor and those in need.

These five virtues are at the core of Vincentian Spirituality.

***“Allow yourself to be led  
by the Lord. He will direct  
all things through you.”***

- St. Vincent de Paul

## **Vincentian Spirituality – On-Going Formation**

Our life as Vincentians, provides us a pathway and life style that leads us to holiness. The essential elements of **Spirituality**, **Friendship**, and **Service** combine to form our **Servant Leadership**. Infused by the theological virtues graced upon us by God, and focused on maturing in the five virtues Vincent calls us to, we are able to embrace and grow in the qualities that are foundational to our life in service to God. As Vincentians, we understand that what we do is not as important as what God is doing through us and in us. As a consequence, we encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Advisor is very important. They are the guides for our journey.

“It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, and to improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor...” (Rule: Part 1, 3.12)

## **Vincentian Pathway**

The Vincentian Pathway provides a life-long and on-going process for formation as a Vincentian. This formation process is based on the Essential Elements of the Society (Spirituality-Friendship-Service) and Servant Leadership. The **Vincentian Pathway** helps Vincentians to discover, develop, deepen and discern their Vincentian heart by forming their mind and attitude into a Vincentian way of serving. The four components are:

- **Spirituality:** will root you in a clear understanding of the Vincentian Spirituality which underlies your Vincentian vocation: mission, vision, values and prayer.
- **Friendship:** will provide you with the ways to gather the support, advice and encouragement you need for your Vincentian journey: community of faith, solidarity, mutual example, good will and empowerment.
- **Service:** will guide you to see exciting new ways to serve with a Vincentian heart, so that you will be able to strengthen your current service: home visits, charity and justice, voice of the poor, catholic social teachings, systemic change.
- **Servant Leadership:** will lead you to become a true Vincentian Servant Leader in the spirit of Jesus and our Founders: characteristics, duties, competencies, discernment, transformation.

## **Discernment and Prayer**

Discernment is essentially a prayerful process through which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can come to discover the difference between what is our will and what is the will of God. It is rooted in the faith that God can and does direct our lives, that indeed, God loves us tenderly and he only asks that we trust him and entrust our lives to him. We can find the process of Vincentian Discernment in four steps:

- **Imitation of Christ**
- **Unrestricted Readiness**
- **Significance of events**
- **The Decision**

This process and expansion of the concept of discernment is provided in the resource *Vincentian Discernment* by Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, CM.

Prayer is continual and on-going communication with God. It is at the very center of both the process of Discernment, and the Spirituality and lifestyle of a Vincentian. Vincentians seek through prayer, meditation on the scriptures, the teaching of the Church, through their daily lives and in their relationship with those in need, to bear witness to the love of Christ.

## Role and Responsibilities of the Spiritual Advisor

### Spiritual Advisor Guidelines

“Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of SPIRITUAL ADVISOR IS VERY IMPORTANT.” (Rule: Part 1, 3.13)

So, we know the Spiritual Advisor has a very important role. *“The Spiritual Advisor undertakes the role and responsibility for the spiritual growth, development and life of the Council or Conference in accord with the mission and ministry of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.”* (Manual: 2.5)

The Region, Council or Conference leadership has the obligation to select a Catholic person who is both willing and able to devote the necessary time and energy to the role of Spiritual Advisor. It is imperative that Spiritual Advisors be rooted in Vincentian Spirituality and so it is essential that they attend and participate in meetings. In the spirit of friendship, humility and Christian joy, the Spiritual Advisor upholds Vincentian values and takes a practical and active role in promoting effective love through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual Advisors are full Council or Conference members, but they do not serve as officers.

Let's explore in more detail the role of the Spiritual Advisor.

### The Spiritual Advisor promotes the mission by:

- Encouraging home visits
- Building a faith community rooted in prayer, reflection and service
- Encouraging Vincentians to see the face of Christ in those they serve

### The role of the Spiritual Advisor is manifested in the following ways:

- Attend meetings regularly
- Provide inspiration, guidance and challenge
- Help develop the spiritual life of members
- Utilize the Society spiritual formation resources
- Promote the works of the Society
- Manifest love for those who are poor and participate in direct service
- Remind members of their Vincentian vocation; their primary purpose to grow in holiness
- Encourage Vincentian friendship among members
- Grow together in their knowledge of Vincentian spirituality
- Strive to learn more about St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, Bl. Frédéric Ozanam and Bl. Rosalie Rendu

### What to look for in a Spiritual Advisor

- Individuals with an ongoing experience of God; personal witness to his/her own growth and deepening of personal spiritual life
- Balanced persons who have good common sense
- Persons capable of being spiritual companion, mentor, friend
- Persons willing to be committed to the Rule, mission and ministry of the Society
- Persons who can foster friendship in conference and with those served
- Persons who can deal with tension and ambiguity
- Someone who has a commitment to the value of the laity in the church
- Someone with good listening and communication skills
- Someone who has the ability to lead prayer and facilitate sharing
- Someone able to recognize and encourage others' gifts in the Vincentian mission

**A good Spiritual Advisor will have the following qualities:**

- Has an ongoing experience of God and is willing to witness to their own spiritual journey
- Balanced, approachable
- Non-judgmental but prepared to share Vincentian values
- Exemplifies Vincentian virtues: humility, simplicity, gentleness, selflessness, zeal

**A good Spiritual Advisor will have Knowledge and Commitment to:**

- Jesus and the Gospels
- Vincentian Spirituality:
- SVdP Rule, mission and ministry
- Church's teachings - especially Catholic Social Teaching
- Value of lay ministry in the church
- Active service to neighbors in need
- Understands 'poverty'

**Important 'tools' for a Spiritual Advisor**

There are several tools or aids that can help the Spiritual Advisor to perform effectively in their role. The Resource list in Part IV of the Spiritual Advisor Handbook provides a comprehensive set of materials to be used. The following is the 'short' list of those trainings or materials every Spiritual Advisor should have at the ready:

- Should have completed Ozanam Orientation
- Spiritual Advisor Handbook
- Vincentian Celebrations book
- The Rule
- The Manual
- Vincentian Pathway
- Vincentian Reflections
- Bible

The Spiritual Advisor, working in concert with the leadership within the Conference, Council or Region, truly has the responsibility to make the mission of St. Vincent de Paul come alive in the membership by illuminating the presence of Christ within them, strengthening the spiritual bonds and helping each member and the group as a whole grow in holiness seeking union and God.

*"The members meet as brothers and sisters with **Christ in the midst of them**, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. **Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential**, as is the common mission to help the poor and the marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide Community of Vincentian friends." (Rule 3.3)*

# **PART II**

**THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR AND CONFERENCE LIFE**

# THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR & CONFERENCE LIFE

So, you have volunteered, or been appointed, to be your Conference's Spiritual Advisor. You've gotten this far into the *Spiritual Advisor Handbook*, so you have read the general description, expectations, and guidelines for Spiritual Advisors.

***"I've been appointed as the Conference Spiritual Advisor...NOW WHAT?"***

But what is it you actually need to *do*? This section of the handbook is intended to lay that out for you in simple terms. Throughout this section there are references to other Vincentian publications and resources that provide greater depth on the topics covered here.

## The Conference Meeting

The Spiritual Advisor is perhaps most visible at the Conference Meeting, and has a special role throughout each meeting to help foster and encourage the Essential Elements of Spirituality, Friendship, and Service in those weekly or bi-weekly gatherings.

One of the tensions Spiritual Advisors often feel is that their Conference Meetings are primarily "business meetings" that seem to crowd out spirituality, which always should be the primary focus.

It is important not to be discouraged by this!

In fact, this "business focus" is a very natural and common tendency; one that was observed by Blessed Frédéric as early as 1835, just two years after the first Conference was formed! In a letter to his friend Lèonce Curnier, Frédéric observed that:

*"[W]e fulfill our duties from habit; we carry out our good works by routine, but no more the enthusiasm, the ebullient proselytizing, the rays of charity which at the beginning came sometimes to illuminate and warm our souls. We are very numerous but we lose in intensity what we gain in expansion. There are ordinarily 50 to 60 of us at a meeting, but we do not know one another very well. The session is nearly always concerned with business, it seems long."* (Emphasis added)

Frédéric went on to propose reforms to keep the Society's focus on what was (and is) its primary purpose: the spiritual formation of our members. Indeed, the first Rule of the Society was published that year, clearly establishing the centrality of spiritual formation.

***In other words, don't be discouraged if meetings drift towards a focus on "business."  
Turning the focus back to spirituality is the very reason you are there!***

## The Essential Elements in the Conference Meeting

### Spirituality

Each meeting begins and ends with prayer, which typically is led by the Spiritual Advisor or by the President. While there is not a specifically prescribed prayer, the Rule does tell us that our opening prayer “*should always include a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and a prayer for those whose suffering they wish to share.*”

Sample prayer and agenda cards are available at the National Council web site.

Many Conferences observe a custom of offering the Sign of the Cross only twice: at the beginning of the Opening Prayer, and at the end of the Closing Prayer. In this way, the entire meeting is offered as a prayer.

Take time periodically to explain and to remind members of this custom, especially new members, so that it does not simply become a rote exercise.

The very first agenda item following the Opening Prayer should be the Spiritual Reflection, and this is always the primary responsibility of the Spiritual Advisor.

#### **Am I Holy Enough?**

There is a common misconception that the Spiritual Reflection is intended to be “taught,” as a homily, or merely shared by reading aloud from a personal trove of Catholic or Vincentian literature. As a result, we sometimes find ourselves asking, “Am I qualified to be a Spiritual Advisor? Am I *holy* enough?”

The short answer to that question is, “Yes.”

The Spiritual Advisor is called not to be a teacher, but a “spiritual animator”; to be dedicated to learning about Vincentian Spirituality; not to have all the answers, but to seek answers together with other members; not to form members, but to encourage each member to pursue personal formation on our shared Vincentian Pathway. Indeed, this is consistent with an outcome of Vatican Council II – a renewal of an appreciation of *the priesthood of all believers*.

Some Conferences are blessed to have an ordained or religious Spiritual Advisor. This can add another level of depth to this special role in our Conferences, but all Vincentians should remain open to this calling; to have a special dedication to your own personal Vincentian Formation, and to sharing it with the friends in your Conference. Recall, after all, that the very first Conference Spiritual Advisor, Emmanuel Bailly, was a layperson.



## What Does a Spiritual Reflection Look Like?

So, if not a homily, what is expected during the reflection offered in our Conference Meetings? As always, our Rule offers an answer (emphasis added):

*“Spiritual reading (or meditation, address) on which **members are always invited to comment** as a means of sharing their faith” (from Statute 7)*

While a prepared talk is certainly acceptable, those who are new to the role of Spiritual Advisor, or who have little experience in public speaking, may find that approach daunting.

Remember, though, that what makes it a *reflection* is that members are invited to participate. As our Core Values remind us, the Conference is a Community of Faith. We grow in holiness together.

We must use this time to truly reflect together! Ask members for their thoughts, and do not be afraid of silence as they contemplate the questions you pose.

God speaks to us in the silence.

## How long should the Spiritual Reflection last?

One reason for conducting the Spiritual Reflection at the beginning of our meetings is to enable members to focus in a more relaxed way, not fidgeting in their seats and looking at the clock because the business part of the meeting has run long that week.

A good Spiritual Reflection should not be less than ten minutes, and can easily be twenty minutes. It will often be the longest single agenda item at the Conference Meeting, and rightly so!

While 10-20 minutes may seem like a pretty wide range, it is important to allow members to reflect naturally, and not to cut off discussion prematurely, solely because of the time. This may sometimes require some judgment:

*Are people still reflecting in order to share their thoughts, or are they silent because we are “done?”*

In other words, reflections *can* last longer than 20 minutes – it is not a hard stop!



## Examples of How to Facilitate a Spiritual Reflection

There is no single, prescribed format we are required to follow for the reflection. However, there are several resources and traditions to make it easier for you to prepare your reflections. The following pages will introduce you to three of them.

## Vincentian Reflections

Perhaps the simplest resource available to aid you in conducting your Spiritual Reflections is the *Vincentian Weekly Reflection*, prepared by the National Council. These one page meditations, available for download, consist of a Gospel excerpt and two readings, along with some suggested questions to spur members' comments. There is a new one for each week of the year.

### How to Lead the Vincentian Reflections

It is important to describe the process which is going to take place, and do not be afraid of repetition just because you have done this many times before:

- Provide a copy to each member of your Conference for their personal reflection
- Stress that sharing is not compulsory and mention the need for confidentiality regarding what our fellow members may share
- Ask, or assign, different members to read the different sections:
  - Gospel reading
  - Reflection
  - Vincentian Meditation

### Opening Prayer/Quieting Period

Leader invites group to:

- Become relaxed and aware of God's presence with us
- "Let Go" of distractions and quietly pray to the Holy Spirit

### Reading

- Each section is read aloud, slowly and prayerfully, by the different members
- Hearing different voices will allow different emphasis on words/phrases

### Quiet Period

Leader invites everyone:

- To quietly reflect on the readings and notice if anything strikes them
- Introduces the Discussion Question suggested in the Reflection
- Allows 2-3 minutes of quiet

### Sharing

Leader invites members who wish to share on the Discussion Question, or on how one of the readings struck them. Possibly not everyone will share, but time should be allowed for each person who wishes to share his/her thoughts.

### Closing Prayer

Leader closes the Prayer Reflection by beginning the Closing Prayer, and all answer the response (in bold).

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
October 1, 2017

**Gospel: (Mt. 21: 28-32)**

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, Sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will? They answered, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

**Reflection:**

This Gospel is a great example of saying, "actions speak louder than words." It is a reminder that belief isn't a matter of saying yes or professing creeds. Belief is action, follow-through. Those who believed in John the Baptist changed their minds, that is their lives, by repenting. Those who believe in Jesus do the same. If tax collectors and prostitutes (symbols for great sinners) can enter the kingdom of God, then there's got to be great hope for all of us! Taking their lead, all we need to do is make change a permanent part of our life. Spirituality is about growth that can only come from the willingness to let go and change. (Living Liturgy, p.244)

**Vincentian Meditation:**

"Aren't the poor the suffering members of our Lord? Aren't they our brothers and sisters? ...We should assist the poor in every way and do it both by ourselves and by enlisting the help of others... To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by work." -St. Vincent de Paul- (McKenna, Praying with Vincent, p. 64)

**Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)**

Do our actions speak louder than our words?

**Closing Prayer:**

Jesus, servant of the poor,  
-may we be carriers of your good news to the poor  
Jesus, servant of the poor,  
-help to serve those who lack resources, who lack options, who lack power over their lives.  
Jesus, servant of the poor,  
-may we help the poor by acts of compassion that alleviate their needs and give them hope.  
Jesus, servant of the poor,  
-grant that we may bring the goodness of God to the poor, in our actions and our words. Amen.



5

## Serving in Hope

*Serving in Hope* is a spiritual formation program developed by the National Office, for use at the Conference and Council level. As our international motto reminds us, Vincentians are called to **Serve in Hope (Serviens in Spe,)** because we are called to bring the love of God to those who are poor and suffering, and therefore we must become rooted in the spirituality that is the heart and soul of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The *Serving in Hope* materials consist of seven modules, with a book (Formation Guide) and series of videos for each module. Every module contains five or six separate sessions. By design, each session can be used as a Spiritual Reflection in a weekly meeting, as outlined below. Alternatively, you may wish to share an entire module as a day-long Conference Retreat. If your Conference has the funds, you should provide the books to every member.



A single session will take a full twenty minutes. A basic model to follow in a Conference Meeting is below, but you will find the full Presenter's Guide from the newest module in the Resources section of this handbook. It is summarized below:

1. Introduction
  - Provide copies of the Formation Guide to each member personal reflection and notes
  - Stress that sharing is not compulsory but encouraged.
  - Ask, or assign, different members to read the different sections.
2. Quietening Down Period
  - Invite the group to become relaxed and aware of God's presence with us
  - Review the Learning Objectives for the session
  - Watch the video for the session (videos range from 2 to 5 minutes in length)
3. Opening
  - Pray the Opening Prayer together.
  - Each section is read aloud, slowly and prayerfully, by the designated members
  - Hearing different voices will allow different emphasis on words/phrases
4. Pause to Reflect and Share
  - The practice of silent reflection and sharing provides the contemplative and relational experience that helps us deepen our journey *together* to holiness.
  - The facilitator introduces the suggested Discussion Question(s)
5. When the sharing has ended, read together the Closing Prayer.

Periods of silence are expected and while sometimes uncomfortable, they are an important part of the practice.

**God speaks to us in the silence.**

## **Apostolic Reflection**

One of the most powerful forms of Spiritual Reflection you may wish to follow in your Conference Meetings is the Apostolic Reflection. For a more in-depth perspective, see the two excellent papers by Rev. Hugh O'Donnell, CM, in the *Resources* section of this *Handbook*.

The tradition of Apostolic Reflection dates back (not coincidentally) to the Apostles, whom Christ sent forth in pairs. Upon their return, He would ask them what they had seen, what they had learned. St. Vincent also followed this model with his missionaries.

The reason this form of reflection is especially useful in our Vincentian vocation, is that it asks us to directly discern God's Will in the works that we are doing; it reminds us that our charity is a *means*, not an *end*.

While Fr. O'Donnell's articles explain three different models of Apostolic Reflection, the one that is easiest, both for time and for planning, in a weekly Conference Meeting, is the "personal sharing, common reflection" model. In this model, one member will share his own specific experience on a Home Visit, and then reflect on a few questions, for example:

- What was his own reaction and feelings in the visit?
- What was the reaction of the persons receiving help?
- How might they have felt?

Next, ask all to reflect on this case:

- Do they need clarification?
- What other feelings might our friends in need have had?
- Does a scriptural image or passage come to mind for anyone?
- Does a quote or image from Frédéric or Vincent come to mind?
- What insights did we derive from this reflection?
- Is there any action we should take?
- Anyone may thank or intercede with God.

Two wonderful tools are available to help members reflect individually, as well as to prepare themselves to share in the group: the *Spirituality of the Home Visit* journal, and *Apostolic Reflection with Sr. Rosalie Rendu*. These books include many other questions you can use in your reflections. It is well worth providing these books to every member, and you can find them listed in the *Resources* section of this *Handbook*.

As with all reflections, do not be afraid of silence! If members are reflecting on what they have heard, and contemplating the meaning to themselves, just relax and wait. God speaks to us in the silence.

### **Benchmarks for Apostolic Reflection**

1. *The God who called us here is here*
2. *God is present in each person and in the community*
3. *Do not tread on the heels of Providence*
4. *In contemplating, loving, and serving the poor, the poor one is Jesus Christ*
5. *The journey is a shared and corporate one*

## Friendship

Our *Vincentian Formation: A Foundation Document*, found in the Resources section of this Handbook, explains the centrality of human relationships to our spiritual formation.

At the center of all our relationships, we see the Holy Trinity, which reminds us that the Divine life is a shared life. Similarly, our Conference, as a community of faith, reminds us that our journey toward Holiness is also shared.

From the earliest days of the Society, Blessed Frédéric saw the friendship that the Conference fostered as an *essential element*. A man who was known as a good friend to many, Frédéric highly valued the spiritual power of friendships. As he wrote to his friend Lèonce Curnier in 1837 (emphasis added):

*It must be agreed, however, that friendship being a harmony between souls, it cannot subsist in a prolonged absence, unless it is given from time to time certain signs of good accord, and these signs can be two-fold: words and actions. Words borne on faithful paper apprise him who forgets that he is not forgotten. They dissipate anxieties, mingling common annoyances and sorrows. It is truly an epistolary meeting where one always gains and never loses. However, there are bonds stronger still than words: actions. I do not know whether you have observed that nothing creates intimacy between two men than to eat together, travel together, and work together; but **if purely human acts have this power, moral acts have it even more, and if two or three come together to do good, their union will be perfect.** Thus, at least, He assures us who says in the Gospel: "Truly, when you are gathered together in my name, I will be in your midst."*

While barbecues, potlucks, and other social gatherings are wonderful for Conferences to hold, it is this deeper sense of growing in holiness together that truly forms us; that brings towards what Frédéric (and our Catechism) call "perfection."

Our friendship unites us on our pathway to holiness, and strengthens us on our way. As a Spiritual Advisor, holding this understanding up to the Conference during meetings and discussions is vitally important. We are a Community of Faith.

Equally important, we must always remember that we are called to treat those in need as friends! Because, as Frédéric famously put it:

*"[E]very man who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation to-day, may tomorrow stand himself in need of a kind word, an advice, or a consolation, because the hand that you clasp clasps yours in return, because that indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves towards you when the old man, the mother, the little children shall have prayed for you."*

We are "conscious of our own frailty, "and dedicate ourselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live."



## Service

The primary form that our service to others takes is in the Home Visit. At each Conference Meeting, members will offer Home Visit Reports. Often, this is the part of the meeting that can become more “business” than “spirit.” Yet it is *exactly this part* which is meant to be the core of our formation as Vincentians! Our service is a means towards growth in Holiness, not an end. It is not philanthropy, but charity; true Christian charity, the “greatest of these” theological virtues which the Apostle Paul gave to us. Our Catechism defines it thus:

*Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. [1822]*

Charity is love, and love is an act of will: to put the needs of another before our own. As Vincentians, we are called to do this because we truly see, and serve, Christ Himself in the person of the poor. And as both St. Vincent and Blessed Frédéric taught, our service and our friendship must be mutual. It must be, as Frédéric put it, “help which honors.”

Because Vincentians are “doers,” called, as St. Vincent put it, to serve God “with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows,” it is only natural that as we get caught up in our activity, we sometimes begin to lose sight of the bigger (spiritual) picture.

As Spiritual Advisors, our role is to breathe life into that ideal; to animate the seeking of spiritual growth through service.

Here are a few brief ideas and examples of ways that you can do this.

- **Words matter.** Encourage members not to use the word “client” to describe those in need. We are called by our Rule “to establish relationships based on trust and friendship” and “to understand them as they would a brother or sister.”

We endeavor to help, in Frédéric’s words, as “weak Samaritans,” as the neighbors Christ called us to be. “Help that honors,” he taught, is mutual.

To *have* a neighbor, one must *be* a neighbor.

To *have* a friend, one must *be* a friend.

To *have* a brother or sister, one must *be* a brother or sister.

Clients do not have clients. Help is not mutual, and does not “honor,” when it is offered to a “client.”

- **Apostolic Reflection.** As discussed previously, using home visits as the basis for the Spiritual Reflection is a very centering exercise for Vincentians. However, our reflections need not be restricted to the formal one at the beginning of the meeting. Indeed, as we remind ourselves by offering the Sign of the Cross only to open and close the meeting, our entire meeting is a prayer – and a reflection.

If conversations surrounding a home visit report seem to be veering off towards cynicism or a less than loving approach, it is important for the Spiritual Advisor to act as the “conscience of the Conference,” reminding fellow Vincentians that they are discussing a friend, a neighbor, and Christ Himself.



We mustn't do so in a pushy or scolding way, but in a sincere way, by asking (for example):

- "Did this visit remind you of any of Christ's encounters with those in need?"
- "How do we think Blessed Frédéric might have advised us here?"
- "What face of Christ did you see on your visit?" (You might even offer examples: Jesus weeping in the Garden at Gethsemane, carrying His cross, defying Satan's temptations...)



- **Our friend, our Lord, is in our midst.** It is easy to become jaded, even cynical at times; to roll our eyes and think, "Oh boy, I've heard this story before!"

We sometimes say things about our friends in need that we would never say in front of them!

A useful exercise to remind us to always be respectful and loving, is to place a chair, with a framed picture of Christ on it, labelled "our friend in need" right in the center of the meeting room. The person we are discussing is our friend, and our friend is Christ Himself!

- **In the Vincentian Spirit.** That is how our Rule asks us to make our Home Visits. Read "The Home Visit" by Mike Syslo, listed in the *Resources* section of this *Handbook* for ideas you may offer to the members.
  - Are we "experts?"
  - Do we have the answers?
  - Are we judging?
  - How can we comfort those who are suffering *right now*?

These are spiritual questions, not business decisions. Your role is not to give the answers, but to gently remind your *confreres* of the questions we are called to answer!

- **Home Visit Journal.** As discussed earlier, you should plan to get copies of *The Spirituality of the Home Visit* for each member, and encourage them to use it. There is ordering information in the *Resources* section of this *Handbook*.

## The Gospel of Matthew Doesn't Need Our Footnotes

St. Vincent de Paul often referred to the Gospel of Matthew, reminding us that Christ “went so far as to say that he would consider every deed which either helps or harms the poor as done for or against himself.”

It is important for us to remember the words of that Gospel, without adding our own footnotes:

### **Matthew 25:35-40**

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink,<sup>1</sup> a stranger and you welcomed me,<sup>2</sup> naked and you clothed me,<sup>3</sup> ill and you cared for me,<sup>4</sup> in prison and you visited me.<sup>5</sup>

Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’

And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

--

### *Footnotes*

1. *Only if my hunger and thirst did not result from my own bad decisions*
2. *Only if you hadn't welcomed me too many times already*
3. *Only if I promised to go to a budget class first*
4. *Only if I demonstrated I “deserved” assistance*
5. *Only if my life was an example of pure Christian morality*

## Vincentian Gatherings Outside of the Conference Meeting

In addition to our regular Conference Meetings, there are many opportunities to grow together as a community of faith, and to mark the milestones of our Vincentian vocation. Spiritual Advisors, working closely with the Conference President, should make every effort to promote these practices.

### Vincentian Feast Days

Attending Mass together as a Conference is an important sharing of our faith. While there certainly is no wrong time to attend Mass together, there are a number of Vincentian Feast Days throughout the year that are important to remember, and they make ideal Masses for the Conference to attend. From our *Rule*:

*The Council of the United States has designated six days for religious observances. On these occasions, the members of Conferences and Councils demonstrate the spiritual nature of the Society by attending the Eucharist together:*

- *Ozanam Sunday (the last Sunday of April)*
- *The feast day of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam (September 9)*
- *The feast day of St. Vincent de Paul (September 27)*
- *The Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the Society (December 8)*
- *A Conference Mass celebrated at least once a year for all members, including spouses and children. During this Mass, it is most appropriate to commission new members into the Conference, pray for those we have visited, pray for our benefactors, pray for the poor, pray for the deceased members, and for continued good work.*
- *Another feast day of local custom, e.g., December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.*

While Ozanam Sunday, Immaculate Conception, and the feast days of Vincent and Frédéric are fixed, the other two enable you, along with your conference, to select Masses of special importance for you.

### A Feast Day of Local Custom

A “feast day of local custom” might be the feast of your Parish’s patron, particularly if that patron is a Vincentian Saint, such as St. Catherine Labouré or St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. It is certainly not necessary, though, to choose only a Vincentian saint!

Recalling that Frédéric, a devout and studious Catholic, drew inspiration from many Saints outside the Vincentian family, it is far more important to choose a feast day that your Conference agrees upon that particularly inspires them, your Parish, or your local community.

### A Conference Mass Celebrated at Least Once a Year

This special Mass is not intended to celebrate a particular feast day, but is to be dedicated to your Conference. Working with your Pastor, you may wish to also use this annual Mass as a time for commissioning or recommitment of members and Officers during the Mass.

The best way to ensure that your Conference really does this is to lock it into your calendar for whatever date your Conference agrees upon!

## Conference Retreats

While spiritual reflections are a focal point of every regular Conference Meeting, there is also great value in dedicated retreats. Below are a few suggestions on how to structure a retreat day.

### Serving in Hope Retreat

- 8:00 Conference Mass
- 9:00 Coffee and light breakfast items
- 9:30 Opening Prayer
- 9:45 *Serving in Hope* Module: similar to the method described previously for Conference Meetings, except covering all the sessions in a single Formation Guide (book) in one day.
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 *Serving in Hope* Module (continued)
- 3:45 Closing Prayer

### Apostolic Reflection Retreat

- 8:30 Gather with coffee and light breakfast
- 9:00 Opening Prayer
- 9:15 Using “Personal Sharing, Corporate Listening” model of Apostolic Reflection, members, in turn, share personal reflections from *Spirituality of the Home Visit* journals. In a group, each person is invited to share his/her story or experience. All we do is share it, without dialogue or comments, without critique. We welcome each person’s story as it is experienced and shared. It is a non-judgmental, non-critical, non-evaluative way of letting people speak out of their own lives. It is permitted to ask a question for clarification. This is followed by corporate listening:
  - “What did we hear ourselves saying?”
  - “What did we, as a group, hear ourselves say?”

*The total time for this style of retreat will vary depending on how many participate. You will find that even with a relatively small group, 2.5 hours can go by quickly.*
- 11:45 Closing Prayer

## Vincentian Celebrations

*Vincentian Celebrations: Rituals and Ceremonies*, which is discussed in the *Resources* section of this *Handbook*, provides many simple ceremonies that you can conduct in your Conference. While this is not strictly the responsibility of the Spiritual Advisor, it is a good practice for you to take the lead in helping the Conference President to plan ceremonies, and to conduct them. Additionally, make a practice to involve your Pastor as often as possible!

Commissioning and Commitment ceremonies should be conducted at least once a year. When new members have fully discerned their Vincentian vocation, we want to honor their commitment, and celebrate their welcome into the Conference. Similarly, we want to recognize the beginning of our Officers’ terms of office.

The Spiritual Advisor taking the lead on these ceremonies also serves to remind all involved that ours is a spiritual vocation; not *philanthropy*, but *charity*: true Christian love, the highest theological virtue.

## Member and Servant Leader Discernment

### New Members

Those who wish to become Vincentians are not simply considering a Parish Ministry, or activity; they are discerning their call to the Vincentian vocation. Because our primary purpose is spiritual growth, the Spiritual Advisor has a key role to play in this process.

Your Conference should have a defined, formal process through which prospective new members are guided, and that process should support the steps outlined in the Rule, Part III:

#### **Statute 3: Membership and Admission**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States has three types of membership: the Active (Full) Member, the Associate Member, and the Contributing Member.

Active (Full) Members are those who participate regularly in the prayer life, meetings, and charitable activities through personal contact with the poor of the Vincentian Conference or Council into which they have been received.

An Active (Full) Member accepts the Rule and Statutes of the Society, belongs to the Catholic Church, and is received as a Vincentian brother or sister into the Society's Conference or Council with which he or she is affiliated. Normally, membership implies Conference affiliation. Less commonly is membership obtained through direct Council affiliation. Only Active (Full) Members hold office in the organization.

#### **Admission Process for Active Members**

The names of persons proposed for active membership are to be submitted to the President of the Conference or Council concerned. The President will provide information concerning the recommended person to the Conference or Council. If approved, the candidate will be admitted as a member and given a Vincentian welcome at the next meeting. If a prospective member wishes to test their Vincentian vocation, that person may defer for a time formal admission into the Society. A candidate for active membership is afforded a period of training and discernment which includes formation in the essential elements and core values of the Society as well as its Rule.

Before being commissioned as a member, according to Statute 4, the Conference President or the Spiritual Advisor should consult with the candidate to discern readiness for active (full) membership. The Conference then takes formal action, normally by a resolution, to accept the candidate into active (full) membership.

Associate Members are those affiliated with the Society by formal action of the Conference or Council with which the member will be joined. Associate Members include those who sincerely and publicly accept the Society's Rule but may or may not belong to the Catholic Church and may or may not attend Conference Meetings or engage in the works of the Society on a regular basis. Associate Members are kept informed of the developments and activities of their immediate groupings, as well as the general progress of the Society, particularly in the local area or diocese. They are invited to attend the general meetings and special observances of the Society and to participate in its charitable activities.

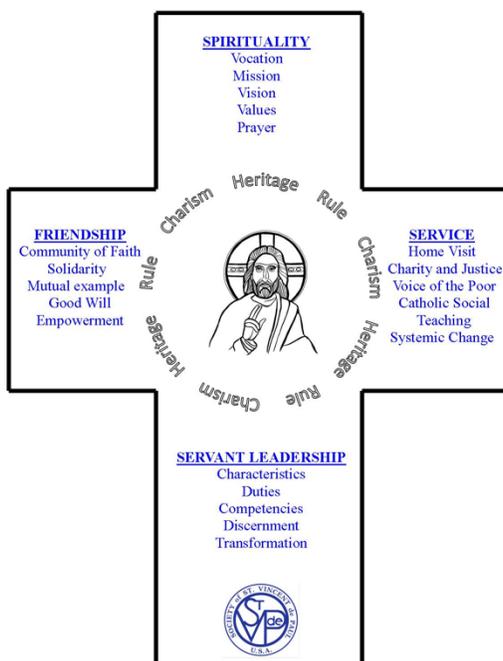
The main role of the Spiritual Advisor in the process is to encourage prayerful discernment, to emphasize the Society's primary purpose of growth in Holiness, and to answer questions about Vincentian Spirituality. We welcome both Active and Associate Members, and all should understand the distinction, and the special calling of being a Vincentian.

## Member Formation

The Spiritual Advisor is not expected to be a “Professor of Vincentian Spirituality,” or to offer prepared lessons. Rather, as a Spiritual Animator, you should regularly offer to members the many resources available to them to help in pursuing their own personal Formation.

Chief among these resources is *The Vincentian Pathway*, a short booklet available from the National Council web site (see Resources section.) Developed under Resolution 88 of the National Council, *The Vincentian Pathway* recognizes that “all Vincentians are Servant Leaders, grounded in Vincentian spirituality, friendship, and service.”

Within this booklet, members are referred to various publications of the Society, indexed to the three Essential Virtues and to Servant Leadership, within four levels of Discovering, Deepening, Discerning, and Developing.



### THE VINCENTIAN PATHWAY:

- Helps create a Vincentian heart by forming your mind and attitude into a Vincentian way of thinking and acting.
- Develops your Vincentian Vocation by preparing you for many and different roles that God may call you to assume throughout your Vincentian life.
- Is not walked in a sequential manner, but the Holy Spirit will lead you and your Conference in a unique way. Indeed, your Vincentian heart will be in a process, over and over, of:
  - Discovering
  - Deepening
  - Developing
  - Discerning

# **PART III**

**THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR AND COUNCIL LIFE**

# THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR AND COUNCIL LIFE

The Spiritual Advisor at the Council level accepts an important role that impacts the lives of all Vincentians within the council. Ideally, the Council Spiritual Advisor will have a minimum of five years as an active Vincentian and be willing to commit to the vocation at this level.

The Council Spiritual Advisor, like Spiritual Advisors at all levels, is committed to the call and pursuit of Vincentian holiness. This person understands the importance of personal witness to the growth of his/her own spiritual life. This Spiritual Advisor understands and strives to live the charism, spirituality, mission, and ministry of the Society. The Spiritual Advisor knows and lives by the teachings of the Catholic Church including its social teachings. This person reads, accepts and models the Society's Rule, its history and the lives of its patrons and founders. Certainly, the Spiritual Advisor recognizes the importance of direct service to our friends in need, and understands and supports the need for systemic change. Ultimately, the Council Spiritual Advisor, whether clerical or lay, must be formed and steeped in Vincentian spirituality. Whenever possible, the Council Spiritual Advisor will attend the national *Invitation for Renewal*.

The Council Spiritual Advisor ultimately has a broad responsibility for Vincentian formation of the Council members and of all conference Spiritual Advisors, in partnership with servant leadership and the Senior Formator in the Diocesan Council.

This Spiritual Advisor works with the Council President to keep Vincentian spirituality and formation as a priority within meetings, at Council events, and in communications with the Diocese, parish communities and district/conference leadership. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to:

- provide opening and closing prayers and reflections at each Council meeting, making use of National resources, e.g. prayers for opening and closing meetings and weekly spiritual reflections based on each Sunday's readings.
- make use of Vincentian discernment when the Council is in the midst of decisions, struggles, change. Fr. O'Donnell's discernment paper is a good reference for this.
- work with the Council President to provide annual retreats for Council and Conference leadership. The Council can provide resources and as Council Spiritual Advisor you can provide the retreat. One good retreat option is a Serving in Hope Module such as 'Our Vincentian Vocation' or "Vincentian Spirituality'.
- provide resources and support to all conference Spiritual Advisors, guiding them to the National website or to the resource guide within this Handbook. Staying in touch with conference Spiritual Advisors, either by email or occasional meetings, can provide much needed support, encouragement, and guidance.
- offer support and Vincentian discernment to Conference leadership and members seeking to identify a Spiritual Advisor, making use of the appropriate sections in this Handbook and reminding conference leadership to pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance.
- organize regular formation sessions for all conference Spiritual Advisors, thereby providing ongoing support, spiritual renewal and the sharing of successes and struggles. These sessions can be short reviews of sections in this Handbook, attendance together at a parish Mass followed by a shared meal, or preparing a reflection or guided meditation based on Vincentian virtues, or perhaps revisiting the section on spirituality from the Ozanam Orientation.
- arrange, recommend or provide Vincentian spirituality and formation retreats, days of reflection and Vincentian celebrations which can be offered by conference Spiritual

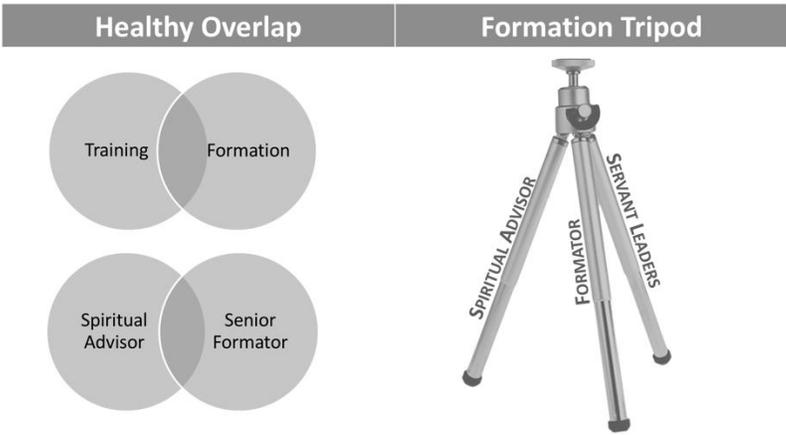
Advisors. Often conference Spiritual Advisors only need a suggestion to provide days of reflection or Vincentian celebrations, and shown where to find resources on the National website. If necessary, you, as Council Spiritual Advisor, might need to provide the retreat for the conferences or be present to assist.

- assure annual commissioning of members, either on Ozanam Sunday or at an appropriate liturgy. This can easily be done with a reminder email and attaching the commissioning document. Suggest that the president and/or spiritual advisor approach the pastor to have this done during a parish Mass, if possible.
- mentor conference Spiritual Advisors to help them grow in Vincentian spirituality, in the use of Vincentian resources, in facilitation techniques on faith sharing and on conducting prayer services/retreats. Make yourself available to Spiritual Advisors, sharing a phone number, email address, or any other contact information for the conference Spiritual Advisors. Check in with them periodically with suggestions, reminders, etc. Offer formation on facilitation and about various forms of prayer at least once a year, or as often as needed in your Council.

That Vincentian formation is a primary responsibility of the Council Spiritual Advisor cannot be over-emphasized. Vincentian spirituality is less likely to be understood, shared and lived out by Vincentians without proper and regular Vincentian formation. Working with the Council President and Senior Formators, the Council Spiritual Advisor provides formation as follows:

- mentor conference spiritual advisors, providing them with Spiritual Advisor formation, recommending resources from National and International web sites, helping them prepare prayer sessions and/or retreats for their conferences. This does require regular contact with conference spiritual advisors to assure that they have what they need and know where to find resources.
- encourage and support conference Spiritual Advisors in their own Vincentian spiritual development and servant leadership role, and provide formation as needed to guide them. As stated above, this is best provided by meetings, days or half-days of reflection and Vincentian formation with conference spiritual advisors. Such gatherings need to take place at least once a year, and more often if possible. At the very least, frequent phone calls or emails to encourage, support and provide resources is important. Certainly, pray daily for your conference Spiritual Advisors.
- guide conference Spiritual Advisors in the use of the Vincentian Pathway for themselves and for their conference members. Since this is a relatively new and unused resource, it would be important that every Council spiritual advisor first become comfortable using this resource personally. It then can be shared with conference spiritual advisors in a day of formation or retreat.

*The Spiritual Advisor must work closely with the Senior Formator in developing the Council's Formation Plan, but must never forget the importance of the full support and assistance of the Council President and other Servant Leaders. We grow in Holiness together!*



Council Spiritual Advisors also have the responsibility to be knowledgeable about Regional and National Councils' larger formation plans and to incorporate those ideas into local formation planning and events. The Council Spiritual Advisor is encouraged to attend regional and national meetings as often as possible, and to share information from these meetings with the Council and Conference members. In this role, the Spiritual Advisor helps the Council and conference members maintain a balance between Vincentian spirituality, formation and prayer with discernment on how to address the local needs of our neighbors.

Council Spiritual Advisors participate themselves in formation and training activities, thereby increasing their knowledge of the various dimensions of Formation. Council Spiritual Advisors are strongly encouraged to participate in the Society's Invitation for Renewal, annual personal retreats and other opportunities that present themselves that will support their own spiritual growth and development. Certainly, there must be a personal commitment to frequent reception of the Sacraments, prayer, and reflection on Scripture in the heart of every Spiritual Advisor.

# **PART IV**

**RESOURCES FOR THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR**

# RESOURCES FOR THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR

As noted previously herein, Catholicism has an enormous amount of resources for enhancing our relationship with the Lord and all His human creation. However, the Lord has invited us to minister on His behalf utilizing Vincentian spirituality. So, it behooves us, as Spiritual Advisors, to lean predominantly on Vincentian spirituality in assisting our fellow Vincentians to grow in their faith.

While nowhere as rich as all Catholic spirituality, Vincentian spirituality has a robust reservoir of resources for us to use in helping our fellow Vincentians grow in their relationship with both the Lord and the epitome of His creation. Please plumb this reservoir of resources often, so that you will have a continually fresh feast to serve your fellow Vincentians.

There are many Vincentian resources available. It is not the intent of this Section IV to reference all of them.

The Resources on the following pages are listed below by category. However, this is not an exclusive segregation. For example, you may well find some Retreat Resource that could be well adapted to a meeting setting, or some Take-Home Resource that could be read at Conference meetings. As a more specific example, the *Serving in Hope* series is generally used in Conference meetings; but, one of the manuals could easily be the foundation for a retreat.

For purchases by mail, send your request to:

**Material and Sales Purchases  
SVdP National Council of the USA  
66 Progress Parkway  
Maryland Heights, Mo. 63043-3706  
PH: 314-576-3993  
Fax: 314-576-6755**

The national SVdP materials can be ordered online at:

<https://ssvpusa.org/materials/>

**If you are viewing this document electronically, many of the resource titles listed on the following pages may be clicked to download them directly. If viewing this document in print, the URL for the website where they may be found is printed in full.**

## Spiritual Advisor Resources

These are items to aid us personally in the fulfillment of our role as Spiritual Advisors.

### Available for download:

- <https://members.ssvpusa.org/formation/formation-resources/>
  - [Vincentian Formation](#)
  - [Guidelines for Formation](#)
  - [Spiritual Advisors Formation](#)
  - [Vincentian Celebrations](#)

### Available for purchase:

- Online Store: <https://www.svdpusa.org/materials/> or Catalog (Information above)
  - [Spiritual Advisors' Handbook](#), (print version of this *Handbook*)
  - [Walking the Vincentian Pathway, A Personal Guide](#)
  - [Walking the Vincentian Pathway Conference Planner](#)

## Conference/Council Meeting Spirituality Resources

These are items to facilitate our ministry within meetings.

### Available for download:

- *Vincentian Reflections/ Reflexiones Samanales Vicentinas* – a tool to focus on the Gospel for Sundays, Holy Days, and Feast Days of Society Patrons and Founders, <https://members.ssvpusa.org/formation/formation-resources/vincentian-reflections/>
- *Vincentian Contemplations* – for individual or Conference reflections <https://members.ssvpusa.org/formation/formation-resources/vincentian-reflections/>
- *Rule and Manual* – read a section(s) and discuss it, <https://members.ssvpusa.org/governance/the-rule-the-manual/>
- *Prayers and ceremonies*

<https://members.ssvpusa.org/formation/formation-resources/vincentian-prayers-and-ceremonies/>

### Available for purchase:

- Online Store: <https://www.svdpusa.org/materials/>
  - *Serving in Hope* – a manual-based series that deepens our understanding of the *Vincentian Way* - seven manuals, six topics per manual, about 20 minutes per topic; can also be done as a retreat or day of reflection:
    - I. Our Vincentian Vocation
    - II. Our Vincentian Spirituality
    - III. Our Vincentian Heritage
    - IV. Our Vincentian Mission
    - V. Our Vincentian Rule
    - VI. Our Vincentian Conference
    - VII: Our Vincentian Home Visit
  - *Rule and Manual* – read a section(s) and discuss it
  - *Vincentian Celebrations: Rituals and Ceremonies*
  - *Icon of the Ozanam Home Visit*
  - *Prayer for the Canonization of Bl. Frédéric Ozanam*

### Available in Appendix of this Handbook:

- *Apostolic Reflections*, Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, CM
- *Vincentian Discernment*, Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, CM

## Home Visit Spirituality Resources

*These are items to help us and our friends-in-need to grow spiritually through our home visits*

### Available for download:

- *Basic Home Visit Workshop*  
<https://members.ssvpusa.org/formation/formation-resources/formators-spiritual-advisors/>
- *The Home Visit Through the Eyes of Frédéric Ozanam*  
<https://members.ssvpusa.org/formation/formation-resources/retreats/>

### Available for purchase:

- Online Store: <https://www.svdpusa.org/materials/>
  - *Icon: A Home Visit by Bl. Frederic*
  - *Desperate Need Prayer Card*
  - *Spirituality of the Home Visit Journal*

### Available in Appendix of this Handbook:

- *The Home Visit*, Mike Syslo

## Renewal/Retreat Resources

*These are items to assist in planning and presenting retreat or renewal sessions.*

### Available for download:

- How to Plan a Retreat (video)  
<https://vimeo.com/654959519>
- *Turn Everything To Love*  
Book: <https://ssvpusa.org/product/turn-everything-to-love/>  
Video Retreat (facilitate local sharing): <https://vimeo.com/458152564>
- Video Retreats and Reflections:  
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8720367>
- Materials for Retreats  
<https://members.ssvpusa.org/formation/formation-resources/retreats/>

### Available for purchase:

- Online Store: <https://www.svdpusa.org/materials/>

## Online Videos

*These are items to view individually or as a Conference, followed by reflection.*

- Fred Talks  
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/6978890>
- Vincentian Heritage  
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8619851>
- Spirituality and Formation Channel  
<https://vimeo.com/channels/1135728>

## Resources for Individual Formation

*These are items for individual member formation and study.*

### Available for purchase:

- Online Store: <https://ssvpusa.org/materials/> or Catalog
  - *Frederic Ozanam Activity Book*
  - *Rosalie Rendu Activity Book*
  - *Apostle in a Top Hat*, James Derum
  - *Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam*, Ray Sickinger
  - *A Heart with Much Love to Give*, Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnee
  - *The Book of the Sick*, Frédéric Ozanam
  - *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change*
  - *15 Days of Prayer with Blessed Frédéric*
  - *Faces of Holiness*, Fr. Robert Maloney CM
  - *'Tis A Gift to Be Simple*, Fr. Robert Maloney CM
  - *Turn Everything to Love*, Fr. Robert Maloney CM
  - *The Frédéric Ozanam Story*, Michael P. Murphy, Fr. Ronald Ramson, CM, Sr. Kieran Kneaves, DC
  - *Walking the Vincentian Pathway: A Personal Guide*
  - *Apostolic Reflection with Sr. Rosalie Rendu*
- Elsewhere (if source is not noted, you may find these at Amazon or other booksellers)
  - *Ozanam: a lay saint for our time*, <http://en.ssvpglobal.org/Shop2/Publications>
  - *Ozanam: Husband & Father, Champion of Truth, Lover of the Poor, Founder of SVdP*
  - *Ozanam*, Madeline des Rivieres
  - *Frederic Ozanam*, Mary Ann Garvey Hess
  - *Frédéric Ozanam – Biography*, Gerard Cholvy,
  - *Praying with Frédéric Ozanam*, Fr. Ronald Ramson, CM
  - *He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul*, Fr. Robert Maloney, CM
  - *The Way of St. Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*, Fr. Robert Maloney, CM
  - *Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul*, Fr. Robert Maloney, CM
  - *Vincent de Paul, The Trailblazer*, Bernard Pujó
  - *Vincent de Paul and Charity*, Andre Dodin CM

## Catholic Social Teaching

*These are Non-Vincentian items that can support Vincentian spirituality.*

### Available for purchase:

- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*
- *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*
- *Seven Themes from Catholic Social Teaching*
- *In the Footsteps of Jesus: Catholic Social Teaching*
- *Being Neighbor: Catechism and Social Justice*
- *Poor for the Poor: The Mission of the Church*
- *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis' encyclical on Love

## Prayer Resources

### Available for download:

- [\*500 Little Prayers for Vincentians\*](#)
- [\*Icon of the Ozanam Home Visit\*](#)
- [\*Icon of the Beggar\*](#)
- [\*Opening & Closing Prayers for Society Meetings\*](#)
- [\*Guidelines for Indulgences\*](#)
- [\*Commitment and Commissioning Ceremonies\*](#)
- [\*Stations of the Cross with Vincentian Reflections\*](#)
- [\*Other Special Prayers\*](#)

### Available for purchase:

- *Prayer for the Canonization of Bl. Frédéric Ozanam*

# **PART V**

## **VINCENTIAN PRAYERS**

*Prayer is central to the Vincentian vocation and spirituality. We pray at our meetings, during our person-to-person service of the poor, individually and as a group. In addition to the prayer resources listed in the Resources section of this Handbook, this section contains some sample prayers you may wish to use in various meetings and activities.*

## **Prayers Before a Home Visit**

### **1**

Holy Spirit, inspire us with joy and patience. Be at work in us to bring good news to the downcast, to heal the brokenhearted, to be witnesses of the love of Christ. Stir in us the fire of your love, and guide us with discernment, and wisdom, generosity and kindness. Amen.

### **2**

Lord, you have led me here to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Help me to open my heart and eyes to this calling as a vocation. May I see you in those who call for help and allow them to see you in me. Let me answer their pleas, and yes even their demand at times, with your gentle spirit. Bless my efforts to see each person as an opportunity for grace and a step closer to being the person you have called me to be. Thank you, Lord, for making these graces available. May I always see them as gifts and not burdens. Amen.

## **Prayers with Those in Need**

### **1**

Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today, that You and I can't handle. Our Father, Who art in Heaven...

### **2**

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for this call, thank you for the opportunity to meet with [Their Name(s)], our brother and sister in Christ. Lord you know each of us. You knew us from the day we were born, you know our hearts, our needs, and everything about us. You told us that you will never leave us or forsake us. You ask us to seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will be opened, ask and it shall be given. We are all asking today for each of our needs, some spoken, some on our hearts. Please Lord, help us find our needs, Show us the way, and help us all walk closer to you. Thank you again for bringing us together. In your name we pray. Amen.

### **3**

God, you have said if two are more are gathered in Your name you are there. You are clearly here in this room. You are as close as the hand we now hold. Be with [*their name(s)*], give her/him/them patience for the small challenges (*insert particular challenges as appropriate*) and courage for the big challenges. Help her/him/them to know she/he/they is/are never alone and that You are always, always, always with her/him/them.

### **4**

*Make up your own prayer based on the situation at hand, always trying to mention the friend and family members by name during the prayer.*

## Prayers Following a Home Visit

### 1

We thank you, Lord, for the many blessings which we receive from those whom we visit. Help us to love and respect them, to understand their deeper needs, and to share their burdens and joys as true friends in Christ. Amen.

### 2

Thank you Lord for all the blessings you have given today. We ask you to continue to bless the ones we have visited, to inspire them to trust in you and come to you for their needs. We pray for [*names of each person and specific needs*] We pray that our work may be continued by your Vincentian servants and completed by your grace, in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and Bl. Frederic Ozanam. Amen.

### 3

Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

## Weekly Conference Meeting - Opening Prayer

*(c.f. Statute 7, Conference Meeting Essentials)*

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be recreated, and You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, through Christ Our Lord. Amen!

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen!

Hail Mary, Full of Grace, The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death. Amen!

Prayers for those suffering (*add names*):

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- 
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## All Day Meetings

### Opening Prayer

*Leader:* Let us ponder as we pray the words of St. Vincent de Paul:

“Jesus, You have called me to evangelize persons who are bruised and burdened, and my purpose is to make you known. When you lived on this earth, your thoughts and actions were of mercy, forgiveness and healing for all people, because you knew it was your Father's Will that all be saved.

“Teach me by your example, and grant me all the virtues necessary to be a true evangelizer and make me, through the fervor of my zeal, to set the world on fire. I want to give myself to You, body and soul, mind and heart and spirit, and always to do what pleases You. In Your mercy, grant me the grace to have You continue in me and through me Your Work, O Blessed Savior.”

Amen

*Leader:* Let us pray: (Please alternate sides)

*Left:* Loving Creator,  
we ask for the insight to understand  
the needs of people today  
that we might grasp the complexity  
of the situations that face us,  
and the absolute demands  
of human need.

*Right:* The hungry have a right to food,  
the homeless to shelter,  
the oppressed to freedom  
and the ill to health care.

*Left:* God, enable each of us to risk  
being in solidarity with our brothers and sisters,  
to be contagious in our love for all,  
as we transmit the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul  
and Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

*Right:* Do not allow our fear, ignorance or pride  
to limit the action of your Spirit,  
nor allow our selfishness to prevent your  
Divine creativity within us from bearing fruit.

*All:* We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

## *Mid-Day Prayer*

*Leader:* Let us give thanks to God for calling us to serve the poor in the spirit of Jesus, as followers of St. Vincent de Paul, especially for the grace to know that in those who are poor, "WE SEE THE FACE OF CHRIST" (alternate sides)

*Right:* Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.  
Faces beaming with success,  
Demanding faces with eyebrows raised,  
Intensely strained and challenging faces,  
Faces daring glances asking that I do my very best for them.

*Left:* Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.  
Caring faces, gentle, kind and understanding,  
Faces that bear the marks of the years of their giving,  
Comforting faces, soft, smiling, relaxed,  
Inviting me to trust and to love the poor.

*Right:* Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.  
Smooth-skinned young faces whose expressions change in seconds with an array of emotion.  
Lined faces of those who hold wisdom close to the heart.  
Peaceful faces awaiting with expectancy, in hope and trust.

*Left:* Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.  
Tragic faces manifesting physical or emotional pain with head bent and eyes closed with pain's unwritten statements.  
Yes, I thought I saw you in the sad faces with tears gently slipping down with hurt that knew no words.

*Right:* Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.  
All of them teaching me of life without words.  
All gifts to me, sealed in human wrappings- lined and unlined, smooth and rough, they are your face made visible to me.

*Left:* Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.  
Each face manifesting you, proclaiming you in deep emotions.  
We revered these faces of our past, our present, and the faces that will be in our tomorrow.

*All:* God, we find you in the human faces that surround our daily lives, for you are there. Help us to serve you in all the faces of the poor, and give us your grace so that we may be aware of your presence alive in our midst. Amen

## *Closing Prayer*

*Leader:* O God, your love ignites our hearts, captures our imaginations, shapes our dreams, and awakens possibilities. Make us disciples on fire with your love so that we can become true followers of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Help us, O God, to enkindle in others a sense of hope that transformation is possible and give us the grace to transmit to others the fire of their charism.

*Leader:* Let us pray (Please alternate sides)

*Left:* When the heart is on fire, light comes from within. With the eyes of an enlightened heart we can see the hope to which we are called. By responding to the call to belong to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we proclaim that the quest to be a servant of the poor is the fire of our lives.

*Right:* The path to seeing the eyes of the heart is discovered in the journey of discipleship. It is not an easy journey. It is an ongoing effort to live the gospel with integrity trying, sometimes succeeding, often failing, recognizing the need for patience, and then trying again.

*Left:* Discipleship is a way of being in the world that affects every relationship. Disciples shape one another according to the action of the Spirit in their lives. The energy of the disciples flows from faith in what is unseen yet believed. At its very core, discipleship is a call to a love so radical that it never gives up on God, one's neighbor, or one's self.

*Right:* Disciples are called to love well, as Jesus had, with hope, truth, fidelity and compassion. This leads inevitably to taking a stand with the Christ of the paschal mystery who willingly laid down his life in love so that all may have life in abundance.

*All:* Almighty God, We do not ask that you make life easy for us, but that problems will not intimidate us. We do not ask for success in every venture, but that when we fail, we can still go on with a fresh beginning. We ask for the grace to bring the love of God, the compassion of Jesus, to those who are poor and suffering. And we ask for the grace to set our hearts on fire so that we will live the true spirit of a Vincentian. Amen

## Other Meetings - Opening Prayers

### 1

Lord Jesus, deepen our Vincentian spirit of friendship during this meeting, make us responsive to the Christian calling to seek and find the forgotten, the suffering or the deprived so that we may bring them Your love. Help us to be generous with our time, our possessions and ourselves in this mission of charity. Perfect in us your love and teach us to share more fully in the Eucharistic Sacrifice offered for all.

### 2

Heavenly Father, we come to you today asking for your guidance, wisdom, and support as we begin this meeting. Help us to engage in meaningful discussion; allow us to grow closer as a group and nurture the bonds of community. Fill us with your grace, Lord God, as we make decisions that might affect our friends in need. And continue to remind us that all that we do here today, all that we accomplish, is for the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of You, and for the service of humanity. We ask these things in your name, Amen.

### 3

Lord, I come before you, a humble creature of your making.  
You alone know my heart,  
You alone know my soul,  
You alone know my whole story.

Lord Jesus, I long to see your face.  
Grant that I may see it in the faces of Your poor.  
May my faith and my actions be pleasing to the Father,  
Whose mercy is equal to His justice.

Grant that I may show mercy to Your poor.  
Grant that I may feed the hungry,  
Clothe the naked,  
And shelter the homeless  
With humility, cheerfulness, and gratitude,  
Knowing that in serving the least of these,  
I serve the Son of God.

Grant that those I serve may see Your face in me;  
That they may pray for my salvation;  
That we may join together with You in eternal life.

**Leader:**

St Vincent de Paul.  
St Louise de Marillac.  
Blessed Frederic Ozanam.  
Blessed Rosalie Rendu.

**All:**

Pray for us.  
Pray for us.  
Pray for us.  
Pray for us.

## Leadership Prayers

### 1

Lord God, You sent your Holy Spirit as your forever presence among us. When your disciples were hesitant to go out to continue your mission, it was the Holy Spirit that gifted them with wisdom and courage.

Today as we gather, we invite the Holy Spirit upon the Vincentians of this Conference/Council as we search for leadership. Grant your servant leader the courage to step forward as our new president. Grant her or him the wisdom to discern where they may best serve You in our Society.

We ask that You lead us to make all of our decisions in love and solidarity with one another and out of our great love for You and your people. We ask all this through Jesus Christ, your Son.

Amen.

### 2

Lord God, You sent Your Holy Spirit as Your forever presence among us. When Your disciples were hesitant to go out to continue Your mission, it was the Holy Spirit that gifted them with wisdom and courage. Today as we gather we invite the Holy Spirit upon us, as we search for leadership. Grant us the courage to step forward to be Your servant leaders. Grant us wisdom to discern where we may best serve You in the Society. We ask that You lead us to make all of our decisions in love and solidarity with one another and out of our great love for You and Your people. We call upon St. Vincent de Paul who led when he was exhausted, who found gifted people to surround himself with, whose leadership left us a forever legacy leading all of us to see the face of Christ in the poor.

We call upon St. Louise who taught us to see the poor as our Masters.

We call upon Blessed Frederic, the founder of our Society, to help us in our organization so that we may continue his vision to love those in need and to evangelize the love of God everywhere we go.

We call upon Blessed Rosalie who taught us to be aware of the delivery of our services to all those in need by telling us that they will remember the love that we showed more than the food that we shared.

Holy Spirit, you are the grace that moves mountains. This day each one of us places ourselves before you as Servants of the Lord. We ask that you guide us to do Your Holy will and we trust that whatever that "will" might be, you will lead the way to accomplish all things in your holy name. We pray all of these things Lord God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

## Vincentian Lenten Prayer

**Reader 1:** Jesus said to his disciples: "[But] take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward."

**Reader 2:** "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

**Reader 3:** "But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

**Reader 4:** "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you." (Matthew 6: 1-6,16-18)

**Reader 5:** May Jesus gift us with his presence this Lent, so that we can be a gift to others as we:

### **Right side:**

Fast from judging others  
Fast from unrelenting pressures  
Fast from self-concern  
Fast from personal anxiety  
Fast from discouragement  
Fast from criticism  
Fast from complaining  
Fast from social media  
Fast from resentments

### **Left Side:**

to feast on kindness.  
to feast on trusting God.  
to feast on compassion.  
to feast on hope.  
to feast on encouragement.  
to feast on affirmation.  
to feast on complimenting.  
to feast on prayer and silence.  
to feast on forgiveness.

### **Together:**

Lord, give us the grace to fast during Lent, so that we can truly celebrate Easter. Amen.

# **PART VI**

**VINCENTIAN FORMATION: A FOUNDATION  
DOCUMENT**



# **VINCENTIAN FORMATION**

**A**

**FOUNDATION DOCUMENT**

**OF THE**

**SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

Approved by Board of Trustees  
National Council of the United States  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul  
August 30, 2002



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## **RESOURCES USED**

# INTRODUCTION



## Vincentian Formation

**A Foundation Document  
of the  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

The purpose of this document is to provide the underlying assumptions, vision and structure for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's formation process. The document is intended primarily for those individuals and groups at the local and National Council levels who have responsibility for formation and education.

Integral to this effort is an understanding and ability to implement organizational formation and servant leadership throughout various levels of the Society.

The emphasis in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul on formation and education stems from the grassroots membership of the Society's response to God's call of grace and articulates the desire of Vincentians throughout the United States to engage in a process of formation, education and training in order to advance in holiness of life with the hope to better serve those who are in need.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

Formation is an ongoing process that begins with one's conception into life and continues throughout life. Formation is multi-dimensional and affects one's whole being, body, mind, and spirit (I Thes 5:23). One's formation is influenced by all of the socio-historical, cultural, philosophical, educational, and religious traditions that provide the context for one's growth and development. Indeed the story of one's life as a person, as a Christian, and as a Vincentian is an ongoing process of graced formation, reformation, and transformation into Christ-likeness.

Vincentian Formation takes into consideration the initial and ongoing process of growing and developing in the tradition, spirit, and spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, patron of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and Blessed Frederic Ozanam, its founder. This process respects that those who seek membership have already received some formation, both as a person and as a baptized Christian. The Society offers spiritual formation -- formation that assists one to find meaning and purpose in life, love and a sense of relatedness -- both in its initial orientation and in its ongoing formation. Spiritual formation assists both the Society and the individual member to achieve the three essential elements of the Society: personal holiness, service of the needy and friendship.

## **PROCESS**

The Process presented here for Vincentian Formation serves as a foundational document for all formation and education in the Society in the United States. It is an implementable, adaptable, and evaluative structure and process.

The implementation of the Process has a two fold desired outcome: 1) to invite all Vincentians to appreciate and celebrate their authentic identity and mission; 2) to renew and revitalize the Society in the United States as a whole and individual Vincentians in particular.

## KEY ASSUMPTIONS OF FORMATION

Formation, in general, is the continuation of Jesus' own work with the apostles: "those sent out." See Mark 3:13-15

- Formation is a process of becoming.
- Formation, in the words of St. Paul, as echoed by St. Vincent de Paul, is to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." See Romans 13:13-14
- Formation, initial and ongoing, are closely linked and should become one organic journey of Christian being and living.
- Vincentian Formation is rooted in a specific call to holiness. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Therefore, he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor." Luke 4:18
- The Church on earth is by her nature missionary. Vincentians are therefore evangelizers. "The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God." AA 6.2
- The vocation to holiness is rooted in the Sacrament of Baptism.
- The Sacrament of Confirmation associates us more closely with the mission of the Church and helps us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds. See CCC #1316
- Vincentians are called to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity. See Lumen Gentium #40
- The Holy Spirit is the principal agent in one's spiritual life. The Spirit creates one's "new heart," and inspires and guides it with a "new law" of love that is pastoral charity.
- Pastoral charity is "the virtue by which the Vincentian imitates Christ in his self-giving and service." It is not just what the Vincentian does, but his/her gift of self. Pastoral charity determines one's way of being, thinking, acting, and relating to people, especially to those who are poor and in need. Pastoral charity makes special demands on a Vincentian.
- Vincentians witness God's love by embracing all works of charity and justice.



## **SECTION I**

**A. THE FOUR MAJOR AREAS OF FORMATION**

**B. CORE VALUES AND VIRTUES FOR VINCENTIANS**

# **A. THE FOUR MAJOR AREAS OF FORMATION**

## **1. HUMAN FORMATION**

Human formation is the basis for all formation. Ordinarily human formation is thought of as one's "natural" side as contrasted with one's "spiritual" side. However, what makes a person distinctively human is the spiritual dimension. Within each person is a dynamic called a transcendence dynamic which calls us to "go beyond" and to realize the spiritual dimension. Realizing the "more than" or spiritual dimension is the work of grace.

Vincentians respond to the call to serve the poor in the Society with their human personalities and character development. The process of initial and ongoing graced formation assist Vincentians to become more of a bridge rather than an obstacle for others in their service.

Vincentians cultivate a series of human qualities needed to be people of balance responsibilities and willing to be formed to greater love, to truth telling, to loyalty, to respect, to integrity, to justice and compassion.

Vincentians are urged to avoid arrogance, quarrelsomeness and to be affable, hospitable, sincere in words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening themselves to clear and friendly relationships and encouraging the same in others, quick to understand, forgive and console. See 1 Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 1: 7-9

Vincentians are called to affective maturity that presupposes awareness that it is love that plays a central role in becoming spiritually mature. See Redemptoris Hominis #10

## **2. SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

The human person exists within a field of relationships. At the center of this field is the Divine. For the Christian, the Divine is spoken of as The Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Made in God's image, each of us is called to live in communal relationships with each other. Each person is related to their immediate, current life situation, to others, and to the wider world. Each person is affected by and affects all of these relationships. Thus each person both gives and receives from each of the poles of this field of relationships in an ongoing way.

As a person grows and develops, he/she becomes more or less receptive to the human and divine directives that emanate from each of their relationships. Events that are “formative” may assist the person to “open” up to the inner spiritual or transcendent dimension that may have been asleep. Gradually through the awareness of God’s grace the person may grow spiritually. Certain attitudes, such as the attitude of “awe,” nourish the person’s continued growth. Certain graces, such as Faith, Hope, and Love serve to build foundational dispositions in the person that assist in ongoing transformation.

A key understanding in spiritual formation is that both the reason and will are exercised on both a functional pre-transcendent (natural) level and a transcendent (supernatural) spiritual level. The end of spiritual formation would have the Divine experienced in a relationship of knowing and loving that is from a transcendent level. The transcendent level of relationship with the Divine moves the person from a control mode to a disposition of surrender. Spiritual living calls the human person to continued conversion from seeking one’s own will to surrender to God’s will.

Spiritual practice such as prayer and meditation, spiritual reading and study, and the spiritual disciplines nourish spiritual living. One’s religious belief and adherence to the teachings and practice of the Catholic Church assists the balanced practice of the spiritual disciplines. The Liturgy and the Eucharist is the summit and source of the spiritual life for the Vincentian. Service to others assists one to grow in generosity, selflessness, and ultimately experiencing the Divine in the other. Rather than attempting to control God, one finds and serves God in everyday events and activities. This latter is the true call of the Vincentian: to experience God in the ordinary activities of daily life.

### 3. INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

A Vincentian is first and foremost a believer. It is faith, hope, and love that bring about a personal relationship between the believer and Jesus in the Church. Spiritual formation includes both intellectual formation as **information** and **formation** of the human heart. We identify intellectual formation as the process of increasing one’s knowledge of the teachings of the faith tradition. As such, intellectual formation is based and built on the study of theology. True theology proceeds from the faith and aims at leading to the faith.

In addition, intellectual formation is also concerned with **how** the faith tradition is formed, reformed, and transformed in the person through grace. Here we distinguish the **faith tradition** from the **form tradition**. This distinction accounts for the diversity of expressions of the faith tradition. While there is one Catholic faith teaching, there are many forms of both receiving, practicing, and witnessing to one’s faith.

Therefore, the goal of intellectual formation is the conversion of both mind and heart through understanding and appreciating the words and deeds of Jesus.

Education is certainly a category of intellectual formation. We view skill development and informational input as educational. Vincentians learn “how-to,” best practices, best projects, for improving service to those in need.

#### **4. MINISTERIAL FORMATION**

Pastoral formation has to do with two essential realities for the Vincentian: **mission** as **service** and **relationship** that results in **communion**. The Vincentian mission is service of those who are needy. The service of the needy is founded upon and nurtured by one’s relationship with Jesus. Ministerial formation focuses the Vincentian on communion with the charity of Jesus. Indeed all formation for the Vincentian aims at nurturing one’s ever growing relationship with Jesus so that it is truly a communion. The Vincentian mission of service is ultimately fueled by the depth of his/her relationship with the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The relationships of communion within the Society of one Vincentian with another is a mutuality of seeing Jesus in the community of the members as well as those we serve.

Ministerial formation is more than concerned with service. The Vincentian grows in his/her appreciation of being a witness of the charity of Jesus “who went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). The Vincentian comes to see that he/she is a visible sign of the solicitude of the Church as mother, father, and teacher. The Vincentian continues to develop his/her ministry with a community spirit, in heartfelt cooperation with others. He/she recognizes and celebrates the different gifts and charisms of the members of Christ’s Body. This demands mutual trust, patience, gentleness, understanding and reliance.

Aware of the essential missionary nature of the Church, the Vincentian is open and available to all possibilities offered for service as an expression of the Church’s mission and the proclamation of the gospel.

The goal of ministerial formation, therefore, is to prepare oneself with a comprehensive pastoral outlook, ready to assume duties that one’s call from God to service requires. This may include formation for servant leadership.

## B. CORE VALUES AND VIRTUES FOR VINCENTIANS

### 1. HUMAN FORMATION

In service to those who are poor and in need, the Vincentian strives to acquire those values and virtues that will enhance his/her call to ministry. These qualities promote a **balanced person**, one of the outstanding characteristics of Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

The Vincentian cultivates a **respect for the life and dignity of every person**. Every person is sacred and this recognition is a matter of Catholic social teaching.

Vincentians work for **justice** in imitation of their founder, Frederic Ozanam.

The Vincentian strives to acquire the **spirit of loyalty, cordiality, and hospitality**—qualities referred to in depth in the Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

As Frederic Ozanam was passionate for truth and a man of his word, so his followers are **people of integrity**.

Finally, Vincentians strive to be **flexible, open, and non-judgmental**.

### 2. SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The special call from God to be a Vincentian is an invitation to respond to personal spiritual growth in a communal relationship with others to serve the poor in alignment with the spirit and example of St. Vincent de Paul, patron of the Society, and the founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Both the patron and founder provide spiritual direction for ongoing formation with the following convictions:

- Vincentians strive to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, desiring to live intimately with God.
- Vincentians seek to place Jesus, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor, as the center of their lives and ministry.
- Vincentians understand that prayer, the reading of God's Word, the Holy Eucharist, and ministry, are significant means for assisting them to maintain awareness of God's presence. Vincentians are women and men of prayer.
- Vincentians hold a high priority for the Eucharist, seeing the Eucharist as the summit and source of their lives
- Vincentians are continuously growing as people of compassion and love—the charity of Jesus Christ.

- Vincentians remember the teaching of Vincent: “There is no charity that is not accompanied by justice.”
- Vincentians strive to make their own the core values of the Society as enumerated in the Manual. They also strive to strengthen the distinguishing Vincentian virtues of simplicity and humility.
- Vincentians invoke the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, often in their lives. Specifically they pray for the intercession of the Spirit before and during home visits.

### **3. INTELLECTUAL FORMATION**

The Society was founded on the challenge to put faith into practice. This challenge means that faith must continuously be renewed through knowledge of the teachings of the Church. Frederic Ozanam, as founder of the Society, provides the Vincentian with an example of a life dominated by the sacred fire of faith and solid orthodoxy. The Church was one of his true loves. In concert with the founder, Vincentians:

- Desire to understand their faith and the teachings of the Church.
- Strive to appreciate the words and deeds of Jesus, their model and exemplar
- Understand that intellectual (mind and heart) formation is a dimension of spiritual formation and strengthens spiritual integration.
- Desire education and training, not for their own personal enhancement alone but to improve their skills in serving others in their ministry.

### **4. MINISTERIAL FORMATION**

In concert with the patron and founder of the Society, Vincentians have heard and responded to a call to communion with Jesus and to service of the poor. The content and process of pastoral formation stresses that Vincentians

- Understand that ministry or service is a means for holiness. They want to be witnesses of the charity and justice of Jesus in whatever they do.
- See all formation as preparing them for communion with Jesus, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.
- Want to be visible signs of the solicitude of the Church to the poor-the preferential option of the Church, of themselves, and of their patron and founder.
- Strive to be open and available to meet the needs of all. They are interested in the best practices and special projects of others, especially Vincentians.
- Be willing and open to practicing the principles of servant leadership in all levels of the Society.



## **SECTION II**

**OBJECTIVES AND ROLES  
OF  
LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE  
FOR  
VINCENTIAN SERVICE**

## **RECOMMENDED OBJECTIVES AND ROLES OF LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE FOR VINCENTIAN FORMATION**

In order to affect Vincentian Formation, it must be embraced as a ministry. In addition, to be most effective, certain roles of leadership corresponding with Council structures seem critical. These roles constitute a ministerial infrastructure that we believe is necessary to sustain a healthy Council practice of Vincentian Formation.

The following seven objectives highlight four key roles:

- The **Council President** and other Council leaders
- The **Formation leader** who becomes the lead agent in promoting and supporting this ministry in the Council
- The **Formation committee** who collaborates with the leader in planning and providing learning opportunities
- **Formators**

While it is agreed that the whole Council is responsible for formation ministry, these four leadership roles are critical lead agents. The following section describes these roles, introduces the objectives to be accomplished, and proposes indicators to help in assessing attainment of the objectives. Objectives and indicators are based upon successful practice. They are meant as guides for enhancing and expanding effective Vincentian formation, and they can be adapted to local needs and circumstances.

## **Objective One: The Role of the Council President and Council Leaders**

**The Council President and other Council leaders will demonstrate a clear commitment to the vision and practice of on-going growth in Christian faith and the Vincentian vocation.**

The Council President bears the responsibility for the Rule and Spirit of the Society in the Council and for ensuring an authentic presentation of the Rule and Spirit of the Society. He/she personally models the Rule and Spirit and is its principal advocate in the Council. He/she sees to it that Vincentians of all ages have opportunities to learn and grow throughout their lives. Experience bears out that the quality of formation in a community depends very largely on the presence and activity of the Council President.

Note: In Councils with paid staff, the President ensures that all staff members promote formation as a Council priority and ensures that formation opportunities are provided.

### **Key Indicators:**

- **Established Council policies and procedures that give priority to the vision and practice of Vincentian formation such as: Council budget funds, staffing, training, and resourcing for formation to the fullest extent possible; multiple forms of ongoing formation are available.**
- **Paid staff members promote and support the formation of Vincentians, and they encourage all Vincentians to participate in basic and ongoing education.**
- **The Council place formation at the center of its stated mission and goals, and it promotes the importance of formation at every opportunity.**
- **The Council gives formation a priority in the allotment of financial resources, in providing learning space, and in event scheduling.**
- **The Council helps to provide access to various available learning resources and opportunities for Vincentians such as a library. Councils connect Vincentians to the resources of the larger Society, such as neighboring Councils, appropriate programs provided by Catholic or secular colleges, night schools, etc.**

## **Objective Two: The Role of the Formation Leader**

**Each Council President will appoint a formation leader, authorized by the Council and personally involved in ongoing formation, to assume primary responsibility for implementing the ministry of Vincentian Formation.**

Each Council needs a prepared lead agent to take hands-on responsibility for effectively establishing the overall learning context and programming in the Council. This person may be a member, a paid staff or a volunteer Vincentian prepared for leadership in this ministry. While the position may be a full-time salaried, it could just as well be filled by a person who donates his or her time for a few hours a week. What is important is that the person have or acquire a formation vision and competency, be formed by the word of God, and be well versed in and comfortable with current documents. This leader will possess the time, energy, and commitment to direct the formation of the Council.

If the designated leader is a staff person, adjustments may be needed in job description so as not to shortchange the amount and quality of time and energy they can devote to Vincentian formation.

If the formation leader is not a paid staff member, he/she reports to the Council President, so as to assure a cohesive Council ministry.

### **Key Indicators**

- **The Council President appoints a formation leader: a spiritual advisor -- a paid staff person or qualified volunteer Vincentian. The Council makes every effort to provide the leader suitable formation in the Rule and Spirit of the Society, educational skills, and an understanding and ability to apply spiritual direction in both a formative and informative manner.**
- **The leader advocates for and gives direction to the primacy of formation in the Council with the guidance and support of the Council President and staff.**
- **The leader promotes the development of an effective Formation Committee. The leader acts as a bridge connecting the formation committee, the staff, other Council groups, agencies, and service organizations.**
- **The leader works with other Council ministries to promote cohesive, effective formation programming. The leader helps every ministry, program and activity realize its full formation potential.**

## **Objective Three: The Role of the Formation Committee**

**The Council will have a core committee of Vincentians committed to and responsible for implementing the Council vision and plan for formation.**

Providing effective, diverse formation opportunities is a demanding responsibility requiring the collaborative efforts of a well-trained, coordinated committee, a nucleus of mature Vincentians, committed to the Society. Clearly, no person acting alone can adequately meet the needs and fulfill the potential of formation ministry. Comprised of 3-10 members, the committees' role is consultation, planning, and program implementation for formation in the Council, working with the formation leader.

### **Key Indicators:**

- **The Council has a functioning Formation Committee that is formally recognized in the Council leadership structure and with clear operating procedures and lines of accountability.**
- **The Formation Committee, working with the President and staff, formulates a vision of formation for the Council. The committee works collaboratively with the formation leader to identify the principal spiritual and human needs of Vincentians, discern learning possibilities inherent in those needs and draws upon its knowledge of the Council, its history and culture, and studies relevant church documents and available research on Vincentian formation.**
- **The Committee identifies elements of Vincentian life that foster growth in faith, assesses their impact, and if necessary, offers recommendations to enhance their effectiveness.**
- **The Committee provides a diverse range of quality programming for Vincentian formation.**
- **The Committee receives both initial and ongoing formation to prepare it to accomplish its mission effectively. The formation leader sees that the committee receives both initial orientation and ongoing formation, so that they grow in personal spirituality, love for Christ, and knowledge of the principles and methods of effective formation.**

## **Objective Four: The Role of the Formator**

**Each Council will utilize trained formators to serve the diverse formation efforts of the Council.**

The formator as the person who actually engages the learners is responsible for either directly presenting some facet of Vincentian formation or as a guide or catalyst to learners as they seek to deepen their ministry and faith. All aspects of the formation of formators must be centered on Jesus Christ, and the effective communication of the Vincentian charism. They must be people of faith with an evangelizing spirit and a commitment to ongoing formation. Not only do they need to be people who know their subjects but also need to have the competence to animate a shared journey with others, the ability to relate authentic Catholic faith to real life circumstances, the ability to lead Vincentians in prayer, and the craft to integrate divergent tendencies into the full faith and life of the Society.

### **Key Indicators:**

- **Each Council has access to well prepared formators for Vincentian formation. The National Council provides assistance in the formation of formators and in helping Councils share qualified formators.**
- **Councils provide recognition for their formators and find assistance for their formation.**

## **Objective Five: The National Vision of Vincentian Formation**

**The National Council will have a clearly stated vision of ongoing formation.**

### **Key Indicators:**

- **The National President acts as a consistent advocate for the centrality of Vincentian formation and as chief formator of Vincentians. He/she puts into operation the necessary personnel, means, and equipment, and also the financial resources to promote and sustain a real passion for Vincentian formation.**
- **The National Council gives clear priority to the formation of Vincentians by highlighting and affirming the centrality of Vincentian formation in the ministry of the Society.**
- **The National Council has in place a plan for formation that has been formed in consultation with National leaders. This plan guides activities.**

- **The National Council works collaboratively to advocate for a comprehensive integrated ministry of formation at the Council and Conference level. Through coordinating their plans and objectives, offices avoid duplicating services and unhealthy competition.**

### **Objective Six: The National Plan and Strategy for Vincentian Formation**

**The National Council will have a clear strategy for developing Diocesan/District or local Council formation leaders, committees, and formators.**

A primary role of the National Council is to affirm the priority of Vincentian formation and to provide leadership, personnel, services, and resources to assist Councils in developing that ministry. It is crucial that Councils have reliable assistance from their National Council in forming Council leadership, committees, and formators.

#### **Key Indicators:**

- **The National Council builds community and connections among Council formation leaders, and it provides for their ongoing formation and support.**
- **The National Council supports Council formation committees in various ways.**
- **The National Council offers formation opportunities for formators.**

## **Objective Seven: National Support for Vincentian Formation**

**The National Council will allocate adequate personnel and resources for carrying out the mission of the Vincentian formation.**

### **Key Indicators:**

- **The National Council has a staff person whose primary responsibility is to provide training and resourcing of Council formation leaders, committees, and formators.**

All or a significant portion of at least one staff person's responsibilities includes advocacy, consultation, networking, communicating, resourcing, research, and training for effective Vincentian formation ministry in the nation. Working with a National commission, advisory committee, or resource network, this person directs and coordinates the various National formation initiatives.

- **The National Council has a Formation Commission.**

Members of this commission serve as a National advisory body in the ministry of Vincentian formation. As such they support and assist the National staff person and the Councils in various projects: the assessment of current needs; the development of a National formation plan; formation for leaders, committees and arrangements; and reviewing and recommending materials. This commission serves as a sounding board and think tank on issues and trends. Membership is drawn from clergy, religious, and from Council leadership, national staff, and others with expertise in this ministry.

- **The National Council maintains current formation resources and makes them available for Council review and use.**

Councils have direct access to formation resources through publishers, bookstores, libraries, conferences, and the internet. The National Council maintains a resource center where materials can be previewed, purchased, or borrowed. The resource center also helps formation leaders and formators learn to use media effectively. All Councils -no matter what their financial situation- have access to quality materials and effective programs.

## **RESOURCES USED TO DEVELOP THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDE:**

- **Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vatican II)**
- **Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity (U.S. Catholic Conference)**
- **The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Vatican II)**
- **Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us (U.S. Catholic Bishops)**
- **Principles of Adrian van Kaam's Science of Formation Spirituality**
- **The United States Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (2002)**

The National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of the United States graciously thanks the **Task Force for Goal I: Spiritual Growth (Strategic Plan 2000-2005)** for the authorship of this formation and education document.

The document was approved by the Board of Trustees at the National Meeting in Philadelphia, Pa., August 30, 2002.

# **PART VII**

## **FORMATION GUIDELINES**

# **SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**



## **VINCENTIAN FORMATION GUIDELINES**

**Revised: March 2020**

# Forward

**These Vincentian Formation Guidelines reflect our continued focus on the spiritual growth and practical knowledge of our Vincentians.**

**Vincentian Formation** is the initial and ongoing process of growing and developing in the tradition, charism and spirituality of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Formation touches the head and the heart of the members, assisting each one to find meaning and purpose, love, and a sense of relatedness. Vincentian Formation thus enables the fulfillment of the three essential elements of the Society: Spirituality, Service and Friendship. Its importance is regularly reflected in SVDP-USA's national strategic plan.

The Society's commitment to recruiting and retaining Vincentians requires us to evolve our orientation and ongoing formation and training to meet the current and emerging needs of Councils and Conferences. Expanding to new parishes, welcoming Vincentians with diverse ethnicities and languages, and engaging youth and young adults, are all exciting opportunities. The **National Formation Team** is accountable for developing new programs and materials to support these evolving needs.

## Roles

This document outlines several specific roles that assist in Vincentian Formation. Many Conferences and Councils may already have Vincentians performing some of these functions, but under different titles. By using standard titles and organization going forward, our One Society will be better able to deliver formation programs, and support formation teams.:

- **Formation Coordinators:** These individuals have the broadest role, ensuring that Vincentians in their geographic area have access to trained spiritual advisors, Ozanam Orientations, and a variety of formation materials and events that meet the needs and desires of the local Society.
- **Spiritual Advisors:** These individuals have special responsibility for the spiritual development of Vincentians in their group. In addition to assisting with formation events and distributing resources, Spiritual Advisors offer a prayerful, mission-focused presence.
- **Ozanam Orientation (OO) teams:** The Society's keystone formation workshop is supported by three roles:
  - **OO Leaders** facilitate the overall planning of Ozanam Orientations in their geographic area, with an eye to increasing quality, access, and attendance. They ensure the training and support of OO Formators and Presenters. They must also be OO Formators.
  - **OO Formators** plan, manage, and help to deliver Ozanam Orientations in their geographic area. They are experts at the logistical preparations, technology setup, and content. OO Formators know how to present every section of the Ozanam Orientation.

- **OO Presenters** know how to present one or more sections of the Ozanam Orientation. Unlike OO Formators, they do not (yet) have the capability to present every section or to coordinate all other aspects of the event.

## Organizational Structure

While the particular circumstances of each local area may dictate certain adjustments, the following chart summarizes the ideal configuration of formation roles at various organizational levels:

	Formation Coordinator	Spiritual Advisor	OO Leader	OO Formators	OO Presenters
Conference		✓			
Council (Arch)diocesan and/or District	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region	✓	✓	✓		

## Implementing the New Guidelines

**Strengthening Spiritual Advisor Formation and Training at all levels of the Society will be essential for the Formation Guidelines to be hardwired in the society.** All Regions will be evaluating their current formation support for Spiritual Advisors and taking advantage of updated training materials. The National Formation Team supports each Region as they assess their current delivery system for OO and Continuing Formation and Education. Many regions already have Formators dedicated to OO, and Regional and (Arch)Diocesan Council Formation Coordinators (titles vary regionally) supporting the significant ongoing formation needs of all Vincentians. Other regions focus their Formators almost solely on the OO program with fewer resources available for ongoing formation and education. **The ultimate aspiration is to strengthen BOTH orientation and ongoing formation and education.** Our Servant Leaders at all levels play a pivotal role in supporting the spiritual flourishing of all Vincentians by putting into practice the new Formation Guidelines.



## VINCENTIAN FORMATION GUIDELINES

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# I

## VINCENTIAN FORMATION COORDINATOR GUIDELINES



### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### REGION AND COUNCIL

##### **Formation of Members**

**“It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor and help them be aware of the benefits, resources and opportunities that are available for the poor.” (Rule: 3.12)**

# INTRODUCTION

## Vincentian Formation

Vincentian Formation is the initial and ongoing process of growing and developing in the tradition, charism and spirituality of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Initial and ongoing formation touches the head and the heart of the members, assisting each one to find meaning and purpose in life, love and a sense of relatedness. Vincentian Formation thus enables the fulfillment of the three essential elements of the Society: Spirituality, Service and Friendship.

## Strategic Plan (2018-2021)

Goal II of the Strategic Plan calls the National Council to,

**“Encourage and Support Vincentians on their Spiritual Journey”:**

- **Celebrate our essential element of Vincentian spirituality**
- **Enhance the formation, and grow the number, of spiritual advisors at all levels in the Society**
- **Increase opportunities for Vincentian spiritual formation**

To respond to this challenge the National Council offers Vincentian Spirituality and Formation Materials and programs, such as:

- **Serving in Hope**, a formation guide and video resource:
  - Module I: Our Vincentian Vocation**
  - Module II: Our Vincentian Spirituality**
  - Module III: Our Vincentian Heritage**
  - Module IV: Our Vincentian Mission**
  - Module V: Our Vincentian Rule**
  - Module VI: Our Vincentian Conference Life**
  - Module VII: Our Vincentian Home Visit**
- **Spiritual Advisor** formation and spirituality resources
- **National Ozanam Orientation Program**, the basic formation program for all Vincentians offered to every active and associate member of the Society.
- The following committees offer workshops and resources:
  - **Systemic Change**
  - **Voice of the Poor**
  - **Diversity/Multicultural Issues**
  - **Youth and Young Adults**

## THE REGIONAL FORMATION COORDINATOR

### A. Selection and Approval:

- Selected by the Regional Vice President, after consultation and approval of the National Formation Chair.
- Must be an Ozanam Orientation Formator
- Will have a minimum of three years as an active member and a willingness to grow in an understanding of the:
  - Charism of the Society and Vincentian spirituality.
  - History, life and spirit of the Founders.
  - Vincentian Formation programs in the Vincentian Pathway **(Attachment A)**
  - Process of adult formation and the experience of working in groups.
  - Importance of communication and presentation skills.
  - Use of computers and other technology.
- Will attend the Invitation For Renewal.

### B. Responsibilities:

- **Create a Regional Vincentian Formation Committee:**

The purpose of the Vincentian Formation Committee is to create and implement a Regional Formation Plan to promote the growth and development of the tradition, charism and spirituality of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the Region, Councils, Conferences and Special Works. The Committee consists of the Regional Formation Coordinator, Regional Spiritual Advisor, a Council/Conference Spiritual Advisor, the Regional Ozanam Orientation Leader and a Council Ozanam Orientation Leader. In addition to these members, other people with additional skill sets may become a part of the Committee.
- **Create a Regional Vincentian Formation Plan:**
  - Collaborate with the National Vice President for the Region and Formation Committee to create the Regional Vincentian Formation Plan, and assist Councils and Isolated Conferences to develop and implement their own Formation Plan.
  - Guide and teach the Vincentian Pathway. **(See Attachment A)**
  - Work with Councils to assure an active, trained Spiritual Advisor for every Conference and Council
  - Work with Councils to assure the Ozanam Orientation for all members.
  - Provide training for Council Ozanam Orientation Leaders.
  - Offer on-going formation in Systemic Change, Diversity/Multicultural Issues, Advocacy, Youth, Young Adults and other Formation programs.
  - Suggest Vincentian Formation resources **(See Attachment B)**
  - Conduct an annual evaluation of the Regional Formation Plan.
  - Complete report on next page and submit.



## THE REGIONAL FORMATION COORDINATOR REPORT

Goal II of the Strategic Plan challenges us to:

### **2-1.1 Make Vincentian Spirituality as unique and compelling as our Service to those in need**

Therefore:

Each year on Frederic Ozanam's birthday, April 23, the Regional Formation Coordinator will submit a report for the previous fiscal year (October-September) to the National Vice President of the Region, the National Formation Chairperson and the National Formation Director giving:

1. The list of the members of the Regional Formation Committee
2. A copy of the Regional Formation Plan

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE (ARCH)DIOCESAN AND DISTRICT COUNCIL FORMATION COORDINATOR</b></p>
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**A. Selection:**

- Appointed by the Council President
- Must be an Ozanam Orientation Formator
- Will have a minimum of three years as an active member and a willingness to grow in an understanding of the:
  - Charism of the Society and Vincentian spirituality.
  - History, life and spirit of the Founders.
  - Programs of Vincentian Formation in the Vincentian Pathway **(Attachment A)**.
  - Process of adult formation and the experience of working in groups.
  - Importance of communication and presentation skills.
  - Use of computers and other technology.
- Willing to attend the Invitation to Renewal, when possible.

**B. Responsibilities:**

- **Create a Council Vincentian Formation Committee:**

The purpose of the Vincentian Formation Committee is to create and implement a Council Formation Plan to promote the growth and development of the tradition, charism and spirituality of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the Council, Conferences and Special Works.

The Committee consists of the Council President, Council Formation Coordinator, Council Spiritual Advisor, a Conference Spiritual Advisor, and the Council Ozanam Orientation Leader. In addition to these members, other people with additional skill sets may become a part of the Committee.

- **Create a Council Vincentian Formation Plan:**

- Willing and able to travel to present the Ozanam Orientation.
- Assure the recruitment and training of Ozanam Orientation Formators and Presenters
- Assist in the organization of teams for Council Ozanam Orientations.
- Provide formation and training of Conference Spiritual Advisors in collaboration with Council Spiritual Advisor
- Offer on-going formation in Systemic Change, Diversity/Multicultural Issues, Advocacy, Youth, Young Adults and other Formation programs.
- Assure an active, trained Spiritual Advisor for every Conference
- Assure the Ozanam Orientation for all members.
- Guide and teach the Vincentian Pathway. **(Attachment A)**
- Suggest Vincentian Spirituality and Formation resources. **(Attachment B)**
- Conduct a yearly evaluation of the Council Formation Plan.
- Complete report on next page and submit.



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE (ARCH)DIOCESAN COUNCIL FORMATION COORDINATOR REPORT</b></p>
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Goal II of the Strategic Plan challenges us to:

**2-1.1 Make Vincentian Spirituality as unique and compelling as  
our Service to those in need**

Therefore:

Each year on the Feast day of Bl. Rosalie Rendu, February 7, the (Arch)Diocesan Council Formation Coordinator will combine the data from the Council and the District Councils and submit a report for the previous fiscal year (October-September) to the Regional Formation Coordinator giving:

1. The list of the members of the Council Formation Committee
  
2. A copy of the Council Formation Plan

## II

### SPIRITUAL ADVISOR GUIDELINES



### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### REGION COUNCIL CONFERENCE

**The Rule 3.13 states:**

**“Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of SPIRITUAL ADVISOR IS VERY IMPORTANT.”**

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Journey Together Towards Holiness**

“Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity. (Rule 2.2)

#### **To grow in holiness:**

The purpose of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to increase the holiness of its members, and so from its foundation the Society has affirmed the importance of the role of Spiritual Advisor as being essential to its life and mission. The Spiritual Advisor is responsible for the spiritual development of either a Region, Council or a Conference. This requires a solid knowledge of the Catholic faith and a full knowledge of and dedication to the mission and ministry of the Society, which is inclusive of evangelizing the poor and being evangelized by the poor.

Goal II of the Strategic Plan of the Council of the United States is dedicated to “Encourage and support Vincentians on their spiritual journey” with the objective to “Enhance the formation, and grow the number, of spiritual advisors at all levels in the Society.” The Region, Council or Conference leadership, therefore, has the obligation to cultivate an active and formed lay, ordained and/or religious for every Council, Conference and Special Work by selecting a Catholic person who is both willing and able to devote the necessary time and energy to the role of Spiritual Advisor. It is imperative that Spiritual Advisors be rooted in Vincentian Spirituality and so it is essential that they attend and participate in meetings. At the present time in the Church, the demands of the parish on the priest prevent most pastors from fulfilling the role of Spiritual Advisor for the Society. Often the best person is a devoted Vincentian who is steeped in Vincentian spirituality.

#### **Vocation of the Laity:**

Today, we stand in the grace of Vatican II which called forth the vocation of the laity. This is also rooted in the spirit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, where the Catholic layman Emmanuel Bailly assumed the role of Spiritual Advisor for the founding members of the Confraternity of Charity. Therefore, in this grace and heritage, we will find that in our Region, Council and Conferences often there is a member, rooted in Vincentian spirituality or someone who has the willingness to be formed, who is waiting for the invitation to be called forth to serve in the role of Spiritual Advisor. In some places an ordained deacon or a vowed religious may be available to serve as a Spiritual Advisor if they have been or are willing to be formed in the Vincentian charism. The Spiritual Advisor’s task is that of spiritual animator/facilitator. Spiritual Advisors play an important role in promoting the mission of the Society and in developing a sense of friendship among the members. In keeping with changing times and needs, they provide inspiration and challenge for the adoption of new works. Spiritual Advisors are full members but if ordained they do not vote.

## THE REGIONAL SPIRITUAL ADVISOR

### A. Selection:

- Selected by the National Vice President for the Region according to Rule III, Statute 15.
- The Regional Spiritual Advisor must have a willingness to grow in the understanding of the:
  - Commitment to the call and pursuit of Vincentian holiness.
  - Value of lay ministry in the fulfillment of the mission of the Church.
  - Importance of personal witness to living a spiritual life.
  - Charism, spirituality, mission and ministry of the Society.
  - Teachings of the Catholic Church including its Social Teachings.
  - History of the Society and the lives of the Founders.
  - Importance of direct service to the needy and being a member of a Conference.
- Will attend the Invitation for Renewal.

### B. Responsibilities:

- **Assist the National Vice President for the Region to:**
  - Assure that Vincentian spirituality and mission is included in the Regional meetings and events.
  - Participate in the Regional Formation Committee
  - Provide consultation, advice and assistance in situations where the mission, spirituality and/or Rule of the Society is being violated.
  - Be available on request to give Vincentian talks, retreats, etc. for Councils and isolated Conferences.
  - Be willing to attend and participate in Regional Meetings.
  - Maintain a list of the Council Spiritual Advisor's information and ensure entry into the database.
  - Submit the Regional Spiritual Advisor Report to the National Vice President for the Region and the National Formation Chairperson.



## THE REGIONAL SPIRITUAL ADVISOR REPORT

Goal II of the Strategic Plan challenges us to:

**2-2.1 Have a trained Spiritual Advisor active in 85% of Conferences and Councils by 2020.**

**Action A: Create an accurate list of Council Spiritual Advisors and enter into the national data base.**

**Action B: Create an accurate list of Conference Spiritual Advisors and enter into the national data base.**

**2-2.2 Develop and promote resources for Councils on-going training of Spiritual Advisors**

**Action B: Conduct the updated formation session for Spiritual Advisors to ensure their appropriate training**

Therefore:

Each year on Frederic Ozanam's birthday, April 23, the Regional Spiritual Advisor will submit a report for the previous fiscal year (October-September) from the Annual Report data, to the National Vice President of the Region, the National Formation Chairperson and the National Formation Director giving:

1. The name and contact information for all Council Spiritual Advisors are listed on the database: \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No
2. The total number of Council Spiritual Advisors: \_\_\_\_\_(\_\_\_\_\_%)
3. The total number of Conference Spiritual Advisors: \_\_\_\_\_(\_\_\_\_\_%)
4. The total number of Spiritual Advisor Training workshops (English) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_ and number of participants \_\_\_\_\_
5. The total number of Spiritual Advisor Training workshops (Spanish) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_ and number of participants \_\_\_\_\_

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE (ARCH)DIOCESAN AND DISTRICT COUNCIL SPIRITUAL ADVISOR</b></p>
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**A. Selection:**

- Selected by the Council President according to Rule III, Statute 15
- The (Arch) Diocesan/District Spiritual Advisor, priest, deacon or lay, must have a willingness to grow in the understanding of the:
  - Commitment to the call and pursuit of Vincentian holiness.
  - Value of lay ministry in the fulfillment of the mission of the Catholic Church.
  - Importance of personal witness to the growth of his/her own spiritual life.
  - Charism, spirituality, mission and ministry of the Society.
  - Teachings of the Catholic Church including its Social Teachings.
  - History of the Society and the lives of the Founders.
  - Importance of direct service to the needy and being an active member of a Conference.
- Willing to attend the Invitation for Renewal, when possible.

**B. Responsibilities**

- **Assist the Council President to:**
  - Communicate the value, works and needs of the Society to the local Diocesan administration and parish communities.
  - Attend Regional and National meetings as often as possible.
  - Assure that there are Vincentian spiritual formation components in Council events.
  - Arrange Vincentian spirituality and formation retreats, days of recollection and celebrations for the feasts of our Founding Saints and Blesseds.
  - Assure that the Vincentian Annual Commitment ceremony is conducted on Ozanam Sunday or at a liturgy annually.
  - Mentor the use of Commissioning ceremonies and other Rituals.
- **Provide for the formation of Conference Spiritual Advisors:**
  - Maintain a list of the Conference Spiritual Advisor's information and ensure entry into the database.
  - Train Conference Spiritual Advisors in:
    - Vincentian spirituality,
    - The use of Vincentian materials provided by the National Office,
    - How to facilitate faith sharing at conference meetings and conduct prayer services.
  - Meet twice a year, in person or conference call, with District Spiritual Advisors.
  - Suggest resource material for the membership to assist in their Vincentian spiritual development and servant leadership capacities. **(Attachment B)**
  - Mentor Conference Spiritual Advisors in the use of the Vincentian Pathway. **(Attachment A)**
  - Complete the Annual Council Spiritual Advisor Report (on the next page) and submit it to the Regional Spiritual Advisor.



**THE (ARCH)DIOCESAN AND DISTRICT COUNCIL  
SPIRITUAL ADVISOR REPORT**

Goal II of the Strategic Plan challenges us to:

**2-2.1 Have a trained Spiritual Advisor active in 85% of Conferences and Councils by 2020 and enter into the national data base.**

**Action B: Create an accurate list of Council and Conference Spiritual Advisors**

**2-2.2 Develop and promote resources for Councils on-going training of Spiritual Advisors**

**Action B: Conduct the updated formation session for Spiritual to ensure their appropriate training**

Therefore:

Each year on the feast of Bl. Rosalie Rendu, February 7, the Council Spiritual Advisor will submit a report for the previous fiscal year (October-September) from the Annual Report data, to the Regional Spiritual Advisor giving:

1. The name and contact information for the Council Spiritual Advisor
2. The total number of Conference Spiritual Advisors: \_\_\_\_\_(\_\_\_\_\_%)
3. The total number of Spiritual Advisor Training workshops (English) in the Council \_\_\_\_\_ and number of participants \_\_\_\_\_
4. The total number of Spiritual Advisor Training workshops (Spanish) in the Council \_\_\_\_\_ and number of participants \_\_\_\_\_

## THE CONFERENCE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR

### A. Selection:

- The Conference Spiritual Advisor, priest, deacon or lay, is determined in prayerful deliberation by the Conference members and is appointed by the Conference President.
- The Conference Spiritual Advisor attends Council formation events and has a willingness to grow in the understanding of the:
  - Commitment to the call and pursuit of Vincentian holiness.
  - Value of lay ministry in the fulfillment of the mission of the Church.
  - Importance of personal witness to the growth and deepening of his/her own spiritual life.
  - Charism, spirituality, mission and ministry of the Society.
  - Teachings of the Catholic Church including its Social Teachings.
  - History of the Society and the lives of the Founders.
  - Regular attendance at Conference meetings.
  - Personally participating in home visits and giving direct service to the poor.
- If the Pastor wishes to be the Spiritual Advisor but is not able to fulfill the responsibilities of the role, the Conference President will appoint an appropriate Vincentian as the Associate Spiritual Advisor.

### B. Responsibilities of a Conference Spiritual Advisor

- **Attend Conference meetings regularly and remain for the entire time**
  - Follow the Spiritual Advisor Handbook
  - Assist members to reach a deeper faith awareness of their:
    - Vincentian vocation and their call to holiness.
    - understanding of the charism and spirituality of the Society.
    - mission to serve those who are in need by person-to-person care.
    - comprehension of the Essential Elements of the Society—Spirituality, Friendship, Service.
  - Suggest resource material for the membership to assist in their Vincentian spiritual development and servant leadership capacities. **(Attachment B)**
- **Collaborate with the Conference President to:**
  - Offer programs for the spiritual development of the members.
  - Discern the readiness for active (full) membership of new members.
  - Ensure that all meetings are conducted in a spirit of Vincentian Friendship.
  - Maintaining a balance between Vincentian formation and prayer with the discernment on needs of the poor.
- **Mentor all Vincentians through the use of the Vincentian Pathway. (Attachment A)**

# III

## OZANAM ORIENTATION GUIDELINES



## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### REGION COUNCIL

**The National Ozanam Orientation Program, the basic formation program for all Vincentians is offered to every active, associate and new member of the Society. The Regional and Council Ozanam Orientation Leader trains and approves Formators and Presenters to conduct the Ozanam Orientation.**

# INTRODUCTION

## **Making the Ozanam Orientation available to all Vincentians**

The Ozanam Orientation program is organized by Regional and Council Ozanam Orientation Leaders who are responsible for preserving the authentic content and presentation of the Ozanam Orientation. Responsibilities for each role are described in the following guidelines.

The Ozanam Orientation is taught by Formators and Presenters, who have overlapping but distinct roles. To ensure an effective overall Orientation, at least one organizer must have significant understanding of all its content. This is the role of the Formator, who oversees the entire program and may also present one or multiple sections. The Formator is supported by Presenters, who have been trained to deliver one or more (but not all) sections of the orientation. In short:

A **Formator** is responsible for the complete oversight of the Ozanam Orientation, is able to present all sections and has a willingness to pursue on-going knowledge of Vincentian spirituality and formation.

A **Presenter** is a person who is able to present a section or several sections of the Ozanam Orientation.

The vision of the National Ozanam Orientation is captured in the Resolution approved in 2010, which states that “It is critically important that a consistent message be presented by Councils throughout the United States...” Therefore, Formators are not free to make significant changes to the Ozanam Orientation slides. A consistent nation-wide set of slides makes it possible for Formators from different Councils to jointly present Orientations in under-served areas. This will radically improve the availability of the Orientation. Consistency also makes it much easier to provide training for Formators and presenters.

Consistency also benefits Conference members. They can attend the nearest Orientation, whether or not it’s in their own home Council or Diocese. Using the approved Ozanam Orientation program means that the Participant’s Guide and other materials can be provided in both English and Spanish. Best practice indicates that the Ozanam Orientation should always be presented either in a day long time frame or in two half days. This is to insure the integrity of the Vincentian formation process. Under no circumstance should the time be condensed or reduced to less than the equivalent of a full-day session.

## THE REGIONAL OZANAM ORIENTATION LEADER

### A. Selection and Qualifications:

- Selected by the National Vice President for the Region, after consultation with the National Formation Chairperson.
- Must be an Ozanam Orientation Formator
- Will have a minimum of three years as an active member and a willingness to grow in an understanding of the:
  - Charism of the Society and Vincentian spirituality.
  - History, life and spirit of the Founders.
  - Vincentian Formation programs in the Vincentian Pathway.  
**(Attachment A)**
  - Process of adult formation and experience in working with groups.
  - Experience in communication and presentation skills.
  - Ability to work with technology
  - Ability to identify and develop candidates for Presenters and Formators
- Willing to attend the Invitation for Renewal, when possible.

### B. Responsibilities

Serve as a member of the Regional Formation Committee, ensuring compliance with the National OO resolutions **(Attachment C)**

- Assist Councils and Isolated Conferences to develop and implement their own plan for the Ozanam Orientation.
- Assist in finding Council OO Leaders
- Facilitate partnering across neighboring Councils
- Ensure an accurate list of Council OO Leaders
- Train, mentor and commission OO Leaders in their Region
- Be willing and able to travel to teach OO Leaders
- Ensure that Commissioning of the Council OO Leaders, Formators and Presenters takes place at an appropriate time.
- Suggest Vincentian Spirituality and Formation resources **(Attachment B)**
- Submit the annual Regional Ozanam Orientation Report to the National Vice President for the Region, the National Formation Director and the National Formation Chairperson.



## THE REGIONAL OZANAM ORIENTATION LEADER REPORT

### Goal II of the Strategic Plan challenges us to:

- **Strive for a 10% increase of Ozanam Orientations offered, including in Spanish, with trained formators by Councils by May 2020.**
- **Strive for a 20% increase of members attending the Ozanam Orientation by May 2020.**

Therefore:

A. Each year on Frederic Ozanam's birthday, April 23, the Ozanam Orientation Regional Leader will submit a report for the previous fiscal year (October-September) from the Annual Report data, to the National Vice President of the Region, the National Formation Chairperson and the National Formation Director giving:

1. The total number of Ozanam Orientations in English conducted in the Region: \_\_\_\_\_ and the total number of participants: \_\_\_\_\_
2. The total number of Ozanam Orientations in Spanish conducted in the Region: \_\_\_\_\_ and the total number of participants: \_\_\_\_\_
3. The total number of trained OO Formators (English) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_  
The total number of trained OO Formators (Spanish) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_
4. The total number of trained OO Presenters (English) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_  
The total number of trained OO Presenters (Spanish) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_
5. The total number of OO Formator Training workshops (English) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_  
The total number of OO Formator Training workshops (Spanish) in the Region \_\_\_\_\_

B. With the Report to the National Vice President of the Region, the Regional Ozanam Orientation Leader will include:

1. The Regional Ozanam Orientation Plan
2. The list of the Trained Formators and Presenters of each Council

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE (ARCH)DIOCESAN AND DISTRICT COUNCIL OZANAM ORIENTATION LEADER</b></p>
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**A. Selection and Qualifications:**

- Selected by the Regional OO Leader, after consultation with the Council President.
- Must be an Ozanam Orientation Formator
- Will have a minimum of three years as an active member and a willingness to grow in an understanding of the:
  - Charism of the Society and Vincentian spirituality.
  - History, life and spirit of the Founders.
  - Vincentian Formation programs in the Vincentian Pathway.  
**(Attachment A)**
  - Process of adult formation and experience in working with groups.
  - Experience in communication and presentation skills.
  - Ability to work with technology
  - Ability to identify and develop candidates for Presenters/Formators
- Willing to attend the Invitation for Renewal, when possible.

**b. Responsibilities:**

- Train and approve OO Formators for the Council
- Schedule, oversee and/or conduct Ozanam Orientations
- Responsible for the oversight of ordering and distribution of OO Formation materials
- Create an accurate list of Council Formators and Presenters and ensure entry into the National database
- Ensure that Vincentians who have attended the OO are entered into the National database
- Submit an annual report to the Regional OO leader with the number of OO's in English and Spanish and the number of Vincentians completing the OO



<b>THE (ARCH)DIOCESAN COUNCIL OZANAM ORIENTATION LEADER REPORT</b>
--

**Goal II of the Strategic Plan challenges us to:**

- **Strive for a 10% increase of Ozanam Orientations offered, including in Spanish, with trained formators by Councils by May 2020.**
- **Strive for a 20% increase of members attending the Ozanam Orientation by May 2020.**

Therefore:

A. Each year on the feast of Bl. Rosalie Rendu, February 7, the Council Ozanam Orientation Leader will submit a report for the previous fiscal year (October-September) from the Annual Report data, (Annual Report data) to the Regional Ozanam Orientation Leader, giving:

1. The total number of Ozanam Orientations in English conducted in the Council: \_\_\_\_\_ and the total number of participants: \_\_\_\_\_
2. The total number of Ozanam Orientations in Spanish conducted in the Council: \_\_\_\_\_ and the total number of participants: \_\_\_\_\_
3. The total number of trained OO Formators (English) in the Council: \_\_\_\_\_ and Formators (Spanish) in the Council: \_\_\_\_\_
4. The total number of trained OO Presenters (English) in the Council \_\_\_\_\_ and OO Presenters (Spanish) in the Council \_\_\_\_\_
5. The total number of OO Formator Training workshops (English) offered in the Council \_\_\_\_\_ and workshops (Spanish) \_\_\_\_\_

B. With the Report to the Regional Ozanam Orientation Leader, the Council Ozanam Orientation Leader will include:

1. The Council Ozanam Orientation Plan
2. The list of the Trained Formators and Presenters of each Council

## **(ARCH)DIOCESAN AND DISTRICT COUNCIL OZANAM ORIENTATION FORMATORS AND PRESENTERS**

### **Selection and Approval:**

- Formators are approved by the Council OO Leader.
- Presenters are trained by their Council Formators
- **Formators** should have the:
  - Capability to organize, schedule, and set up an Ozanam Orientation.
  - Ability to present all sections of the Ozanam Orientation.
  - An in-depth knowledge of the Society at the local, regional and national levels so that when a question is presented, they can answer the question accurately.
  - must have a willingness to pursue on-going knowledge of Vincentian spirituality and formation
  - Ability to develop skills of presenters and guide presenters to a better capacity for presentations if they need guidance.
- **Presenters** should have
  - The capability to present one or more sections of the Ozanam Orientation.
- **Formators and Presenters** must have a willingness to grow in an understanding of the:
  - Charism of the Society and Vincentian spirituality.
  - History, life and spirit of the Founders.
  - Program of Vincentian Formation.
  - Use of computers and other technology.

### **Responsibilities of a FORMATOR:**

- Schedule and conduct Ozanam Orientation in conjunction or in collaboration with the Council OO Leader
- Responsible for ordering and distribution of OO Formation materials
- Ensure that Vincentians who have attended the OO are entered into the database
- Some Formators have accepted responsibility for presenting other formation materials in addition to the Ozanam Orientation, such as training Spiritual Advisors, presenting Invitation to Serve, or conducting workshops on mentoring and the Home Visit, to name just a few.

### **Responsibilities of a PRESENTER:**

- **Prepare and Present one or more sections of the OO**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OZANAM ORIENTATION FORMATOR TRAINING PROCEDURES</b></p>
---

**Candidate Requirements:**

- A Vincentian with normally 3 years of experience and approval of Council/Region
- Attended an Ozanam Orientation (OO)
- Effective presentation skills
- Willingness to grow in knowledge and spirituality of the Society
- Experience in home visitation
- Proficient with computers and technology

**Goal:**

- To prepare Ozanam Orientation Formators to competently present all sections of the Ozanam Orientation

**Objectives:** Upon completing the training, the participant will have:

- An understanding of the distinction between formation and training, and how that applies to the Ozanam Orientation.
- Basic knowledge of and commitment to Vincentian spirituality
- Knowledge of the resources needed to present all sections of the Ozanam Orientation
- A commitment to present the Ozanam Orientation authentically, according to the National Resolution (**Attachment C**)

**Materials Provided on Flash Drive:**

- Ozanam Orientation slides and videos
- Participant's Guide in PDF form
- Optional handouts for participants
- Ozanam Orientation Formator's Guide.
- Formator tools and documents: a collection of useful tools for formators. Includes optional exercises and videos.

**Procedures for Training:**

- The Regional Ozanam Orientation Leader and/or Assistant Leader will present the Formator Training. (this can be done in person or via the web)
- Formator training must include substantial practice on the part of the participants, who will give sections of the Ozanam Orientation for each other.
- The Ozanam Orientation Leader may design the training to meet the situation and the needs of the participant.

**Evaluation:**

- The trainer, or Ozanam Orientation Leader specifically designated by the trainer, must observe the new Ozanam Orientation Formator who is being trained presenting multiple sections in order to assess if the Objectives have been met. A live Ozanam Orientation program is preferred but not required.
  - The person in training is not considered to be a Formator until he/she has met the Objectives as assessed by the OO Leader.
  - A Commissioning ceremony and pin is highly recommended for both Formators and Presenters.

**Developing an Ozanam Orientation Team:**

- The Ozanam Orientation Formator may train OO Presenters for selected sections of the Ozanam Orientation. Presenters can give sections as a member of a team under the supervision of a trained Ozanam Orientation Formator.

# IV

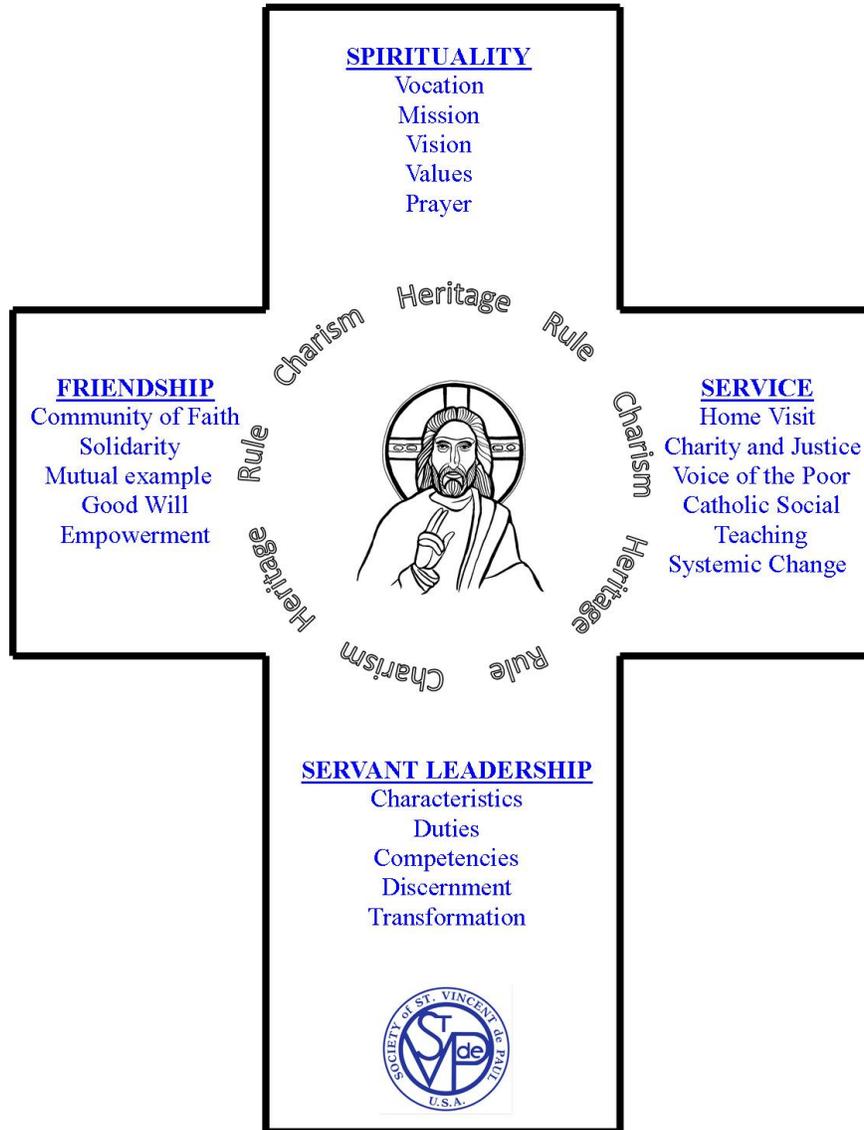
## ATTACHMENTS



**Attachment A**

# THE VINCENTIAN PATHWAY

**A Process for Ongoing Formation as a Vincentian...**



**...Growing in Vincentian Leadership**

## The Vincentian Pathway

**Our Rule: Part 1, 3.12 states:**

**“It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, and to improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor...”**

Therefore, the **Vincentian Pathway** is being offered as an opportunity for every Vincentian to engage in an on-going process of formation. This formation process is based on the Essential Elements of the Society (Spirituality-Friendship-Service) and Servant Leadership. As you walk your journey as a Vincentian you will encounter many delights and many challenges. Along the way you will grow and change. The **Vincentian Pathway** will help you to discover, develop, deepen and discern your Vincentian heart by forming your mind and attitude into a Vincentian way of serving.

To assist you in this formation process the four components of the **Vincentian Pathway** are inter-related and as you are challenged and grow through one component you will find challenge and growth through the others. This process will develop your Vincentian vocation and prepare you for the many and different Leadership Roles that God may call you to assume throughout your Vincentian life. The four components are:

- **Spirituality:** will root you in a clear understanding of the Vincentian Spirituality which underlies your Vincentian vocation: mission, vision, values and prayer.
- **Friendship:** will provide you with the ways to gather the support, advice and encouragement you need for your Vincentian journey: community of faith, solidarity, mutual example, good will and empowerment.
- **Service:** will guide you to see exciting new ways to serve with a Vincentian heart, so that you will be able to strengthen your current service: home visits, charity and justice, voice of the poor, catholic social teachings, systemic change.
- **Servant Leadership:** will lead you to become a true Vincentian Servant Leader in the spirit of Jesus and our Founders: characteristics, duties, competencies, discernment, transformation.

Since 2000, through the Strategic Plan—Goal 1, Vincentian Spiritual Formation materials and programs have been developed and the **Vincentian Pathway** began transforming volunteers into Vincentians. On the Pathway, the Holy Spirit leads your Vincentian heart in the twist and turns of **Discovering, Developing, Deepening** and **Discerning** in your Vincentian vocation.

## **Attachment B**

### **VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY RESOURCES**

*For Spiritual Advisors and Formators*

#### **I. SVdP NATIONAL COUNCIL RESOURCES**

The order form and catalog for the following resources are found on [www.svdpusa.org](http://www.svdpusa.org)

Serving in Hope:

- Module I: Our Vincentian Vocation
- Module II: Our Vincentian Spirituality
- Module III: Our Vincentian Heritage
- Module IV: Our Vincentian Mission
- Module V: Our Vincentian Rule
- Module VI: Our Vincentian Conference
- Module VII: Our Vincentian Home Visit

Apostle in a Top Hat, by *James Patrick Derum*

Turn Everything to Love by *Robert P. Maloney, CM*

Faces of Holiness by *Robert P. Maloney, CM*

Vincentian Meditations, by *Thomas McKenna, CM.*

Apostolic Reflection with Rosalie Rendu, by *Joan Gibson, DC and Kieran Kneaves, DC*

Spirituality of the Home Visit

T's a Gift, by *Robert P. Maloney, CM*

A New Century Dawns, by *Robert P. Maloney, CM*

Mystic of Charity, by *Robert P. Maloney, CM*

The Frederic Ozanam Story

Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change

#### **II. SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH RESOURCES**

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church; by the *Pontifical Council of the Social Doctrine of the Church* Order on Amazon.com

The website for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: [www.USCCB.com](http://www.USCCB.com)

Busy Christian's Guide to Catholic Social Teaching: [www.uscatholic.org](http://www.uscatholic.org)

**III. AMAZON:** The following can be ordered on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) :

**St. Vincent de Paul:**

Vincent de Paul, The Trailblazer, by *Bernard Pujo*

Praying with Vincent de Paul, by *Tom McKenna, CM*

The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor,  
by *Robert P. Maloney, CM*.

Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, by *Robert P. Maloney, CM*.

Vincent de Paul and Charity, by *Andre Dodin, CM*.

**St. Louise de Marillac:**

Praying with Louise de Marillac, by *Audrey Gibson, DC and Kieran Kneaves, DC*.

Louise de Marillac: Social Aspect of Her Work, by *Margaret Flinton, DC*.

Louise de Marillac: A Light in Darkness, by *Kathryn LaFleur, SP*.

**Blessed Rosalie Rendu:**

Sr. Rosalie Rendu: A Daughter of Charity on Fire with the Love of the Poor by  
*Louise Sullivan, DC*

**Blessed Frederic Ozanam:**

Antoine Frederic Ozanam by *Raymond Sickinger*

Ozanam, by *Madeline des Rivières*

Frederic Ozanam, by *Mary Ann Garvey Hess*

Praying with Frederic Ozanam by *Ronald Ramson, CM*

**Vincentian Spirituality:**

Classics of Western Spirituality Series: Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac

Deep Down Things, by *Richard McCullen, CM*.

He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul, by *Robert Maloney, CM*.

## Attachment C

### NATIONAL OZANAM ORIENTATION RESOLUTION-2010

*Whereas*, membership in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is both a **vocation and a ministry** to those in need, with our primary goal being growth in holiness, consequently we should be striving constantly to help each other and encourage each other in that growth. And,

*Whereas*, in order to help all Vincentians to understand and live the mission and spirituality of the Society, the National Council accepted the **National Ozanam Orientation Program** in 2006. And, since the purpose of the Ozanam Orientation Program is twofold:

1. To introduce new members to “who we are and what we are all about.”
2. To reacquaint existing members with our “spirituality and heritage.”

The target audience for the Ozanam Orientation Program includes existing members, new members, prospective members and interested parties. And,

*Whereas*, it is **critically important that a consistent message be presented by Councils throughout the United States** while allowing for flexibility of presentation styles, therefore be it **Resolved that: All elements of the National Ozanam Orientation Program be presented.**

- The Orientation be led by **trained Formators.**
- The Rule, Manual and Ozanam Orientation Participant’s Guide be provided for each member attending.
- **All information contained in the slide presentations provided by National must be conveyed during the Ozanam Orientation.** An individual Council may be creative in how they accomplish this provided they are in accordance with other parts of this resolution.
- Vincentians grow in holiness together, and in the spirit of friendship of our Founders, the Ozanam Orientation must always be presented to a community of members by a trained Formator(s), **not as an isolated event using AV or Internet alone.**

**In order to insure the consistency of content**, the National Formation Chair, National Formation Director and the Regional Formation Coordinator in consultation with the Regional Vice President, must be consulted for **authorization and certification of any changes to the content of the National Ozanam Orientation program. (Approved: April 23, 2010)**

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Therefore, an Ozanam Orientation Formator must:

- **study, prepare and organize their presentation.**
- **fulfill the regulations of the Ozanam Orientation Resolution.**
- **possess good communication and presentation skills**
- **be willing to work with a team.**
- **be open to evaluation.**

# **Resolution-2011**

**Society St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.**

**Board of Directors Meeting**

**June 16, 2011**

**A Resolution to establish the Ozanam Orientation as required for new active members, all Officers, Spiritual Advisors in the Society.**

*Whereas* the Ozanam Orientation has been approved by the National Council as the program through which members are introduced to the Society, and

*Whereas* experience has proven the value of the Ozanam Orientation in preparing new and existing members of the Society to better understand the mission, spirituality, organization, history, Rule, accountability, strategic plan and home visitation aspects of the Society, and

*Whereas* the Society has now developed the capacity to present the Ozanam Orientation in all Regions and through the Regions to Councils and Isolated Conferences;

*Therefore be it Resolved* that the National Board of Directors recommends that the National Council require that:

- All new active members must attend Ozanam Orientation within one year.
- All existing members of the Society should be required by their Councils to attend an Ozanam Orientation in order to reacquaint themselves with the “spirituality and heritage” of the Society and prepare themselves to enter the “Vincentian Pathway” process .
- The Ozanam Orientation should be taken before taking office, for all Council and Conference officers and Spiritual Advisors, but must be taken within one year after taking office. All Executive Directors are required to take the Ozanam Orientation within one year of being hired.
- The effective date for this resolution is January 1, 2012.

The category of this Resolution is **Formation and Training**

Resolution number: **6/16/2010-11 93**

**Board of Directors Approved June 17, 2011**

**National Council Approved September 2, 2011**

# **PART VIII**

## **SERVING IN HOPE – MODULE VII**

# INTRODUCTION

## MODULE VII: OUR VINCENTIAN HOME VISIT



### A NEW DIMENSION AND DIRECTION TO THE SERVING IN HOPE SERIES

- Module VII: Our Vincentian Home Visit introduces the opportunity for frequent stops to: **“Pause to Reflect and Share,”** providing the important time for moments of silent personal reflection, to sharing in small groups as well as discussion together in the Conference. This allows for a focus on dialogue and reflection and so **each Conference will likely move at a different pace as each Session will take many meetings to complete.**
- The facilitator is challenged to “hold the space” as the members of the Conference become more and more comfortable with these various forms of reflection and sharing. **Periods of silence** are actually expected. There will also likely be times of **spirited dialogue** as we embrace the diversity of relationships with the neighbor that challenge our status quo approaches.
- The facilitator for the meeting will be focused on creating an environment for learning and sharing among Conference members as a priority, **taking as many meetings as necessary to proceed through the sessions.** This variation is encouraged and based on the inclusion of a broad range of home visit strategies emerging in our focus on systemic change, and our need to have sufficient time for sharing and reflection. This Module can be used during Conference meetings or for a Retreat Day.
- As the session titles reflect this Module is about the cultivation of a **Vincentian Heart** in the context of our encounter with the neighbor, each other, and the communities we serve.

*HOW TO LEAD THE*

**“SERVING IN HOPE” –MODULE VII: OUR VINCENTIAN HOME VISIT**

**VIDEO/ FORMATION GUIDE SERIES**

*IN A CONFERENCE*

**INTRODUCTION:**

**The facilitator describes to the group the process which is going to take place:**

- Provide a copy of the Formation Guide to each member of your Conference for their personal reflection and notes.
- Stress that sharing is not compulsory but encouraged, and mention the need for confidentiality.
- Ask, or assign, different members to read the different sections
- **For Module 7 share that the society is evolving and adopting systemic change strategies that require learning and change. Discussion among the members and sharing of perspectives is really important for each conference community to discern how they choose to respond.**

**OPENING PRAYER/QUIETING DOWN PERIOD**

**Facilitator invites group to:**

- Become relaxed and aware of God’s presence with us
- Review the Learning Objectives for the session
- **View the video**

**INTRODUCTION**

- Read the Opening Prayer together
- Each section is read aloud, slowly and prayerfully, by the different members
- Hearing different voices will allow different emphasis on words/phrases

**PERIODS FOR “ PAUSE TO REFLECT AND SHARE”**

- **Module 7 is intended to include the practice of silent reflection and sharing throughout. Please follow the simple instructions carefully to ensure this session provides the contemplative and relational experience that helps us deepen our journey together to holiness.**
- **Periods of silence are expected and while sometimes uncomfortable, they are an important part of the practice.**
- **Facilitator and participants will be reading the specific instructions for the blend of individual quiet reflection and sharing in small groups and in the conference as part of the session.**

- **The facilitator will be responsible for encouraging the discipline of reflection and sharing that is central to the formation and learning offered .**
- **The facilitator introduces the suggested Discussion Question(s)**

## **SHARING**

The facilitator invites members who wish to share on the Discussion Question, or on how one of the readings struck them, or on what the material inspires around ongoing change in the Vincentian vocation and ministry. Possibly not everyone will share, but time should be allowed for each person who wishes to share his/her thoughts.

**To encourage sharing, the facilitator can conduct group sharing sessions where a person shares or verbally “passes” to the next person. Another strategy is use of a “talking piece” that is passed from member to member during specific group sharing sessions. Another suggestion would be to have the group in a circle facing a center. This strategy can encourage a sharing directed to the center of the group and helps folks not feel on the spot and freer to share.**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

At the end of the session the Leader closes with the Closing Prayer.

# **PART IX**

## **SPIRITUAL ADVISOR COMMISSIONING**

# COMMISSIONING CEREMONY

## Installation of a Spiritual Advisor



**Opening Song:** *(Begin with an appropriate song)*

**President:** Come Holy Spirit, live within our lives.

**All:** And strengthen us by Your love.

**President:** As we gather together to commission \_\_\_\_\_ *(Name)* \_\_\_\_\_ as the Spiritual Advisor for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, let us pray the words of the Rule(2.2) which calls us to journey together towards holiness:

*(Alternate sides)*

**Right Side:** Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness.

**Left Side:** Vincentians aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity.

**Right Side:** Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their ideal is to help relieve suffering for love alone, without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves.

**Left Side:** Vincentians draw nearer to Christ, by serving Him in the poor and one another. They grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and one another.

**President:** *(Hands the Manual and Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to the new Spiritual Advisor)*

Receive this Manual and Rule of the Society as the sign of your leadership and responsibility. May the Holy Spirit grant you a receptive mind and a loving heart so that you will to come to know the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Since the beginning of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Spiritual Advisor has been appointed to help foster the spiritual life of the members under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in conformity with the Rule of the Society.

And so I now ask you:

Do you \_\_\_\_\_ *(Name)* \_\_\_\_\_, promise to carry out your duties with diligence and creativity, promoting the work of the Society by giving inspiration and challenge for the adoption of works in keeping with changing times and needs?

**Spiritual Advisor:** I do, and I pray for the strength and wisdom to faithfully serve the members and those they visit.

**President:** Do you promise to be a spiritual animator, developing the Vincentian spiritual life of the members so that they may better understand the meaning of charity and its practical application toward those in need?

**Spiritual Advisor:** I do, and I pray that we will be of one mind and one heart, so that we all will be a sign of the presence and love of Christ in our community.

**President:** Do you promise to help all members reach a deeper faith awareness of their participation in the mystery of the Church and their vocation as Christians and Vincentians to serve and minister to others as well as to each other?

**Spiritual Advisor:** I do, and I pray that we will be filled with the grace to identify with the poor and needy, and to foster friendship with each other and those we serve.

**President:** Do you promise to adhere loyally to the spirit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, attend meetings, provide scriptural and Vincentian readings and prayers, participate in the discussions, and provide guidance on spiritual matters?

**Spiritual Advisor:** I do, and I pray that I will be generous with my time, my possessions and myself in this mission of charity.

**Leader:** \_\_\_\_\_ (*Name*), you have generously accepted an important responsibility as a Spiritual Advisor of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. I now ask all of us here present to share in that responsibility by our prayers and support. For this let us seek the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patroness of our Society, as we say together:

**All:** Hail Mary...

**Leader:** Prayer of Blessing and Commissioning

Let us now raise our hands in blessing as we pray together:

In the spirit of Jesus, as a servant leader, and in the name of our Patron, St. Vincent de Paul and our Founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, we commission you \_\_\_\_\_ (*Name*) as the Spiritual Advisor of the \_\_\_\_\_ (*Name*).

We ask for the grace that with your wisdom and leadership, we may together:

- grow in holiness,
- deepen our spirit of friendship with each other, and
- serve the poor in charity and justice, love and compassion.

Amen

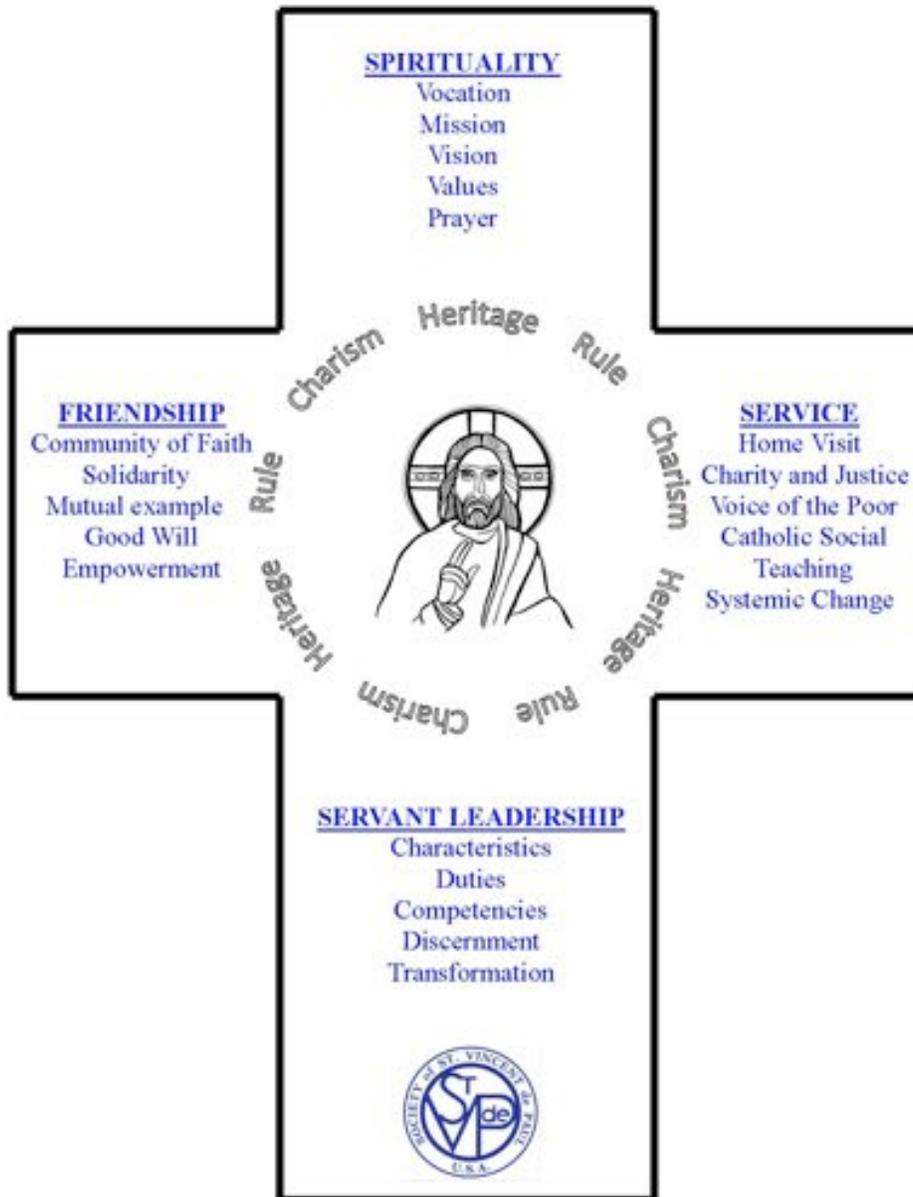
**Closing Song:** (*End with an appropriate song*)

# **PART X**

## **VINCENTIAN PATHWAY**

# THE VINCENTIAN PATHWAY

A Process for Ongoing Formation as a Vincentian...



...Growing in Vincentian Leadership

# The Vincentian Pathway

## “A Life-Long Journey”

**“It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, and to improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor...” (Rule: Part 1, 3.12)**

The **Vincentian Pathway** is being offered as an opportunity for every Vincentian to engage in a life-long and on-going process of formation. This formation process is based on the Essential Elements of the Society (Spirituality-Friendship-Service) and Servant Leadership. As you walk your journey as a Vincentian you will encounter many delights and many challenges. Along the way you will grow and change. The **Vincentian Pathway** will help you to discover, develop, deepen and discern your Vincentian heart by forming your mind and attitude into a Vincentian way of serving.

To assist you in this formation process the four components of the **Vincentian Pathway** are inter-related and as you are challenged and grow through one component you will find challenge and growth through the others. This process will develop your Vincentian vocation and prepare you for the many and different Servant Leadership Roles that God may call you to assume throughout your Vincentian life. The four components are:

- **Spirituality:** will root you in a clear understanding of the Vincentian Spirituality which underlies your Vincentian vocation: mission, vision, values and prayer.
- **Friendship:** will provide you with the ways to gather the support, advice and encouragement you need for your Vincentian journey: community of faith, solidarity, mutual example, good will and empowerment.
- **Service:** will guide you to see exciting new ways to serve with a Vincentian heart, so that you will be able to strengthen your current service: home visits, charity and justice, voice of the poor, catholic social teachings, systemic change.
- **Servant Leadership:** will lead you to become a true Vincentian Servant Leader in the spirit of Jesus and our Founders: characteristics, duties, competencies, discernment, transformation.

Since 2000, through the Strategic Plan—Goal 1, Vincentian Spiritual Formation materials and programs have been developed and the **Vincentian Pathway** began transforming volunteers into Vincentians. On the Pathway, the Holy Spirit leads your Vincentian heart in the twist and turns of **Discovering, Developing, Deepening** and **Discerning** in your Vincentian vocation.

# **PART XI**

## **APOSTOLIC REFLECTION**

Fall 1995

# Apostolic Reflection

Hugh O'Donnell C.M.

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## Recommended Citation

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## Apostolic Reflection

BY

HUGH O'DONNELL, C.M.\*

The Inter-Assembly document of the Daughters of Charity, *At Jacob's Well*, states: "We will move forward . . . We will commit ourselves to the way of discernment through apostolic reflection." These words declare apostolic reflection will be your way of life, your way of journeying forward.<sup>1</sup>

Two insights emerged in working with the Ongoing Formation Team which give direction and substance to the following article. The first appeared in the presentation on Vincentian Discernment, namely, that *unrestricted readiness* is at the heart of discernment and belongs, not to the order of technique or spiritual means but is our way of life. At the center of our lives is *unrestricted readiness* rooted in the goodness of God which opens us dynamically toward the Kingdom of God and our brothers and sisters.

The second insight concerns apostolic reflection as a concrete instance of discernment. Apostolic reflection is not a religious exercise or a new technique that is now in fashion. Rather, apostolic reflection is emerging in our time as the very center of community life in such a way that it is the way forward. *Sharing our lives is the way forward*. This insight is at the heart of these reflections.

What is the foundation of apostolic reflection for Vincent? It is the absolute conviction "God is here!" I have been mentored on the road to this understanding by a confrere, Father André Dodin, and a Trinitarian priest, Father Dennis Dwyer. They led me to understand the profound influence of Benet of Canfield, the English Capuchin, on

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\*This is a companion article to "Vincentian Discernment," which appeared in *Vincentian Heritage* 15, no. 1 (1994):7-23.

<sup>1</sup>The Congregation of the Mission also affirms apostolic sharing as a key way of renewing and animating its own missionary life, though the vocabulary is different. Paragraph 46 of the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission* reads, "In community prayer we find an excellent way of animating and renewing our lives, especially when we celebrate the word of God and share it, or when in fraternal dialogue we share with one another the fruit of our spiritual and apostolic experience."

Vincent and the more distant but real influence of Jan Ruusbroec, the Flemish mystic. The very important lesson Vincent learned from them is "God is here" -- within me, in front of me, behind me, in this person, this sister, this child, these circumstances, these events. Much careful study remains to be done. I will present what I know and trust you to receive it to the degree it resonates with the love in your hearts and your lived experience of Vincent and Louise.

I heard of Benet of Canfield for the first time four years ago. I learned from Father Dodin that in 1609, when Vincent arrived in Paris for the first time, Father Duval gave him a copy of Canfield's principal work, *The Rule of Perfection*. Canfield is considered by historians of the spiritual life as the Master of the Masters of seventeenth-century spirituality. In particular, he was a teacher of Cardinal de Bérulle and many of those interested in the spiritual renewal of France. When Vincent came to Paris in 1609, he had not yet let go of his ambitions. When Canfield's book came into his hands, he was just beginning to turn to a totally new future in the kingdom. Fifty years later, in 1658, when he wrote the *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, he took the paragraph on discerning God's will and obedience to it body and bones from Canfield. But, Canfield's influence on Vincent penetrated his spirit far beyond this text. When I had an opportunity to read *The Rule of Perfection*, I experienced knowing Vincent in a wholly new way. Comparable to reading Francis de Sales's *An Introduction to the Devout Life* and *On the Love of God*, I realized I was reading Benet of Canfield just as Vincent himself had.

Canfield maintained that the whole of the spiritual journey could be boiled down to one thing: the will of God. God's will mediates everything else. Canfield's influence on Vincent is found, for example, in Vincent's words, "Do not tread on the heels of Providence." He took these words from Canfield and they characterize Vincent's whole spiritual journey.

Canfield divides *The Rule of Perfection* according to the three ways God's will comes to us, namely, the external will of God, the internal will of God and the supereminent will of God. The external will of God which is well known to us, refers to what we are permitted or forbidden to do. These commands and prohibitions flow from the moral law, civil society, the Church or one's situation in life. The external will of God--that is easy enough. Sometimes we stop there.

But Canfield says there is also an internal will. It resembles Jesuit discernment, which pays attention to the inner motions of the spirit,

our feelings, our emotions, our interior experience. It refers to the interior guidance of the Holy Spirit. The will of God is manifested to us in the ways we are attracted and repelled interiorly. We are invited by Saint Ignatius to listen to our interior, our feelings, our emotions, our likes and dislikes, our consolations and desolations. There is an increasing interiority and intimacy between the human heart and the Spirit.

The third and most interior level is the supereminent will of God. The expression sounds very technical, but it can be translated this way. It is the knowledge of the will of God that comes about through friendship, through communion, through having one heart with God. It is the knowledge of God arising intuitively from the love of God. The gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit operate in the same way: spontaneously. We become 'in tune' and then we become intuitive in regard to God's will. When a couple has been married for fifty years, each one knows what is in the other's mind and heart. When we have had friends for a long time, we know in the same way, and beyond that we know we know. That's what the expression "the supereminent will of God" means. It is the knowledge of God's will which comes about through love, communion, friendship, being of one mind and heart with God. That is what Saint Paul speaks of in First Corinthians, when he speaks of having the mind and heart of Christ. It is this increasingly interior experience of God's will that leads us to the heart of Vincent's life.

There is one more influence worth noting. Who influenced Benet of Canfield? Canfield probably was very much influenced by the Flemish mystic Jan Ruusbroec, who is considered by some as the greatest of all the mystics. At the same time, he is *the least other-worldly* of all the mystics. This is Evelyn Underhill's considered opinion. If we translate *least other-worldly* into positive terms, you will see what I am leading to: Ruusbroec regards the mystic as the one who knows in his gut, in her heart, in his bones, in her being that *God is here*. That is his great contribution. He sees that we are not outside of God. We exist *within the common life* of God. When God speaks the Eternal Word, at the very same moment (if you can talk that way) God speaks us. As the Spirit brings everything back to God eternally, the Spirit is always bringing us back to God. For Ruusbroec, we are drawn into the breathing of God: the speaking of the Word and the return of the Spirit. We are inside the divine breathing out and breathing in. God is here. God is *here*. We are *in* God. We are *in* God.

I think this is the deepest sense of Vincent's and Louise's life. If we try to get to their heart and soul, what would we say? We would say that in their hearts and in their bones, they know "God is here!"

I began to reach the conclusion that Vincent's separation from Cardinal de Bérulle was not something he chose to do, rather it was something he had to do. He received a lot from Bérulle, who was an important guide and companion for a long time. It was Bérulle who got him to Clichy and to Châtillon. Vincent, though he could have joined the Oratory, did not; he was being led in another direction. I believe there was a deep reason why Vincent found himself on another path than Bérulle's. For Bérulle, God was elsewhere. He regarded life in terms of taking what was happening in front of him and bringing it to the Divine Liturgy before the throne of God. Vincent's experience led him in the opposite direction. For Vincent, God is here and the Divine Liturgy is in front of us. God is here! That is why we can say "the poor are our Masters." God is here! God is here in poor people, in our experiences, in events and in the persons who are in our presence and in whose presence we are. Saint Ignatius is very strong on the secularity of God's presence, but Vincent recognizes God's presence in a particular form--the presence of God in poor people.

Let us think of *repetition of prayer*, which is a creation of Vincent and Louise, from this perspective. Spontaneously and from his heart, Vincent says: Sister, what do you think? Please share your prayer with us, for 'God is here,' God is in your life, in your heart, in your thoughts, in your reflections, in your prayer, in your experiences. Share God with us.

The heart and soul of apostolic reflection, then, is to be found in the radical conviction that *God is here*. When you come together in apostolic reflection, then, what is the ground for your coming together? God is here in me, in my Sister, in each other and in the community. God is here in our coming together.

Now what is the contribution of Vincent and Louise? They treated each person as sacred and unique. Personalism is very powerful with them. Vincent and Louise treated one another as sacred and unique. Then they treated each and every person as sacred and unique.

DePaul University in Chicago has been able to identify the charism of the university in a way people can work with, which is what you have done with your mission statements. You have identified the five qualities that characterize your institutions. DePaul found two words to express our values: *Vincentian Personalism*.

The person is very much at the center for Vincent and Louise. So, you can see that the key in apostolic reflection is the sacredness of every person in the group, then, the sacredness of the coming together of different people on this given evening. Another thing that is very strong in Louise and in Vincent is the idea that every person is a member of the Body of Christ, and, consequently, is a gift. There is deep affection for each sister. It is each person as person and each person as member in communion with the others that evokes not only respect but affection and deep attention to each one's silence, presence, being and words.

I think one of the great miracles in the life of Louise is that she became such a great mother to the Daughters of Charity. Louise's basic wound is on her mother's side. She had very good relationships with the men in her life: she had an affectionate and trusting relationship with her father who claimed her in spite of illegitimacy, with her husband, with Francis de Sales, and with Vincent. On her father's side, there was great natural strength. Her wound was on the mother's side. She tried to overcome that in the way she raised Michel but without notable success. She tried so hard to be a good mother to Michel that she was chronically anxious about him. The miracle of grace, to my way of thinking, is that she became such a tremendous mother to the Daughters of Charity. She knew each one personally and held each one in her heart with affection and tender love. She passed on bits of information from one to the other in her letters, and taught them everything from the alphabet to all that the mission required. This is a remarkable story of transformation. It says something to us about our own wounds and what the grace of God does. In exactly the place where she was wounded initially, she became an absolutely wonderful mother to her Daughters and to many others. Vincent and Louise shared their apostolic and spiritual experiences with one another over a period of thirty-five years.

In our reflection on apostolic reflection, there are three beacons that guide us: (1) the sacredness and uniqueness of each person; (2) the affection for each member of the local community and of the larger community; and (3) the sharing of apostolic and spiritual experiences with one another.

In 1989, I gave a retreat in England to Daughters of Charity. I met a Daughter who was being missioned to Liverpool. Liverpool, famous as one of the nineteenth century industrial cities, is in severe decline. In the center of that city is a place called Netherly. It is inner city. The

three Daughters on mission there have a ministry of presence. Their mission is to be parishioners in that place. The Sister I met was in her early fifties when a letter went around asking for volunteers for Ethiopia. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she had the vague idea that someday she would go. She volunteered, thinking there was no chance she would be chosen. The next thing she knew she was in Ethiopia. She was there for ten or eleven years and loved it. For reasons of health she came back, expecting to return to Ethiopia, where her heart was. It did not happen. Instead, she was being missioned to Liverpool. You can see from what is written below, she has found a new life and mission. I got the letter around Christmas, just before we met to plan this day. In it she talked about how important, how central apostolic reflection was to them in their radical and in a certain way difficult mission. I asked her permission to quote from the letter. She responded that all three sisters gave their permission but could not imagine that what was said could be important to the American sisters. She was glad for whatever gift it might be. Actually, it is a great gift. She writes:

I must admit, God is so good to me . . . just wondering if I am still on the right track—and being careful not to get our little community into a rut . . . This would defeat the purpose of this difficult mission—“parishioners” in a very poor parish in a first world country, where we are struggling together to maintain a very simple lifestyle—on the beat on the streets of the estate—trusting on Divine Providence to see to our needs—and together trying to live within a budget, that is realistic but not excessive, spending only what we need and not satisfying every fad or fancy. We are helping each other to grow and in this growth process to remain full of joy—hope and love. To help us do this we have apostolic sharing on Wednesdays—where we come into His Presence and share with Him and with each other all the joy—sorrows—disappointments and visions for the future. He does speak to each of us if we listen. We love that hour sharing. Even if we have no words to say—it is still great. I remember you saying how difficult—if not impossible—for (some) to pray thus. They do not know what is missing in their

lives. I hope—no pressure of work—not any thing will take over this hour—it is here we get food for the week ahead.

This is a remarkable testimony to what apostolic reflection can become. Apostolic reflection has come to be at the very center of their lives. It is their way forward. The gift of God is communicated through the companions with whom they live and with whom they share their lives. Sharing has become the central gift. It flows from life, from the exigency of the apostolate, from a felt need for one another -- from life together.

What forms can apostolic reflection take? There are many. As an introduction to answering this question, what I want to say that there is a difference sense of corporateness among us. Today, very often, people in the same house no longer share the same ministry. In the past, very often, everyone in the same house, whether it was a school or hospital or social agency, had the same ministry. Where the ministry was shared, there was a natural inclination to talk about it over supper. The reality has changed to a large extent. If we are to be corporate at the level of mission and apostolate, we need to talk to each other about what is happening in our *diverse* apostolates and share our *different* experiences. What happened automatically in another age has to happen consciously and dialogically today. There is a new sense of corporateness, a new opportunity for corporateness in apostolic communities today. Consequently community is not simply given but has to be created. This is also true of the Church. How is the Church created? The Church is created through the Eucharist, through the sharing of the Body and Blood, the dying and rising of Jesus. The Eucharist *celebrated* and *shared* creates the Church.

The same thing is true of our communities. Our communities are no longer a given. If they are only a given, then our houses will be merely hotels. They have to be created in a way they did not need to be created before. The vehicle for creating our communities is sharing: free, deliberate, conscious willingness to share our lives, our experiences, our spirituality, our relationship with God, with one another. There is a new and important face to corporateness, something that could have been taken for granted in the past. In a hospital, you used to take for granted that employees would absorb the values of the Daughters of Charity from daily contact. That is not true in the same way today. Now you have Vice-Presidents for Mission Effectiveness.

Today the values need to be shared consciously, deliberately, intentionally, freely. You have found a way to instill the love, the knowledge and the commitment of your coworkers and employees to the charism.

Apostolic reflection, which may previously have been an exercise on the periphery of your lives, has now become your *way of life*. It has come to *the center*. It is *the way* in which you and we will create our communities.

I would like to suggest a useful image from John Dunne, who has written *The House of Wisdom*. The basic image he uses in his lifetime of theological reflection and writing is the image of *passing over and passing back*. He says our way of moving forward is first to honor our own experience and then to pass over from our own experience to our neighbor's experience. Touched and changed by his or her experience, we pass back to our own experience. It is a way of going beyond the presumption that my experience is normative, the only experience that counts, or the voice of inferiority which discounts my experience in favor of yours. It is a dialogical model, valuing both your experience and mine. *Passing over and passing back . . .* and being transformed in the process. That is the rhythm of our lives. You can see a little of Ruusbroec in this--the divine action of breathing--going forth and coming back.

If we live in this world by passing over and passing back, then diversity is a blessing and the differences of our sisters and of our brothers are a great gift. We pass over into the lives of people who have different points of view, who do not necessarily agree with us, who have their own experiences. The Spirit blesses us through the richness of our differences--in dialogue.

To return to the question: what form will apostolic reflection take? There are several, none is normative. The first one, the one which we are most familiar with, is the *common sharing concerning a common experience*.

The second one, which is the one we are going to experience this afternoon, is *personal sharing-corporate listening*. A group called Inter-Community Consultants, headquartered in Saint Louis, helped our province a great deal in organization and community process. The central process they used was called *simple sharing-corporate listening*. It goes like this. In a group, each person is entitled and invited to share his or her story, his or her experience. Simple sharing means all we do is share it, without dialogue or comments, without critique. We wel-

come each person's story as it is experienced and shared. It is a non-judgmental, non-critical, non-evaluative way of letting people speak out of their own lives. It is permitted to ask a question for clarification. Consequently, everyone around the circle gets a chance to share her (or his) experience. This is followed by *corporate listening*. It is a little tricky but not very. "What did we hear ourselves say?" "What did we, as a group, hear ourselves say?" It could be as simple as, we heard ourselves say it has been a difficult week, or we have heard ourselves say that our God is a God of surprises, or we heard ourselves say that our lives are far more touched by our patients, by our students, by others than we imagined. It is a way of knowing how God is present and active among us, how God is here. That is the sense of it.

A third model, which some have tried in your province, has a lot of power to it. One person shares an event or an experience, then the others enter into a common reflection and dialogue on her experience. Over time, each one has a chance to share her story and have the community reflect on it.

It is good to experiment with different ways of doing apostolic reflection. There is freedom to do so. The key to sharing is to share something that was important to you during the past week. It does not have to be something of great moment. It has to be important to you, it has to have touched your life in some way. The underlying assumption is that God is there, obliquely or directly in your experience. Remember the sister from Liverpool said, "We share with Him and with each other, joys, sorrows, disappointments, visions for the future." The greatest treasure we have is our own lives. If we find ourselves in a community which invites us to share our lives with one another, it is a very powerful thing for the future.

A person who has meant a great deal to me is a Vietnamese monk by the name of Thich Nhat Hanh. He was the head of the Vietnamese Peace delegation in 1974-76 in Paris. He met Thomas Merton one time, and after the meeting Merton said, "Thich Nhat Hanh is my brother." He is an immensely centered and spiritual person. He said in a recent talk, "People ask me, what is the way to peace. But there is no way to peace." Everyone was surprised. "Peace is the way," he said. When you think of it, it is really true. There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.

What is the way to apostolic sharing? There is no way. Apostolic sharing is the way. What is the way to discernment? There is no way. Discernment is the way. Unrestricted readiness is the way. What has

been on the margins has become the center. What have been ways and means in our lives have become the substance. Apostolic sharing is at the heart of our existence. Why? Because that is the nature of community. Not just to be at the same address, or the same work, but to share our lives--a conscious, free, vulnerable, chosen communion and sharing with one another about that which is important in our lives, namely our apostolate, our lives and our spirit. Something radical is happening.

As we pursue Vincentian discernment and Vincentian apostolic reflection, we can ask ourselves: what are their benchmarks? There are a few key ones.

Firstly, *the God who called us here is here*. We come together in the belief that we have been called together. God has called us to come together, not to negotiate but to live together. The God who has called us is in our midst. We have come together in God.

Secondly, *God is present in each person and in the community*. This grouping of people will never happen again. The Spirit is present in a unique way each time we come together. A house of four or five people is a unique place of grace. If someone else comes, it is a new group. If we have a group of four people and a fifth person comes, we cannot simply expect that person to blend in. No, the new person is a new gift. There is a new mix, and there are twenty-five new relationships that have to be considered and shared. Everyone is a gift. Each community has its own uniqueness. It does not mean, of course, that there is not anyone who is hard to get along with. It simply means that this is a place of grace.

Thirdly, *do not tread on the heels of Providence*. Time is on God's side, and, consequently, on ours. We are invited to set aside our timetables and agendas, and abide in God's time. At the heart of our coming together is the Eternal Presence. We have come together to be touched and led by the Presence of God.

Fourth, *in contemplating, loving, and serving the poor, the poor one is Jesus Christ*. This is from the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity, I think from the original Constitutions. You are stating that the substance of your lives is to contemplate, love, and serve God in poor person.

Finally, *the journey is a shared and corporate one*. There is great strength in sharing your call, because of the power of the Body. Christians know that Divine Life at its heart is shared, because we know the shared life of the Trinity. When we know the Trinity, we

know that not only created life is lived in sharing, but divine life is a shared life. Louise is very strong on the Trinity and the Holy Spirit.

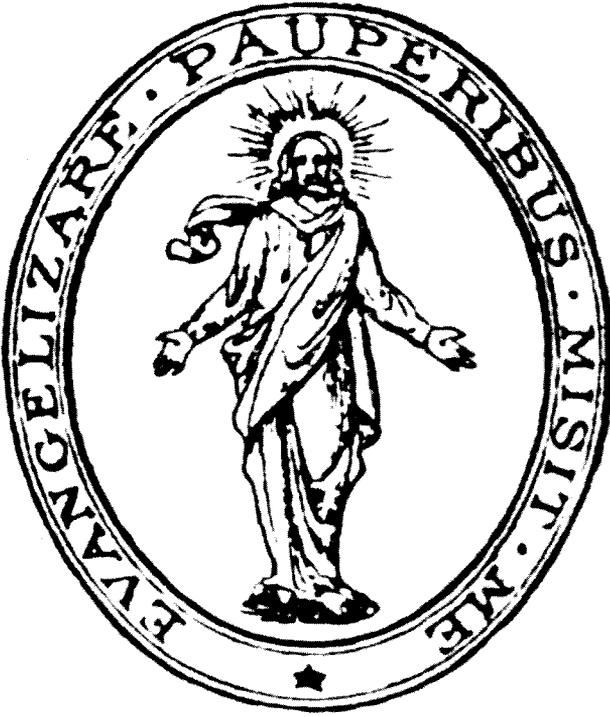
We are being brought back to the substance of our lives: the capacity, the vocation, the opportunity to share our lives with one another in freedom, in respect, in attentiveness, in listening and in love. Apostolic sharing is a way of life, and perhaps the gift for our time. Let us thank and praise God that the Spirit is leading us in the way of apostolic reflection.<sup>2</sup>

The spirit of the Company consists in giving itself to God to love Our Lord and serve him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor, in their own homes or elsewhere, to teach young girls and children and, in general, all those whom divine providence sends you.

*(Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity, 9  
February 1653)*

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<sup>2</sup>The following process was then used in small groups. First, they took some time for silent reflection on what had been important in each one's life in the last week. Then, in groups of five, they went around the circle and shared something that had been important to them in the past week. They did this in the manner of *simple sharing*. Then, they asked themselves as a group the question, "What have we heard ourselves saying?" This was *corporate listening*. At the end they were free to thank and bless God or intercede as they were moved to do so.



# **PART XII**

## **VINCENTIAN DISCERNMENT**

Spring 1994

## Vincentian Discernment

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## Vincentian Discernment

BY

HUGH O'DONNELL, C.M.

I started my relationship with the Daughters of Charity in 1970 when Sister Mary Rose McPhee and Father Arthur Trapp invited four or five Vincentians each to prepare a talk and then go on the circuit. One of the most unexpected gifts that has come to me as a Vincentian has been to discover the double family and, as the gospel says, to have a hundred or many hundred sisters. It has been a great grace for me. I am glad to be back on the circuit.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit has a lot to do with this day, so let us begin with the “Veni Sancte Spiritus”—meditatively in chant as it is done at Taizé. (The presence of the Spirit was felt from the beginning.)

Let us reflect on this paragraph from Abelly’s biography of Vincent. It is taken from a translation of Abelly’s life of Vincent, 1664, which has been recently published by the Vincentian Studies Institute.

Among the multitude of thoughts and inclinations that incessantly arise within us, many appear to be good, but do not come from God and are not pleasing to him. How, then, should one discern these? We must look at them carefully, have recourse to *God in prayer*, and ask for his light. We must reflect on the motives, purposes, and means, to see if all of these are in keeping with his good pleasure. We must talk over our ideas with prudent persons, and take the advice of those placed over us. These persons are the depositories of the treasures of the wisdom and grace of God. In doing what they suggest, we are carrying out the will of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These reflections were first presented to the Daughters of Charity of the West Central Province on three successive Saturdays: in Fort Worth, Texas on 7 March 1992; in New Orleans, Louisiana on 14 March 1992 and in Saint Louis, Missouri on 21 March 1992. They were subsequently presented at the Vincentian Week in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 19-23 October 1992, which was planned and celebrated together by the Daughters of Charity and the priests and brothers of the Congregation of the Mission. These reflections are equally relevant to both the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentians.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission* (Divided into Three Books), trans. William Quinn, F.S.C., ed. John E. Rybolt, C.M., notes by Edward Udovic, C.M., and John E. Rybolt, C.M., intro. Stafford Poole, C.M. (New Rochelle, NY: 1993), 3:46; *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, entretiens, documents*, ed. Pierre Coste, C.M., 14 vols. (Paris: 1920-1926), 12:436, n. 4.

This is a wonderful summary of Vincent's way of discernment. First, he started out with openness to the will of God. Then, he weighed the reasons. And thirdly, he trusted himself to a person who had some sense about the matter. He had a great sense of trust that the Lord mediates his will through other people, superiors and others in whom we can have great confidence. This last point seems particularly characteristic of Vincent and Louise.

Our theme for the day is *discernment*. It is one of the most needed gifts for the present as well as for the future. Times have changed a great deal since I took vows. I took vows in a very stable society, a stable Catholic society, a stable American society. In those days, everything supported you and me and carried us along. It was hard to get into trouble. Now society works in another direction. There are many ways in which society does not support the decisions and the commitments we have made. Beyond that, however, a tremendous change has occurred in our world in the past thirty to forty years. Change has become our way of life. We have gone from a world that was stable and predictable to a world of continuing change. You can see right away the context for discernment.

Before, everything was predictable in a certain way, we do this week what we did last week. I know I would never last in a Trappist monastery, I would last the first week, but on the next Monday, I would say "Now, what do I do?" and they'd say, "What did you do last Monday?" and I would say "Well, I had better leave." I do not think I could take the routine. That is how our lives were, weren't they? They had a great deal of predictability to them, but now they do not. The shifts in society economically, politically, socially, and in every way have been immense. Let me suggest just one such change. Our generation, it seems, is the first generation in the history of humanity in which to be single is socially acceptable. In all tribal cultures and historical societies to be single is undesirable and often a cause for derision or pity. When I was a boy, if someone was single, we thought that he/she had failed in love. It was generally unacceptable, except that the Church had always provided religious life as a way for people with a single vocation. Now, we have finally come in the last twenty to twenty-five years to a new and different way of seeing things. Being single is a widespread and socially acceptable phenomenon, at least in the West. I think it is the first time in any society that this has been the case. This is just one instance of how radically the world in which we have lived since the end of the Second

Vatican Council has changed and is changing.

Let me, parenthetically and in passing, speak of our response to this new situation. It concerns the new opportunity for the value of celibacy. This gift of celibacy that we have been carrying, half knowing what it was but not knowing what it was, has fresh meaning. We are beginning to see that there is a new world of meaning for celibacy, not only as a religious phenomenon but precisely as a secular phenomenon. There is a new world and context in which the values embodied in celibacy are life-giving exactly in the world as such and not only in religious life. This new world is not only one of adversity but also of opportunity and of blessing for the gospel.

Secondly, let us look at humanity's changing consciousness. If we ask ourselves what are the roots of our contemporary situation, we might say the roots go back to Vietnam, or we might say the roots go back to the Second World War or at least it is a twentieth century phenomenon, or we might say the roots go back to the Enlightenment; we might even want to say the roots go back to the Reformation. Maybe the roots are even deeper.

In the Church, this is certainly true. Karl Rahner, for example, when he gave the graduation address at Weston in Boston in 1980, reflected on the question: "What was the theological significance of the Second Vatican Council?" He said that it was the first council "of a World Church." It was not the first council of a Church existing throughout the world, for that has been the case for a while now, but it was the first council of a Church in which people from around the world spoke in their own name. The Chinese hierarchy was established as Chinese only in 1922; the first African bishops were appointed in 1926. Church is becoming indigenous everywhere. The leadership in the Church is indigenous—coming from its own soil rather than being imported or transplanted from Europe and maybe North America to other places.

It is a new world. Human consciousness itself is being transformed. Authority is less and less the means of transmitting values, while personal authenticity and integrity are more and more the effective means of transmitting values. The old values are still important, very important in fact, but the way of transmitting them is less centered on "Listen to me because I have the authority" and far more centered on "Listen to me because I am an authentic witness of the gospel."

Yes, there is a new consciousness developing. It is not just about

change and loss, it is about grace. The Lord is in the midst of all of this. Person is far more central. The value and importance of each person as a unique, unrepeatable expression of who God is, is key. We are beginning to find new friends across boundaries that formerly separated us, as our affirmation of the human person and human authenticity comes into focus.

When God spoke your life into the world, he spoke once and forever, never to be repeated. God has said something special in each of you and in each person you serve and in each person who comes into your life. He has said a word that can never be said again because he has said it uniquely in you and uniquely in me. We begin to see that each person is unique and of immense value and importance. I am not talking here about "individuals." Thomas Merton in that classic chapter, "Christianity and Totalitarianism" in *Disputed Questions*, made clear the difference between an individual and a person. "Individuals are faceless units within mass societies. They are units of consumption or production escaping freedom and renouncing personal responsibility. A person, by contrast, is made for love and communion in freedom, responsibly standing on his/her own two feet, who tries to realize his/her own fallibility and struggles to decide in his/her own conscience what is the will of God."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, there is a new mode of relationships developing. The great prophet of what is happening was John XXIII. On 11 October 1962, in the homily with which he opened the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII said, as he set the revised agenda for the Council, "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relationships." His reference to Divine Providence has a special resonance in Vincentian ears.

Providence is leading us to a new order of human relationships. He clarified his meaning by adding: a new order of human relationships in which violence is factored out, not in. It makes an essential difference whether or not violence or the threat of violence is in the background when we relate to other people. John XXIII says my relationship to you must be a gospel relationship in which the threat or use of violence is not a background factor, but rather a relationship based in reverence, respect, and regard, in listening and challenging, in all those things that go into human relationships, in love. Perhaps our own experience can testify to John XXIII's vision and we can say

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<sup>3</sup>*Disputed Questions*, (New York: 1960), 136.

Divine Providence has been leading us to a new order of human relationships. There is joy and peace in knowing Divine Providence is at the heart of the new order—the dying and rising—we have been experiencing.

This, then, is the new world in which discernment is coming to center stage. Things are not predictable, not routine. We are called to pay attention to our unfolding history in a new way.

I have great admiration for what you have done as a province. It is truly a prophetic thing, the choice you have made. You have chosen to become discerning communities in the next three to five years.

This is a radical choice. It is on the cutting edge, and it is a choice that our side of the Vincentian family has not come to in a concrete way at the present moment. We have all been involved in planning over the past two decades and articulated and pursued many goals, strategic and otherwise. But I have seldom been struck so much as I have by your goal for becoming discerning communities in the next three to five years. It is operationally possible. It is concrete, specific, mainstream, cutting edge, full of promise.

We know that the real master of discernment is Ignatius. We have all, including Vincent and Louise, learned from him and his sons, the Jesuits. Yet, Vincent and Louise, in their time, incarnated discernment in a truly unique way. We are beginning to discover how to describe it to ourselves. We have probably always felt their gifts, but now we are able to find the words for it.

Discernment, then, what is it? Two key components are (1) to be led by the Spirit (2) in freedom. Our freedom is engaged in discernment. It is the Spirit who addresses our freedom. The Spirit calls us, invites us in our freedom to go in a certain direction, to act in a certain way, to be in a certain way. It is the dynamic: the action of the Spirit touching the freedom of the children of God.

It is a choice, not between good and evil, but between two or more goods. In a course on discernment at Saint Thomas Seminary, students were asked, “What have you learned so far?” One student said that in learning that discernment is not a choice between good and evil but a choice among goods, he found himself far more challenged than when he was choosing between good and evil. It is true. It is a greater challenge for us to acknowledge that discernment is the choice among several goods.

One of the things that has changed in our society is young people have a great many more options today. When I was growing up, there

were not so many options. A person could do what his or her mother and father did, could enter religious life, and a few went to the university. The options were limited. Discernment today has to do with facing an increased number of good options. It is good news but difficult and challenging news.

Secondly, it is not just about figuring out what people in general need to do, but discernment involves listening to the way the Holy Spirit is present to me as a person, or to our local community, or, if you are thinking provincially, to our province. It is just the exact opposite of mass production. The key to mass production is interchangeable parts. You can buy the same muffler in California, Florida, or Taiwan. But that is exactly what discernment is not. God speaks to us, not just as instances of human nature, but to each of us as persons who have a name, an unrepeatably name. So God speaks to us as unique persons and as persons in communion with one another, either in our local communities or in the larger communities of the province or in the communion of communities we know as the Church. Discernment is a choice addressed to me or to us. It is existential, historical, personal. This word is addressed to me, and to you, and to us in communion with each other. At the heart of discernment is not conscience's discrimination between good and evil, nor theology's identification of what is common to everyone, but exactly the inspiration of the Spirit present to the person as a person who is unique and in communion at this moment in his/her history.

From another point of view discernment is about the answer to two questions. The first is: what are the *yeses* and what are the *nos* in my life? Discernment is about the next yes or no. I know a great deal about myself if I know what I say "Yes" to and what I say "no" to. For example, the basic scriptural invitation which comes from one of the prophets is "choose life." It is not, "I like life, or wouldn't life be good?" but, it is *choose life*. We say "yes" to life and "no" to everything that is harmful to life. Discernment then is about what we say "yes" to, what we say "no" to in the present and near future.

The second concrete question is: where does my body, time, money belong? The things we have at our disposal—our bodies, our person, our time, our money—where do they belong? We have a lot of options. These are the concrete choices we must make.

Discernment has three different faces. The first is the one we know best of all. It is the vocational face. When we hear someone is discerning, we imagine he or she is seeking the answer to a life question, such

as: am I called to the community, will I get married, shall I marry this person, is the Lord calling me to be single? The vocational issues come to mind. Or we may think of direction changing decisions, such as a change in career. We are beginning to find out that in religious life we might have not just one apostolic career but two or three or even many in a lifetime. In general, we assume discernment refers to major turning points in a person's life. It includes mid-life decisions. We have learned much more about this in the last twenty to thirty years. The true self is emerging in mid-life which involves a number of decisions. What is clearer to me today is that not only do we receive a first call, but, somewhere in mid-life, we receive a second call. We need to listen to that second call, as it were to a second vocation. It is like a vocation within a vocation.

These vocational or life direction decisions involve a "yes." The *quality* of that "yes" means everything. As I think about my own life, the most difficult times have been when my heart has been divided, when it is been half here and half there. The best times of my life have been when I've been able to say "yes" unconditionally in a single direction, when I've said "yes"- "yes" without all the "yes, buts." When my "yes" has been single-minded and unconditional, I can suffer a great deal, I have been able to put up with a lot, I have seen things in perspective. When my heart was divided, however, and my "yes" was conditional, it was very hard because my energies, at their root, were divided. This is especially true for people like ourselves for whom spiritual integrity is at the heart of our lives. To be divided in the area of our commitment is very painful.

The quality of our "yes" is important not only to our lives but also to the decision making process. The more we can say "yes" to our vocation, our mission, our community, the more power there is in our lives, the power of the Holy Spirit.

On the subject of first call and second call, Jean Vanier has said the first call is to generosity and the second call is to love. The generosity of the first half of our lives is a participation in the generosity of God. It is a great gift. But we may let that generosity fill our lives to such an extent that we do not have to deal with the brokenness, the darkness, the limitations and the sin in our lives. So, there is nothing wrong with generosity, except when I am consumed with generosity there are some unanswered questions waiting for the day when I run out of energy. On that day, some of the harder questions will come up to me for purification. Then I will begin to see that while there was really a

great deal of God in my generosity there was also quite a bit of myself. That is a painful day but a good day, because, if I have the patience and the courage to stay with it, the Lord purifies my spirit. Love becomes more and more central. The journey then is a journey from a generosity, which has a lot of love in it, to love itself. Love becomes increasingly the center of our lives. Generosity is a great gift; love is a greater gift. The transition happens when the Spirit purifies our hearts and leads us in the way of love.

Another pattern is also evident in the journey: it is from action to presence. This pattern has special importance in an apostolic community, because at some point there comes a diminishment of our energies. If our total identity as apostolic persons is linked up with our activity and our achievements, when our energies diminish we begin to think we are running out of love for God. Actually, what is happening is that our way of loving God is being transformed from activity to presence. The greatest of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit is presence. Father Richard McCullen, the former superior general of the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity, has said, "A saint is someone who has time." That is true, isn't it? If someone has time for us, if I have time for you or you have time for me, that is a great gift. Someone who has time is someone who is able to be present. This shift to presence is accompanied by intensified apostolic prayer. The heart of the apostle grows in us and we come to carry the world of our brothers and sisters—their joys, their sorrows, their brokenness, their hope—in hearts full of God's compassion.

There is a movement here. As we listen in discernment, we are listening within a certain flow from action to presence. It does not speak against action nor does it say action does not continue, but there is movement to the center that is of great importance at the core of which is a listening heart.

Discernment has the image of being heady, of figuring things out. Discernment is essentially of the heart. It is about being present to what is going on in such a way that we can hear. It flows from a listening heart.

If the first face of discernment has to do with the paths we take, the second has to do with everyday life—living a life of daily discernment. We have sometimes called this "living in the presence of God." The Quakers would call it "being present to the Presence." We should be present to other people. It is even more profound if we seek to be present to the Presence in everyone and every event and everything.

This is at the heart and soul of Vincent and Louise. What they say is "God is here!" Be present to the Presence—living with a listening heart, a daily attentiveness to the Lord's Presence, a daily discerning, a daily decisioning.

Perhaps, the messianic promise found in Jeremiah/Ezekiel, which always seems to fire our hearts and imaginations, speaks to this same point. The prophet says, "I will take away their hearts of stone and give them hearts of flesh."<sup>4</sup> We have been given through the Spirit of the Messiah truly human hearts filled with the Holy Spirit. It is with these hearts we attend to the presence of God day by day and hour by hour in our lives. It is with hearts of flesh, full of God's own incarnate compassion, that we listen attentively to the personal Presence in whom we are immersed. Vie Thorgren has called this "living with a discerning heart."

Finally, the third face of discernment has to do with making choices in social areas, in our outreach to our brothers and sisters. Sometimes we get stuck, because the problems are so great. One tendency consequently is to say to ourselves, "Whatever I can do is only a drop in the ocean," and then decide to mind our own business and go our own way. Another temptation is to take upon ourselves the entire social agenda and burn out in a year or two or three. How do we live between those two options? The Quakers, and especially Thomas Kelly who wrote a book called *A Testament of Devotion*, are very helpful in this question. The Quakers have a thing called "concerns." God is concerned with all of creation, God is concerned with all our brothers and sisters, God is concerned with all those who are in need, but God knows that you and I cannot do it all. So, in the midst of His concern for all of us, He gives each of us a "concern"—a specific concern—like children or the homeless. Maybe God gives a person two or three "concerns." Anyway in the midst of this very large agenda, God speaks a personal word to each of us calling us to respond to some brothers and sisters here and now in this place and in this time.

The insight that within the universal concern that God has for all creation, he addresses a specific concern to you and me, is helpful and freeing. I find it is truly liberating. It allows us not to cop out and not to burn out, but to live in the peace of God as we give ourselves wholeheartedly in communion with God's concern for all. It calls us

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<sup>4</sup>Ezekiel 36:26.

to listen to what God is calling us to in the midst of this large social agenda. Among the many concerns of the kingdom and of humanity, we are called to attend to what one, two or three concerns God gives to me, to us, to live now! So that is the third face of discernment.

One of the most encouraging and exciting developments in the Vincentian tradition is the fact that Vincent and Louise are now being listened to from a lay perspective. In the past year, Vie Thorgren gave a very beautiful talk on Louise at the Symposium "Legacy of Charity," just published in the recent issue of *Vincentian Heritage*.<sup>5</sup> In the year she spent preparing the talk, a couple of things came to the surface about Louise. Perhaps you have known them for a long time, but I am learning them. We use them in the course we teach together on discernment.

The first point concerns Louise and the hidden life of Jesus at Nazareth. The course begins with Jesus's hidden life at Nazareth, which was so close to the heart of Louise and at the center of her spiritual life. We came to understand discernment must start from that invisible daily place manifest in the hiddenness of Nazareth. Discernment is not about negotiating a good deal with God. It is about listening to what God is calling us to do. And one of the best places from which to listen is not the public arena but that secret place called Nazareth, whether it is the physical Nazareth where Jesus spent most of his life or the interior Nazareth we each carry within us. Louise is very strong about Nazareth and from some of the letters we see that she taught Vincent about Nazareth.

One of the great influences on the contemporary spiritual life of the Church is Charles de Foucauld. The heart and soul of his spirituality is Nazareth. He himself spent several years in Nazareth itself, washing dishes for a sisters' community and spending the rest of his time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The spirituality of the Little Sisters of Jesus and the Little Brothers of Jesus is to live the mystery of Nazareth in interior silence, humble presence, and hiddenness in God. It is this spirituality of the mystery of Nazareth which is the heart of their presence among the poorest of the poor as coworkers and fellow human beings, Brothers and Sisters of Jesus.

There is a wonderful letter on this theme which Louise wrote to Anne Hardemont.

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<sup>5</sup>Vie Thorgren, "'God is my God': The Generative Integrity of Louise de Marillac," *Vincentian Heritage* 12, no. 2 (1991):201-18.

I praise God with all my heart for the disposition in which you tell me you now are. Nevertheless, I share the pain you are experiencing because you feel that you are doing nothing. Be thoroughly consoled, my dear Sister, by the thought that you are imitating the state in which the Son of God found Himself when, after leaving the temple where He had been working for the glory of God, He went with the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph to obey them. He thereby accomplished the will of God by toiling for many years at the humble tasks of a carpenter's shop. Yet He had come upon earth to labor for the salvation of the entire human race. We do not know, my dear Sister, why Divine Providence has put you aside, leaving you hidden in the Son of God. Nevertheless, by working unostentatiously and quietly in the service of the poor, you are most certainly fulfilling the designs of Divine Providence. If you reflect upon this, my dear Sister, as I am sure you do, you will find profound peace and you will wait lovingly and confidently until God wants something else of you. In this way, you will be practicing holy indifference.<sup>6</sup>

Louise recognizes that Anne feels like she is doing nothing, so she invites her to do what she does in a spirit of quiet peace and attentiveness to what God might be asking of her next. There is a wonderful power here! The interior Nazareth in each of our hearts is the place best suited for listening to what the Lord is saying in our lives.

A second way in which Louise has revealed the heart of discernment to us is through her devotion to the thirst of Jesus. The mystery of the thirst of Jesus reveals the longing and desire which make discernment dynamic. The thirst of Jesus is not primarily a physical thirst but a thirst for communion with his Father and the Spirit and a thirst to share the fruits of the cross with all his brothers and sisters.

Two of the most powerful things then that we can have going for us in our lives are spiritual participation in the mystery of Nazareth and free communion in the mystery of the thirst of Jesus to share the goods of the kingdom with humanity.

Monika Hellwig in 1976 wrote *The Eucharist and the Hungers of the World* in preparation for the Eucharistic Congress during our bicentennial year. In it, she said, that in America hunger and thirst are unacceptable. If you are hungry or thirsty, have a coke, a pizza, a candy bar. But in the spiritual life to hunger and thirst is the heart of our lives—it is our energy, our power. When we allow ourselves to hunger and thirst in the spiritual order, we let ourselves live in long-

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<sup>6</sup>Louise de Marillac to Anne Hardemont, 20 December 1659, in *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac: Correspondence and Thoughts*, ed. and trans. Louise Sullivan, D.C. (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 660.

ing for the kingdom and for communion with the Absolute Mystery, whom alone our hearts are made for. Physical hunger and thirst, for example, in fasting can contribute to living in the desire of our hearts. If we are looking at ourselves as discerners, we need to be at home in Nazareth longing for the coming of the kingdom and the good of our sisters and brothers. A brief story. When I taught at Notre Dame in the seventies, a young priest—a searcher —was in my class. One morning I read something from the closing pages of Thomas Merton's book *Contemplative Prayer*. He was scheduled to finish the program that day. He had asked me earlier if I had read the book *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*. I had not. After class, he came up to me and gave me the book and said, "Thanks for the class," and left. When I got to my room, I opened the book and it was inscribed. He wrote, "I learned this morning in listening to Merton that contemplation is the home of the pilgrim." I have always remembered those words. Home is not necessarily a place. The home of the pilgrim is within us. It is that Nazareth place, that quiet place. When Nazareth, when contemplation, is the place where we dwell, we can go every place. There is a translation of the meaning of spiritual place being developed in our time for us. A person in Al-Anon had this wonderful insight, which she shared with me. "The Twelve Step Program is the monastery of the world." The translation is from place to way of being in the world.

That is what Louise is telling us. If our way of being is to be interiorly at home in Nazareth and if our way of being is to long for the Kingdom, then discernment has a center and is easy. When we are not in that place and we trying to discern, discernment is difficult. Nazareth is the right place from which to see. A person can best see the valley from the top of the mountain.

The next two sections are about Vincent, the one is taken from a text of Abelly and the other from Dodin. The way of Vincent according to Abelly is a process; the way of Vincent according to Dodin adds content to process.

In the passage from Abelly which we cited at the beginning of the talk this morning the cornerstone of Vincent's discernment is precisely *indifference*, or to put it another way, the willingness to do whatever God wants.

On one occasion Vincent wrote to Louise, "I hate uncertainty as much as you do, but what is really important to us is to govern our lives not by our hatred of uncertainty but by indifference, by which we are open to what God wants. Let us then try to grow in indifference."

In the planning session for these days which I see as having been extremely important for the preparation for these talks, the formation committee and I talked about "indifference" as a poor word in English. It has negative connotations. It has overtones of not caring, of capitulation, of being a door mat, of being passive and depersonalized. So, we were looking for a different vocabulary to express what Vincent meant by "indifference." The French have a great word for it *disponibilité* but we do not have an English word to correspond to it. Another expression they have is "à votre service," that is, "I am at your service." This expression also does not work very well in English. What is meant is "I am your servant," "I am your disciple," "I am your daughter, or your son." That is the positive content of "indifference." Positively it means "readiness"—to be ready, but not just to be ready. There is an adjective that goes with it—"unrestricted readiness"—to be really ready to do what God calls us to do. Bernard Lonergan's expression, when he talks about the love of God, is "unconditional willingness." It is to be open in an unrestricted way to the fullness of God's presence, not just to one part of it. We can see that such an attitude is at the heart of our lives. We came to in our preparatory session that once we say "unrestricted readiness," we are no longer talking simply about a technique or a process, but we are talking about our deepest way of being. "Unrestricted readiness" is not only a corner stone of discernment, it is at the heart of our being. Our vocation, our way, is to be people of unrestricted readiness. We are servants and disciples. We are ready. "Be it done to me according to your will."

A story that Sister Germaine Price told me some years ago comes to mind. In Burundi, there was a little girl who wanted to go home with the sisters, but they told her she could not. She said, however, "I'll be ready in a second." She ran to the house where she had one little dress, she got it, came back and said, "I'm ready, I'm ready!"

There is a point of view that wants us to believe that unrestricted readiness is depersonalizing. It is true, of course, that it would be against our personhood, if God were arbitrary. But our unrestricted readiness is not toward an arbitrary God. Vincent and Louise have given us the gift of knowing, we are unrestrictedly ready in relationship to the *Divine Goodness*. It is amazing that twenty years after the death of Vincent, some of his friends and acquaintances, namely Louis XIV and others, built Versailles, which was a tribute to the world of Enlightenment in which God did not have a place. Enlightenment is

about the omnipotence of the human person. Eventually in spite of unlimited self-confidence and humanity's best efforts, the world is still full of misery. Who is to blame? This is not Vincent's world, nor is it Vincent's God. The God of Vincent and Louise is the God of Divine Goodness.

When Saint Louise went on her first mission, Saint Vincent wrote to her, "Go, therefore, Mademoiselle, in the name of our Lord. I pray that his divine goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, the shade against the heat and the sun, your shelter against the rain and the cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toils, and finally that he may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works."<sup>7</sup>

The subject of the sentence is "Divine Goodness." We are unrestrictedly ready in the face of our God of Divine Goodness. That is Vincent's and Louise's North Star, and ours, too—Divine Goodness. We must believe that God loves all people more than we do. If that is true, it is not a big sacrifice to be unrestrictedly ready, to be most willing instruments and channels of his love.

Concretely we need to believe that God can get us to where there is life for ourselves and for others better than we can. For example, consultation and dialogue are good and necessary. Dialogue certainly is of the essence of the future. But there are two things that consultation and dialogue cannot fathom: (1) which persons will be there when we get there, for we do not know whom the Lord intends to put into our lives; and (2) what events will occur when we get there. So, even as we participate in a discernment process, the most important things are still hidden from us—the persons and the events. Eventually, we come to believe that God can get us to a place of life for ourselves and others better than we can. I say this with the firm conviction that the process of consultation and dialogue is valuable and necessary. But the future is hidden from us in terms of persons and events. Our experience tells us the most unexpected people come into our lives and they turn out often to be the best blessings.

After "indifference" or "unrestricted readiness," the second step is what we usually mean when we talk about discernment. It is to

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<sup>7</sup>Vincent de Paul to Louise de Marillac, 6 May 1629, in *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents. I Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1607-1639), newly translated, edited, and annotated from the 1920 edition of Pierre Coste, C.M., ed. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., trans. Helen Marie Law, D.C., John Marie Poole, D.C., James R. King, C.M., Francis Germovnik, C.M., annotated John W. Carven, C.M., (Brooklyn: 1985), 64-65.

weigh the evidence, the pros and cons, with a listening heart. Abelly, in the passage we read at the beginning, summarizes the elements. We need to reflect on the motives, purposes and means and think about the outcomes and consequences. These deliberations involve questions of information, insight, facts, and values. We sift the internal and external evidence.

The third step is to seek counsel from a wise woman or a wise man. This is characteristically Vincentian. In the presence of a trusted confidant, listen for God's word. What I am saying differs somewhat from the text you have. In the Abelly text before you, it says "consult wise persons," in the plural. What I have found is that it is all right if I consult one or two, but personally if I consult seven or eight people I am lost. It would be rare if they agreed. Then, I have to choose among the wisdom people! I am really at sea and I cannot get back to that place where I can consult anyone. One wise woman or wise man in whom I have trust is one of the greatest treasures.

For Vincent, it is Father André Duval. When Vincent founded the Congregation, he went to Duval and presented his dilemma to him. It went something like this: "In 1617, Madame de Gondi set aside 45,000 livres and asked me to find a congregation to preach missions on her estates for the salvation of the souls of the people living there. I've tried for seven or eight years without success. Madame de Gondi is not well and she wants this done before she dies, but no one will accept the responsibility. I have to tell you one more thing. In the meantime, Father Portail and I and a few others have done it. And I have to tell you still one more thing, God has been blessing our work a great deal. "

When Vincent finished presenting his quandary to Duval, Duval said to him, "The Scriptures tell us that those who hear the word of God and do not heed it will receive many stripes." Vincent rose from the conversation, stopped looking for another congregation to do the work and founded the Congregation of the Mission.

To the process of unrestricted readiness, deliberation and wise counsel, André Dodin adds the content of Vincent's discernment. This is the final consideration in Vincentian discernment.

On sabbatical in 1987-88, I was looking for Vincent's spirituality and was shocked to read in Dodin that people who are looking for Vincent's spirituality are arrogant! Vincent, he says, does not have a spirituality but a *spiritual way*. It has three points: experience, faith, action. The cornerstone for Vincent is experience. Mother Suzanne

Guillemain said it more powerfully perhaps than Vincent when she said, "Les événements, c'est Dieu." "Events, that's God!" Sister Beatrice Brown helped me with that last week, when she said, "What if nothing is happening in my life?" Perhaps, "Les événements" means "circumstances." "Circumstances, that's God!" That is really helpful. Circumstances! Events, circumstances in my life—that's God. That is how radical Vincent and Louise are. God is here! The God whom we worship is present in history and in relationships. That is why the poor are our masters, God is here. The sacrament of discernment for Vincent is God's presence in the poor. For Vincent, experience and action have primacy. Actions flowing from love create the theater for Vincent's reflections. It is typically this way with us too. It is our experience that we reflect upon. We live into the future and then think about it. It is certain that the cornerstone for Vincent is experience. He brings experience into dialogue with the gospel, with the attitudes and actions of Jesus and with the mystery of the poor. Step two in discernment then is a dialogue between experienced events and the gospel.

The third and final step for Vincent is prudence, which means to act from wisdom. Our use of the word "prudence" often connotes caution rather than practical wisdom. So, we perhaps are better off to call this step practical wisdom, or, to make Vincent's meaning explicit, practical divine wisdom. For Vincent, a practical action is one that flows from God's wisdom and love. Secondly, an action is good when it embraces the extremes. This came to me as a great surprise. For Vincent, the extremes give power. My tendency is to let all the extremes go and find a middle way—but it is in holding them together that there is energy. You can feel the energy and the power. Love God and love your neighbor. Let your love be effective and affective. It is not enough to love God if my neighbor does not love God. It is not enough that my love is affective, it must also be effective. Holding the two in relationship establishes the dynamic field of energy in which the Holy Spirit is infinitely creative. Vincent is not someone to choose the middle road. This is not a middle ground: it is exactly the opposite. Energy is created by embracing both extremes. We can ask ourselves are you for the rich or for the poor? Is there a way Vincent was for the rich *and* the poor? It is communion Vincent sought. And we seek the transforming communion of the rich with the poor.

Continuing in this line for a moment, what is the one word we can use to characterize the meaning of Catholic? I would suggest it is the word *and*! The great Catholic word is *and*. Catholic means to

include rather than exclude someone or something. The great Catholic way is solitude *and* communion, person *and* community, community *and* mission. And is the great life-giving word for Vincent as he embraces the extremes. Be wise as serpents and simple as doves.

The third and final guideline of Vincent's practical wisdom was that we must always be firm regarding the goal but gentle and flexible regarding the means. We need to know where we are going but we do not have to get there like a tank. We just need to get there as we can get there. All of this is embraced by the Spirit and the mystery of charity.

The long and short of these reflections is that discernment is a great gift, especially in our time.