

Serving in Hope

MODULE I



Our Vincentian Vocation

Video/Formation Guide

Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council of the United States

Serving in Hope

Vincentians “*Serve in Hope*” because we are called to bring the love of God, the compassion of Jesus, to those who are poor and suffering.

St. Vincent said, “God demands first the heart, then the work.” It is only with our heart that we can bring compassion, respect and devotion to the destitute and marginalized.

It is only with a heart on fire with God’s love that service can become mission. And it is only by “*Serving in Hope*” that our mission can root us in the faith that in the poor “*Vincentians will see the face of Christ.*”

Preface

Serving in Hope is a video-assisted resource for the spiritual formation of the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The goal of the series is to root all members of the Society in the spirituality and heritage of its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

Serving in Hope combines videos with formation guides. The formation guides provide you with materials to enrich your understanding, invite you to discuss insights and to record your responses, and gives you enrichment readings to read between sessions.

Serving in Hope consists of a 5 minute Introductory Video for the program, and a 3 minute Video Introduction for each of the six Sessions in the Module together with the Formation Guide Booklet.

Serving in Hope is an on-going formation program for all members of the Society. It is also a program that can be used to mentor future new members into the spirituality and heritage of the Society.

Serving in Hope can be used a Session at a time during a Conference meeting, or combined together for a Retreat Day.

Serving in Hope

MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation **Video/Formation Guide**



Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Council of the United States

Serving in Hope

VIDEO/FORMATION GUIDE SERIES

MODULE I: *Our Vincentian Vocation*

- Session 1: What is a Vocation?
- Session 2: Vocation of the Laity
- Session 3: The Vocation of Vincent and Frederic
- Session 4: Essential Elements of the Society
- Session 5: Core Values
- Session 6: Mission

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- Session 3: Contemplatives in Action
- Session 4: Journey together to Holiness
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MODULE III: *Our Vincentian Heritage*

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- Session 3: The Rule
- Session 4: Blessed Rosalie Rendu, DC
- Session 5: The Vincentian Family
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MODULE IV: *Our Vincentian Mission*

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- Session 3: Life and Dignity
- Session 4: Family, Community and Rights
- Session 5: The Poor and Work
- Session 6: Solidarity and Creation

MODULE V: *Our Vincentian Rule*

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- Session 2: Captures our Spirituality
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- Session 4: Creates our Relationships
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- Session 6: Guides through our Statutes

MODULE VI: *Our Vincentian Conference*

- Session 1: Our Spirituality
- Session 2: Our Friendship
- Session 3: Our Service
- Session 4: Our Home Visits
- Session 5: Our Parish
- Session 6: Our Church

How to Lead the **“SERVING IN HOPE” –VIDEO/FORMATION GUIDE SERIES** *in a Conference*

INTRODUCTION

Leader describes to the group the process which is going to take place:

- Provide a copy of the Booklet for each member of your Conference for their personal reflection and notes, together with the Enrichment Reading section.
- Stress that sharing is not compulsory but encouraged, and mention the need for confidentiality.
- Ask, or assign, different members to read the different sections.

OPENING PRAYER/QUIETING DOWN PERIOD

Leader invites the group to:

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

SESSION

- 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.

QUIET PERIOD

Leader invites everyone:

- To quietly reflect on the readings (allow 1-2 minutes of silence).
- Introduces the suggested Discussion Question.

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

At the end of the session the Leader ends with the Closing Prayer.
(The process for each Session should take about 20 minutes. One Session at a time may be conducted at a Conference Meeting, or combined together for a Retreat Day.)

MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation

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MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation

SESSION 1.1:

What is a Vocation?

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will better:

- ① Appreciate the meaning of “vocation.”
- ② Articulate your “call” to be a Vincentian.
- ③ Understand your ministry of service as a “call” to put your faith into action.



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

"The two disciples heard what John the Baptist said, and followed Jesus. When Jesus turned around and noticed them following Him, he asked them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him 'Rabbi, where do you stay?' 'Come and See,' he answered." (John 1: 37-39)

INTRODUCTION:

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

The word "vocation" comes from the Latin vocare; which means "to call." Vocation is a "call" a personal summons from God to a human being, inviting the person to embark upon a specially chosen work relative to God's plan of salvation. As members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we have been "called" by God to a ministry of service to those who are poor, to bear witness to Jesus' compassionate love.

READING:

(Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States, p. 54)

It's not for everyone. It's not for anyone. But being a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul - being a Vincentian - is for some. It is a special calling by God. Blessed Frederic Ozanam says: "... what is proposed to us is the sublime vocation God has given us. Would that we were a little bit worthy of it and bent easily to its burden." (Letter #90)

St. Vincent de Paul said over and over again, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." The Church says: "The followers of Christ are called by God, not according to their accomplishments, but according to his own purpose and grace." (Lumen Gentium, #40)

A member of the Society puts his or her faith into action. The Vincentian vocation is the intimate desire to participate personally and directly in helping the needy by person-to-person contact and by the gift of one's heart and friendship, doing so within a Conference, a community of faith, of lay persons each inspired by the same vocation.

The Vincentian vocation may be expressed in many ways and with different shades of meaning. Practical translation of faith into action, meditating upon it and adapting it to our changing world is the very life of every Vincentian, the very life of the Society.

(Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that touched you - and make notes in the space provided.)

DISCUSSION:

Have you felt that being a Vincentian is a “vocation” - that you have been “called” by God to serve the poor?

CLOSING PRAYER: Let us pray together the words of St. Vincent:

“It is our vocation ... to set people’s hearts ablaze, to do what the Son of God did, to set it aflame with his love. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him.

I must love my neighbor as the image of God and the object of his love ... I must act in such a way that people love their Creator and each other in mutual charity for the love of God who loved them so much that he delivered up his own Son to death for them.” Amen

SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT de PAUL



PATRON SAINT
Saint Vincent de Paul
(1581-1660)



FOUNDER
Blessed Frederic Ozanam
(1813-1853)

ENRICHMENT READING:

(Please read before the next session.)

FREDERIC OZANAM'S VOCATION STORY

Frederic Ozanam was born in Milan, Italy on April 23, 1813, and at the age of three, his family moved to Lyon, France. When Frederic was 7 years old he nearly died of typhus. His parents had already faced the death of 8 of their children, but with a deeply rooted faith in God they prayed that Frederic would be cured, and by a miracle of grace he lived. Frederic's father was a doctor, and he often saw his father and mother leave, sometimes in the middle of the night, to take care of the sick and the dying. Their example gave him the wisdom and compassion that only comes from the witness of people's lives.

At the age of 16, while in college, Frederic suffered a severe crisis of faith. He questioned why he believed and he faced despair, depression and scruples. When the temptations became stronger and sharper, Frederic felt surrounded by darkness and he felt utterly alone. He prayed to the Holy Spirit; he asked for the gift of faith, the grace to believe, and when the crisis ended, he promised to consecrate his life to the defense of the faith and the service of truth.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

At the age of 18, Frederic went to Paris to attend the University. The post-revolutionary Paris was not merely anti-Catholic, it bristled with open hostility against anything Catholic or Christian. The young college students would often meet with their friend and mentor, Monsieur Emmanuel Bailly, to discuss and debate issues. One evening, at a meeting, the revolutionaries issued a challenge by saying, "Christianity is now outworn and defunct. It may have been useful in the past, but what use is it today? What has Christianity to offer? Where are its works now? Show us your works!"

"Show us your works," this pierced Frederic's heart and sent him to the poor. By grace, Ozanam knew the secret that service must be motivated by love and that assistance given to the poor must be given personally with sympathy, humility, compassion and respect. The lives of his parents had taught him this wisdom.

Frederic and his companions came to know that they needed to organize their works for the poor- they needed to organize formally to help the poor on a regular basis, both in order to serve the poor and in order that others could see the witness of their lives. And so on Tuesday evening, April 23, 1833, Frederic Ozanam, together with Emmanuel Bailly, Auguste Le Taillandier, Francois Lallier, Paul Lamache, Felix Clave and Jules Devaux, began the Conference of Charity and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was born.

Emmanuel Bailly sent Frederic and his companions to Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity. Sr. Rosalie gave them the names of families to visit in their homes. Pondering, she

looked at Frederic and said, "Because you see Christ in His poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility as His servant. But, 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 way 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 can bring them."

Frederic chose St. Vincent de Paul to be the patron saint of his new Society. He once said: "Even the revolutionaries admired St. Vincent, they forgave him the crime of having loved God." Frederic wrote: "To choose a patron saint does not mean simply adopting a figurehead which will help us to cut a good figure in the religious world. A patron is a model whom we must try to imitate, as he strove himself to imitate the Divine Model, Jesus Christ. It means trying to carry on the work he has started endeavoring to acquire something of his warmth of heart, attempting to catch up the threads of the thoughts which were in his brain. A patron saint provides a model for us to copy on this earth and a protector who will watch over us in heaven."

Frederic and Amelie

Frederic was named a professor at the Sorbonne when he was only 27 years old. He was the youngest to be named to this post. Frederic's faith that had been tried by fire, proved strong as he continued to face the prejudice and the anger of those who hated him in hating the church.

After many years discerning his vocation, thinking first that God was calling him to the priesthood, Frederic realized that marriage was his vocation and on June 23, 1841, when he was 28, he married Amelie Soulacroix who was 20. Then on July 7, 1845, they had a child whom they named Marie. Frederic had a deep conviction that marriage was indeed a sacrament and a vocation. The sacrament of marriage was a powerful means of holiness for Frederic and Amelie, as for countless Vincentians throughout the world. Frederic knew the poverty of poor health all his life, and his suffering led him further on the journey to a compassionate heart. It was Amelie's love and strength that supported Frederic during the painful years of suffering that he had to face. Amelie believed in Frederic's dream, in his vision of the Society, and when he became discouraged, she was always there to bring hope.

Legacy

The Rule of the Society evolved out of the life and faith of Frederic. Authentic Vincentian service assists the impoverished and the troubled but it is done in love and with love. As Vincent, Frederic knew that this is what our Lord asks of his followers, namely, that they seek and find Jesus in the poor. Vincentianism is Faith in Action: it is a reaching out in friendship and with helping hands to those who are poor or who are suffering. Vincentian helping is person-to-person, by a personal gift of the heart, in humility, simplicity and charity. Being a Vincentian is a vocation.

Frederic knew that service must promote human dignity and integrity, and that “No work of Charity would be foreign to the Society.” The Society was to be concerned not only with relieving need but also with redressing the situations that cause it, and so he advocated the concepts of Christian social justice, the rights and dignity of every individual and the need for equality of opportunity in education and employment.

Frederic taught that Vincentians must seek through prayer, meditation on the scripture, the teaching of the Church, through their daily lives, and in their relationship with those in need, to always bear witness to the love of God. And Frederic also knew, as Vincent did, that we do not go to the Lord, as if we were alone. We need a Christian community where members mutually encourage one another in loving God and neighbor.

Frederic possessed a faith conviction that a PROVIDENT GOD was guiding history and guiding his own personal journey. He always had a true devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. Therefore, it seems fitting that on the feast of the Birthday of the Blessed Mother on September 8, 1853 Frederic Ozanam died at the age of forty, having attained an authentic holiness through his life and work, knowing that God had indeed called him to be a Vincentian.

Notes

MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation

SESSION 1.2:

Vocation of the Laity

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will better:

- ① Understand the vocation of the laity in the Church.
- ② Appreciate the universal call to holiness.
- ③ Articulate how holiness is found in the midst of the world.



OPENING PRAYER:

"My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are children of your heavenly father, for his sun rises on the just and the unjust In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5: 44-48)

INTRODUCTION:

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

The lay Faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church's life. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church. God issues a vocation to holiness to each member of the laity, which is manifested in daily work and activity.

"The laity live in the world, ... They live in the ordinary conditions of life in the family and in society, from which the web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper role and being led by the spirit of the Gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity." (Lumen Gentium, #31)

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the universal call to holiness, that general call of God to all the baptized to a life of grace and union with Him. This vocation is the call that gives human life its meaning and its destiny beyond this life.

But, "Holiness is not limited to the sanctuary or to moments of private prayer; it is a call to direct our whole heart and life toward God and according to God's plan for this world. For the laity holiness is achieved in the midst of the world, in family, in community, in friendships, in work, in leisure, in citizenship. Through their competency and by their activity, lay men and women have the **vocation** to bring the fight of the Gospel to economic affairs, so that the world may be filled with the Spirit of Christ and may more effectively attain its destiny in justice, in love, and in peace." (Economic Justice for All, #332)

(Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that touched you - and make notes in the space provided.)

Notes

Session 1.2

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

READING:

(Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States, p.59)

Pope John Paul II says to the laity: "There cannot be two parallel lives in your existence as lay men and women: on the one hand, the so-called 'spiritual' life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called 'secular' life, that is, life in a family, at work, social responsibilities of public life and in culture.

The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility ... are the occasions ordained by Providence for a "continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity." (Christifideles Laici, #59)

Vocation also refers to the calling from God to follow a specific way of life. In particular, vocation is understood as God's call to a distinctive state of life such as married, single, religious or priestly. The Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders are thus designated Sacraments of Vocation.

(Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that touched you - and make notes in the space provided.)

DISCUSSION:

How have you found in your lay vocation the road to holiness that is practiced everyday in your home, office, and Conference?

CLOSING PRAYER: Let us close with the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam:

"Thus, friends, let us work on this earth, docile and submissive to the will of God without knowing what He is accomplishing through us. But He, the divine Artist, sees and knows. When He will show us the finished work of our life, of our toil and of our troubles, we shall then be thrown into ecstasy and we shall bless Him for deigning to accept and place our poor works in His eternal mansion." Amen

ENRICHMENT READING:

(Please read before the next session.)

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND THE VINCENTIAN VOCATION**St. Vincent de Paul**

In 1617, Divine Providence called an ordinary man to an extraordinary mission, by touching the heart of Vincent de Paul and leading him to the service of the suffering and destitute poor of the villages of France. In the small village of Chatillon-les-Dombes, Vincent founded the Confraternities of Charity (Ladies of Charity), ordinary lay women in the parishes who served the sick in their homes. In 1625, he founded his community of priests, the Congregation of the Mission, to evangelize the poor. And in 1633, Divine Providence gave an ordinary woman an extraordinary mission, by touching the heart of **Louise de Marillac**. Together with Vincent, she co-founded the Daughters of Charity, to serve the poor through health, education and social ministries.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam

In 1833, Divine Providence once again called an ordinary man to an extraordinary mission, by touching the heart of Frederic Ozanam to bring hope to the hopeless in the streets of Paris. Frederic was mentored in serving the poor by another ordinary woman with an extraordinary mission, **Sister Rosalie Rendu**, a Daughter of Charity working in the slums of Paris. Frederic Ozanam, together with his companions, founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and they soon found that “no work was foreign to the Society.” In 1845 Divine Providence led the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to the United States, with the first Conference in St. Louis, Missouri.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul-Today

As we begin a new millennium, Divine Providence continues to call ordinary men and women to an extraordinary mission as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul continues to bring hope to the poor and suffering in the spirit of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and St. Vincent de Paul. Indeed, our Vincentian Vocation roots us in the Church, as we answer the call of the Second Vatican Council:

“The joys and hopes, griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” (Gaudium et Spes, #1)

Vocation of the Laity

The Council indeed brought joy and hope into our lives, by giving us the grace to see the Church as mystery, sacrament, and communion-the presence of Christ in the world, not just as an institution or organization. It encouraged us to see the Church not as something outside ourselves, composed of hierarchy, clergy, and religious alone, but as the whole People of God of which we are all a part. It clarified and developed the call of the lay vocation in the Church today. It stressed the Church's eternal responsibility to be an instrument of social justice, human rights, and peace. Finally, the Council expanded both our earthly and eternal horizons so that we might recognize that God's saving grace touches all people of good will.

The Council indeed opened the Church to the grace of the vocation of the laity, and therefore the following documents will be used throughout the Serving In Hope: Formation Guides:

- *Lumen Gentium* ("Light of All Nations") 1964 :
The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
- *Gaudium et Spes* ("Joy and Hope") 1965:
The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
- *Apostolicam Actuositatem* ("Lay Apostle") 1965:
Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity
- *Christifideles Laici* ("Christ's Faithful People") 1988: The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People (Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II)

The Vocation of the Laity in the Church and in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, begins with our Christian "vocation" given to us at Baptism. The common grounding in baptism paves the way for an adequate understanding for all followers of Jesus: we are called to discipleship and to share in Christ's ministry. Baptism establishes a personal relationship with Jesus. It also incorporates us into the community of believers-the Church. It effects the forgiveness of sins and marks the beginning of a new life as the brother or sister of Jesus, and as a son or daughter of God. The baptized truly can pray: "Our Father who are in heaven ... "

THE VINCENTIAN VOCATION

A mission statement describes the unique purpose in the life of an organization.

It captures the values and the inspiration of the vision given to the members.

Our **Mission Statement** captures the grace of our Vincentian Vocation:

Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,
a Catholic lay organization,
leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually
by offering person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering
in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam,
and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

As a reflection of the whole family of God,
members, who are known as Vincentians,
are drawn from every ethnic and cultural background,
age group and economic level.

Vincentians are united in an international society of charity
by their spirit of poverty, humility and sharing,
which is nourished by prayer and reflection,
mutually supportive gatherings and adherence to a basic Rule.

Organized locally Vincentians witness God's love
by embracing all works of charity and justice.
The Society collaborates with other people of good will
in relieving need and addressing its causes,
making no distinction in those served because, in them,
VINCENTIANS SEE THE FACE OF CHRIST.

MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation

SESSION 1.3:

The Vocation of St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will better:

- ① Appreciate the vocation of Vincent to the priesthood.
- ② Understand the call of Vincent to serve the poor.
- ③ Appreciate the vocation of Frederic to marriage.
- ④ Identify the call of Frederic to found the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.



OPENING PRAYER:

As he made his way along the Sea of Galilee, he observed Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said, "Come and follow me; I will make you fishers of men." They immediately abandoned their nets and became his followers. (Mk 1:18)

INTRODUCTION:

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

The Vocation of Vincent de Paul

As a young man, Vincent de Paul began his studies to become a priest. Priesthood in that era was more of a career choice than a vocation, as it offered a chance for advancement and security. He was ordained at the age of 19, and was a very ambitious young priest hoping to inherit a benefice that would give him an early retirement.

He went to Paris and secured a post as a chaplain at the royal court of Queen Marguerite. He was moving along quite well in his career, and eventually he became the chaplain to one of the most prestigious families in Europe. He would visit the vast estates of the de Gondi family, and during a visit to Folleville he heard the confession of a dying man. Touched by this event, he conducted a parish mission on the general confession of one's life, and discovered his own mission. He then went to a small town, Chatillon-les-Dombes, where he established the first Confraternity of Charity, to serve the poor in their homes.

During this time, Vincent was suffering a dark night of the soul, and he promised God that if he would take away this darkness he would dedicate his life to the service of the poor. God immediately took away the anguish and it never returned. Vincent was 36 years old, and 17 years a priest before he found his true vocation. He faithfully fulfilled his vow to the poor till the day he died.

(Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that touched you - and make notes in the space provided.)

The Vocation of Frederic Ozanam

Frederic Ozanam was from a very devout Catholic family, and his parents taught him a deep love of God and the poor. As a young man in Lyon, France Frederic suffered a crisis of faith, and Frederic promised God that if his faith was restored, he would give his life to the service of truth. The doubts vanished, and Frederic became strengthened in the faith that he so loved, and he remained faithful to his promise for his entire life.

Frederic moved to Paris to study law at the Sorbonne. At this time, there were many attacks of anti-catholicism and anticlericalism. He joined the Conference of History, under the mentorship of Emmanuel Bailly. At one of their meetings, a challenge was issued to the members to show their faith by alleviating the needs of the suffering poor and to promote social justice in the church and society. This drove Frederic to the poor, and in 1833, on his twentieth birthday, six students together with Emmanuel Bailly, formed the Conference of Charity and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was born.

After first considering a vocation to the priesthood, and after many years of discernment he came to understand that it was God's will that he serve God and the church as a layman. When Frederic was 28 years old, he met Amelie Soulacroix, they were married on June 23, 1841. After four years, they had a daughter, Marie, their only child. Frederic came to know that he had found his true vocation in the sacrament of marriage.

To Frederic was granted the grace of balancing the commitments to marriage and family, together with the call to serve the poor through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a grace he was faithful to all of his life.

(Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that touched you - and make notes in the space provided.)

DISCUSSION:

Tell your own "vocation" story. Is there any relationship, or similarity, between your life and Vincent/Frederic?

CLOSING PRAYER: Let us pray the words of Cardinal Newman (*US Manual*, p. 3):

“God has created me to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission- I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next ... I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do his work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep his commandments and serve him in my calling.” Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (*Please read before the next session.*)

VINCENT de PAUL'S VOCATION STORY

Vincent de Paul was born in the southwest of France in the little village of Pouy. He was the third of six children, having 3 brothers and 2 sisters. His parents belonged to the peasant class, and they struggled to make a living for the family by farming the land. Life was hard, but the family was rooted in a deep faith in God. Vincent was smart, and so his parents decided to send him to school in order that he could become a priest. Priesthood in that day was more of a career than a vocation. Priesthood opened doors to prestige and money, and the expectation was that Vincent would then be able to take care of his family.

Priesthood

His parents even sold a pair of oxen in order to be able to finance his education- a considerable sacrifice for a poor farm family. So Vincent went off to school and was ordained at the age of 19. It is evident from the fact that he was ordained about 5 years earlier than most, that Vincent was not only intelligent, but he was also clever and persuasive. Vincent was a very ambitious young priest, he was determined to be successful and to get an office in the Church from which he could get enough money to take care of himself and to return to help his mother and his family.

Paris

Eight years after ordination, at the age of 27, and still empty handed in his quest for the rewards of a Church benefice, Vincent left the south of France and came to Paris, hoping that the city would offer him more opportunities for advancement. Within a few years he became a Chaplain in the Court of the Queen of France, and a tutor and chaplain to one of the wealthiest and most influential families of France, the de Gondi's.

Vincent was now about 33 years old and moving along quite well in his career. But, just as Vincent thought he was secure in his position and influence at the court, some one accused him of a theft. Vincent was innocent, as was later proved, but the accusation was

devastating because judgments were formed immediately. Vincent began to see his world collapse and all that he had built up: his reputation, his influence, his power, everything he had built his hopes on—that he had thought so important—seemed to crumble. The astounding thing is that Vincent remained silent and he did not try to defend himself.

It was also at this time that Vincent began to face the darkness of doubt against his faith, a darkness that lasted for almost four years. But Providence was leading the way, even though he did not yet understand. God sent special people into Vincent's life who loved him and challenged him, friends who were his spiritual directors, mentors and guides. The pain and struggle of these years slowly revealed to Vincent his own poverty, and in this poverty deep down, he was coming to know the mercy of God—the God of compassion.

Conversion

In 1617, at the request of Madame de Gondi, Vincent went to Folleville to minister to the peasants that worked on the de Gondi estates. It was here that Vincent heard the confession of a dying man. Vincent became struck with the reality that had he not been sent to Folleville, the dying man would have died in despair not knowing that there was a God who loved him and forgave him. In fact, he would have died without knowing the mercy of God.

Vincent pondered all of this, in order for the poor to find God, the poor needed good priests. Slowly, Vincent was being led to the poor, to the peasants, to the very place from which he had spent all these years running away. And finally rooted in the faith that God was sending him to the poor, he surrendered. And in that surrender to be God's servant of the poor, all of his doubts against faith vanished.

Vincent then went to a town named Chatillon-les-Dombes, and he tells us the story: "... whilst I was living in (Chatillon) a little town near Lyon, to which God had called me to be the parish priest, one Sunday, when I was vesting for Mass, I was told that in an isolated house, everybody was ill; that there was not even one of them who could render any assistance to the others, and all were in an expressible state of poverty and indigence. This news touched me to the heart. I did not fail to commend them affectionately to the charity of the congregation in the course of the sermon, and God, touching the hearts of those who heard me, moved them with compassion for those poor afflicted people."

This simple story holds in many ways the secret of Vincent and how his life became mission driven. First, Vincent had finally come to know that his priesthood was a vocation, not a career, and therefore he knew he had been sent by God to Chatillon. It was God's work, God's mission that he was called to do. And the secret lies in the one line: "This news touched me to the heart". When Vincent told the story of the poor family, he spoke from his heart, not his head. He didn't tell them that they should do something, he only told them how the poor family was suffering. When Vincent spoke about the poor, Vincent's heart was so transparent that others could see the faces of the poor and they could feel the pain that was in their hearts.

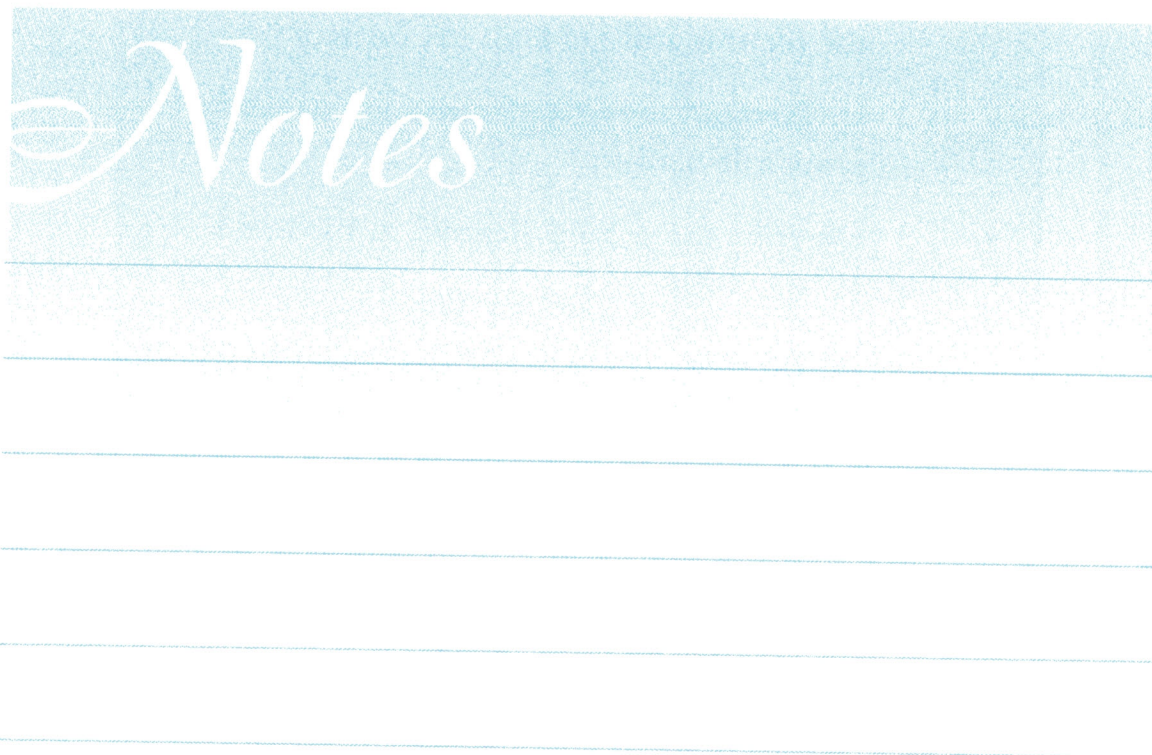
As the story continued, Vincent went to see the family and with his own eyes he saw how God evoked compassion and touched the goodness in people's heart. In awe Vincent tells of the "regular procession of people" that was unleashed, of people who wanted to help. Vincent learned to believe and to trust in the goodness that was in people's hearts, a goodness that only had to be evoked. It was in Chatillon, in 1617, that Vincent founded the Ladies of Charity and sent them on mission to serve the poor.

Apostle of Charity

Vincent was 36 years old and had been a priest for 17 years, before he surrendered his life to the poor, and his doubts against faith vanished. He then became the "Apostle of Charity." He founded his community of priests and brothers, the Congregation of the Mission in 1625, and sent them to bring good news to the poor and to educate the clergy.

God then sent Vincent to Louise de Marillac, a woman who had also learned compassion through years of suffering. Together they founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633, a community of women who dedicate their lives to serve the poor through health, education and social ministry.

Vincent de Paul faithfully served the poor for 43 years: the refugees and beggars, the sick and the dying, orphans, indeed he touched and brought healing to every form of poverty and destitution. Vincent died September 27, 1660 and the Church has named him the "Universal Patron of Charity."



Notes

MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation

SESSION 1.4:

The Essential Elements of the Society

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have
greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate the role of Emmanuel Bailly as the mentor and guide to the Society.
- ② Understand the first element as the call to grow spiritually.
- ③ Describe the second element as the bond of friendship.
- ④ Identify the third element as person to person service.



OPENING PRAYER:

I give you a new commandment: Love one another; such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

INTRODUCTION:

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

In 1835, when the *Rule of the Society* was first written and approved, Emmanuel Bailly (founding member, first Conference President) wrote the introduction. It should be remembered that Frederic Ozanam and the other founding members of the Society looked to Bailly as their mentor and guide. It was his thinking, advice and influence that formed the first Conference into the working model for the *Rule*. In the introduction to the first version of the *Rule*, Bailly pointed out what he referred to as the *Object of a Conference*. Over the years, these have been summarized into the *Essential Elements of the Conference of Charity*.

READING:

(Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States, p.50)

Element I: 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;

We must make an effort to grow spiritually in order to keep the spark of inspiration alive. We must also encourage others to do so. This includes the other members of our Conference as well as those we serve.

Element II: Faith Community

- to bring together men and women 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;

The Society hopes to develop a community of faith among the members. The objective of the Society is to develop a bond that goes deeper than just team work. The friendship that is sought should be developed both among the members as well as with those we serve.

Notes

Session 1.4

Element III: 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.

Person-to-person service by our members is what the Society emphasizes. Our members also strive to serve God in others with the best way possible, no matter how long it takes. The focus is on quality of service, not quantity.

The **Essential Elements** identify who we are and why we exist. They are more than three independent qualities or reasons for existence. Vincentianism calls for an integration of all three.

- Focus on spirituality only is not Vincentianism. You can join any number of organizations or third orders if spirituality is your only concern.

- Focus on fellowship only is not Vincentianism. Look within your parish and outside and you will find lots of organizations that are socially focused.

- Focus on service only is not Vincentianism. Look in the phone book. In most major cities, you will find somewhere in the area of 300 non-profits who are looking for people to provide service.

When we speak of Vincentianism, we speak of a blend of spirituality, fellowship and service. This is who we are. This is why we exist.

(Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that touched you - and make notes in the space provided.)

DISCUSSION:

How do you see the three Essential Elements integrated in your Conference? Is there an element that needs to be strengthened?

CLOSING PRAYER:

My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, "Good-bye and good luck! Keep warm and well fed," but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that? So it is with faith that does nothing in practice. It is thoroughly lifeless You must perceive that a person is justified by his works and not by faith alone. Be assured, then, that faith without works is as dead as a body without breath. Amen (James 2:14-17,24,26)

ENRICHMENT READING:

(Please read before the next session.)

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A CONFERENCE

In 1835, when the *Rule of the Society* was first written and approved, Emmanuel Bailly (founding member, first Conference President) wrote the introduction. It should be remembered that Frederic Ozanam and the other founding members of the Society looked to Bailly as their mentor and guide. It was his thinking, advice and influence that formed the first Conference into the working model for the *Rule*. In the introduction to the first version of the *Rule*, Bailly pointed out what he referred to as the *Object of a Conference*. The object was fivefold: the first having to do with mutual example and friendship, the second dealing with visiting "the poor at their dwellings," and the last three dealing with matters of faith and spirituality. Over the years, the *Object of the Conference* has been summarized into the *Essential Elements of the Conference of Charity*.

Element I: 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;

There are multiple meanings built into the first element: bearing witness, faith that inspires, work for the good of humanity. Our faith is what is behind what we do. It is our inspiration — our motivation. As Vincentians, we are expected to bear witness to this in our actions and words. The works we do are basically the fruit of our faith. Our faith is not something that simply exists. It must be fed, it must be nurtured, it must grow. If we are not doing something actively to help it grow, it will, in fact, deteriorate and die. Implied in the first element is that we must be doing something actively as Vincentians to build ourselves up spiritually in order to be able to be inspired and motivated by our faith. Thus we have a strong emphasis within our ministry toward spiritual growth and understanding *Vincentian* spirituality.

As part of bearing witness to our faith, we also encourage those whom we visit to grow in their faith as well. This does not mean that our purpose is to convert those we serve to Catholicism. It means that we should try to inspire them to grow closer to God.

So, the first element calls us: to grow in spirituality; to allow that spirituality to inspire and motivate us; and to encourage others to grow closer to God.

Element II: FAITH COMMUNITY

- to bring together men and women 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;

“To bring together men and women of good will” — for the first 135 years that the Society existed, it was formally an organization of all men. In 1968, in the wisdom of our international leadership, women were welcomed into the Society as full members. Today, women are actively involved in all aspects of the Society.

Our purpose in bringing together these men and women is to assist them by “mutual example and true friendship.” There is a lot to be said for those words. It is different from a simple working relationship or basic teamwork. We are hoping that the relationships that we develop between our members actually become friendships. In a friendship, there exists a level of confidence and trust that does not exist in other relationships. We are hoping for a bond to be established between our members.

Friendship is also what we promote between our Vincentians and those we serve. From the beginnings of the Society, developing a friendship with those we serve was part of our mode of operation. Frederic Ozanam and the other members of the Society focused their works on adopting families and staying with them for however long they were in crisis. Developing a friendship with those families was essential to helping them through this process. Today, it is with those individuals and families that we see often that we have an opportunity to develop friendships. After all, not many people are willing to take *good advice* from strangers — no matter who they represent. Fellowship is an important part of who we are as Vincentians.

Then, again, in the second element, we emphasize the spiritual nature of our ministry — “to draw nearer to the Divine Model.” We must grow spiritually in and through this ministry in order to serve our Lord better.

Element III: 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.

“To establish a personal contact” particularly identifies the mode of the work we do. It is in person-to-person contact that we serve. The members of the Society are expected to personally perform our works of charity. We are not to give our funds to others to do their works no matter how good these works may be. We are not to hire people to do our works of charity for us. Vincentians must be involved directly in the works we do.

We are often thought of as an organization that “serves the poor.” This is correct but incomplete. We are called to serve “those who suffer” which pulls financial status out of the picture. Our service to others often takes on many different looks besides providing material support for someone. In many cases, we are called to be good listeners — we may have brought food to a person or family but what they really wanted was someone who would just listen to their story and show them compassion. Many times we are called on simply for a caring and loving touch, an understanding smile. Those we serve may need emotional support regardless of their financial status. We are here for all who are suffering.

We are asked “to bring to the latter the most efficacious and charitable aid possible.” The key-word here is *efficacious*. We are not asked to be efficient. A St. Vincent de Paul Conference is a work of charity — not a business. We do not expect efficiency in operation. We expect our Vincentians to provide the highest quality of service possible to those in need regardless of how much time is involved. The word *efficacious* refers to quality. Our focus is to be on who we are serving rather than what we are doing. Our focus is to be on who we are serving rather than how many we are serving.

The Society does operate special works such as thrift stores, free dining rooms, etc. These special works do require a certain amount of efficiency to be built into the operations. But, once again, if contact is specifically being made with someone we are serving, our emphasis must be on quality of service rather than on the number of people we can process in the shortest period of time. Efficacy always overshadows efficiency. Serving those in need in the best possible way is what the third element is about.

MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation

SESSION 1.5:

The Core Values of the Society

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will better:

- ① Appreciate the principles central to the creed and ministry of the Society.
- ② Articulate how the Core Values are lived in your Conference.



OPENING PRAYER:

"Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure. Moths and rust corrode; thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure, which neither moths nor rust corrode nor thieves break in and steal. Remember, where your treasure is, there your heart is also." (Matthew 6:19-22)

INTRODUCTION:

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul adheres to a group of **Core Values:**
(*Manual at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States*, p. 2)

Growth in intimacy with Jesus is a life-long process

Jesus calls each of us to conversion and renewal. Meditation on the Gospel readings lead us to growth in intimacy with Jesus.

Prayer is Essential: personal and communal

Private prayer and prayer in common, e.g., in the Conference, in one's family and the Eucharist, are essential to the life of a Vincentian.

The dignity of the human person

Vincentians believe that respect and love of each human person is rooted in their dignity as a child of God.

The preferential option for the poor

Whatever choice in life others make, ours is for the poor. We should honestly identify the way in which our life and works will have a real effect on the poor, the most abandoned, in society.

The identification of Jesus with the poor

Our Mission Statement calls us to: "... make no distinction in those served because, in them, Vincentians see the face of Christ."

The virtue of humility: personal and corporate

Humility is truth in thought, word and deed. Blessed Frederic referred to the Society as the "little Society," rooting us in humility.

Poverty in spirit is the primary Beatitude

Poverty of spirit leads us to trust in God's love for us. We are then able to serve the poor with compassion.

The virtue of simplicity

Simplicity gives us the grace of purity of intention: doing everything for the love of God and for no other reason.

Jesus is the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor

In the mind of St. Vincent, the image of Jesus was Jesus, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.

Divine Providence

St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic trusted that God was truly providing for them, always acting in their lives and in the lives of the poor.

Friendship

Frederic told his followers that one of the essential principles of being a member of the Society is friendship.

Community

Conferences are communities of faith from which members go forth as apostles and servants of the poor.

The Society is concerned with charity and justice

We are called to be advocates, to be a voice for the voiceless and to bring hope to the hopeless.

The virtue of charity within and outside of the Society

Charity begins at home, which means that members of the Society must be genuinely charitable to each other in their Conferences and Councils.

Solidarity

One powerful way to effect solidarity is by home visits – entering the homes of the poor and spending time with them.

(Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that strike you - and make notes in the space provided.)

DISCUSSION:

How have you seen these Core Values lived in your Conference? Which value(s) pose the greatest challenge for you and your Conference?

CLOSING PRAYER: Let us pray the words of Blessed Frederic:

“Help becomes honorable, because it may become mutual, because every one who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation today, 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 the indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves toward you when the old man, the mother, the little children shall have prayed for you.” Amen (October 21, 1848)

ENRICHMENT READING:

(Please read before the next session.)

THE CORE VALUES OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL**I. HOLINESS OF LIFE****Growth in intimacy with Jesus is a life-long process**

The first objective of the Society is growth in holiness of life, the universal call of the Church. This growth is a life-long process; it does not happen overnight or in a short period of time. Jesus calls each of us to on-going conversion and renewal.

Prayer is Essential: personal and communal

Vincent calls his followers to be contemplatives in action. Prayer nourishes ministry, as ministry nourishes prayer. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the spiritual life for us, as it was in the lives of St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic. The Patroness of the Society is the Blessed Virgin Mary under her title of the Immaculate Conception (December 8th). Members of the Society traditionally have held a special devotion to Mary.

II. SERVICE OF THE POOR**The dignity of the human person**

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the person is the foundation of all the principles of the social teaching of the Church. The dignity of the human person was one of the basic principles in the ministry of St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic.

The preferential option of the poor

In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Good Samaritan, and instructs us to concern ourselves firstly with the needs of the poor and vulnerable whoever and wherever they may be. This is our preferential option: To be the one who treated him with compassion (Lk 10:37).

The identification of Jesus with the poor

Both St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic remind us that Jesus is represented to us by the poor. Vincent tells us that it will be by the light of faith that we will see this: Jesus identifies himself with the poor in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 25:31-46. “As often as you did it for one of my least brothers or sisters, you did it for me.”

III. HUMILITY

The virtue of humility: personal and corporate

Humility was one of the primary virtues of Jesus, therefore, in the minds of Vincent and Frederic, one of the primary virtues for all their followers. Their lives were rooted in humility to a heroic degree. Humility is truth in thought, word and deed. Both men taught that humility should be “obligatory” for groups as well as for individuals. If a group did not manifest humility, it should cease to exist; that is one reason Frederic referred over and over again to the “little Society.”

Poverty in spirit is the primary Beatitude

The first Beatitude – the first attitude of being – is poverty in spirit. If we are not poor in fact, we all can develop the attitude of poverty in spirit. The saints tell us that primarily this means humble surrender to God. This is the attitude that impels us to trust God totally. It means, too, that we do not allow possessions to control us.

IV. SIMPLICITY

The virtue of simplicity

Simplicity traditionally has radiated throughout the Society since its foundation. It consists in referring things to God alone, a purity of intention: doing everything for the love of God and for no other reason. Simplicity was Vincent’s favorite virtue.

Jesus is the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor

In the mind of St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic, Jesus was the “Center and Rule” of their lives and ministry. Jesus was the one driving force in their lives. Their image of Jesus was Jesus, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor. Jesus as the “Rule” of one’s life means a specific lifestyle involving attitudes, habits and behaviors of every day living.

Divine Providence

St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic trusted that God was truly providing for them, always acting in their lives and in the lives of others – that God’s will was being accomplished. Both men caution us not to run ahead of Providence but to let God direct us.

V. COMMUNITY OF FAITH

Friendship

Frederic reminds his followers that one of the essential principles of being a member of the Society is friendship. Members are to be friends in and out of the Conference or Council activity, friends with the poor, friends with God.

Community

Members of Conferences and Councils are men and women of faith. Conferences basically are communities of faith from which members go forth as apostles and servants of the poor. Faithful attendance at Society meetings helps to strengthen our Vincentian Vocation.

VI. CHARITY**The Society is concerned with charity and justice**


St. Vincent teaches that charity is not charity if unaccompanied by justice. Blessed Frederic says that the whole order of society is based on justice and charity. The Society is concerned not only with the alleviation of poverty but with the eradication of its causes.

The virtue of charity within and outside of the Society

Charity is to be practiced within the Society as well as outside of itself. Members of the Society must be genuinely charitable to each other in their Conferences and Councils. There is no room for duplicity. Divisions and disunity over personalities, ideologies and politics have no room in the Conference. They are the cause of scandal.

Solidarity

The Holy Father calls solidarity a virtue and relates it to charity. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that loving our neighbor has global dimensions in an interdependent world. One powerful way to effect solidarity is by home visits – entering the homes of the poor and spending time with them.



MODULE I

Our Vincentian Vocation

SESSION 1.6:

The Mission of the Society

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will better:

- ① Appreciate the Mission Statement of the Society.
- ② Describe the key words found in the Mission Statement.
- ③ Understand how the Mission inspires the vision of the Society.



OPENING PRAYER:

"I call you friends ... It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure, so that all you ask the Father in my name he will give you. The command I give you is this, that you love one another." (John 15:15-17)

INTRODUCTION:

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

A Mission Statement describes the unique purpose for the organization. It captures the values and virtues of the members, and inspires the vision and all decision making.

The Mission Statement of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul:

"Inspired by **Gospel values**, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a **Catholic lay** organization, leads women and men to join together to **grow spiritually** by offering **person-to-person** service to those who are **needy and suffering** in the tradition of its **founder**, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and **patron**, Saint Vincent de Paul." (Paragraph 1)

- **Gospel values:** Jesus is the driving force in St. Vincent's life. He calls Jesus the center of his life and activity. Jesus is the source and model for all Vincentians.
- **Catholic and lay:** The Society is a Catholic lay organization based on Catholic beliefs and principles. Vincentians respond to the call to live out their lay vocation through the ministry of the Society.
- **Grow spiritually:** Vincentians are called to journey together toward holiness, to be on fire with the love of God.
- **Person-to-person:** Vincentians must be involved directly in the works they do.
- **Needy and suffering:** Our service to others often involves many different activities besides providing material support for someone. We are called to be good listeners, always bringing care and compassion.
- **Founder:** The spirituality of the members is inspired by Blessed Frederic Ozanam who sought to renew faith in Christ and the Church. His vision was to establish a network of charity and social justice encircling the world.
- **Patron:** The Society has been placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul, the members are inspired by his spirituality, manifest his attitudes, his thoughts, his example and his works.

(Pause in silence for reflection, underline the words/phrases that strike you and make notes in the space provided.)

Mission Statement of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (continued):

“As a reflection of the whole **family of God**, members, who are known as Vincentians, are drawn from every ethnic and cultural background, age group and economic level.”

Vincentians are united in an **international** society of charity by their spirit of **poverty, humility and sharing**, which is nourished by **prayer and reflection, mutually supportive gatherings** and adherence to a basic **Rule**.

Organized locally Vincentians witness God’s love by embracing all works of **charity and justice**. The Society collaborates with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes, making no distinction in those served because, in them, **Vincentians see the face of Christ**. (Paragraphs 2-4)

- **Family of God:** The Society is rooted in the belief that God is our Father, and we are therefore all brothers and sisters.
- **Poverty, humility, sharing, prayer and reflection, mutually supportive gatherings ... charity and justice:** These are our Core Values.
- **Rule:** The Rule was written down in 1835, based on the practical experiences of the first Vincentians. It gives us regulations that preserve the objectives and spirit of the original foundation.
- **Vincentians see the face of Christ:** The vocation of the Vincentian is to follow Christ through serving those in need and so bear witness to his compassionate and tender love. Vincentians **Serve in Hope**.

(Pause in silence for reflection.)

DISCUSSION:

What key words speak to your heart the most?

CLOSING PRAYER: Let us pray the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

“We must do what is agreeable to God. Therefore, we must do what our Lord Jesus Christ did when preaching the Gospel. LET US GO TO THE POOR!” Amen (April 23, 1833)

ENRICHMENT READING:**THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL****(Excerpts from “Praying with Frederic Ozanam”, by Fr. Ronald Ramson, CM)**

In 1831, the eighteen-year old Frederic moved to Paris, a city that was then dirty, gloomy, and overpopulated. In deference to the wishes of his father, Frederic enrolled in the school of law. Dr. Ozanam's dream was that his son would one day hold a position on the royal court of justice. Law was not Frederic's preference; his heart's desires were literature and history. He would fulfill those desires later.

While studying at the Sorbonne, Frederic met both friend and foe. He became acquainted with the shining lights of nineteenth-century French Catholicism ... and at the same time, in the lecture halls and corridors of the university, Frederic heard and felt the attacks of anti-Catholicism and anticlericalism. These were voiced by professors who enjoyed the sport of scorning the church and ridiculing those students whom they suspected of being practicing Catholics. In a short time, Frederic gathered a small group of students with similar feelings and convictions as himself, young men of an ardent and living faith. Their corporate unity and courage helped them to counter hostile attacks against the truths of the faith.

The Conference of History

Frederic collaborated with Emmanuel Bailly, editor of the *Catholic Tribune*, in forming the Conferences of History, which met every Saturday. At a particular meeting in the spring of 1833, Frederic and the others were challenged by a proponent of Saint-Simonism, which declared that doctrines and creeds were unimportant and that society moved strictly by social and economic forces. One Saturday, during a heated verbal exchange, Jean Broet, a student and follower of the doctrine of Saint-Simonism, challenged Ozanam and his friends: “We agree that at one time your Church was a great Church and was a source of good. But what is your Church doing now? What is she doing for the poor? Show us your works and we will believe you.” Saint-Simon challenged Christianity to establish a more equitable and just social order.

Frederic knew in his heart that his challenger was right. In spite of the good done socially and academically for members of the Conference of History, Frederic said that “one thing is wanting ... works of charity. The blessing of the poor is the blessing of God.” Frederic and several friends decided to meet the following week to see what they might do.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

On the evening of 23 April 1833, Frederic's twentieth birthday, six students - Augustine Le Tallandier, Francois Lallier, Felix Clave, Jules Devaux, Paul Lamache, Frederic Ozanam and their mentor, Emmanuel Bailly, met in the offices of the *Catholic Tribune*. Ozanam had accepted the challenge, and his words moved the others present: “We must do what is agreeable to God. Therefore, we must do what our Lord Jesus Christ did preaching the gospel! Let us go to the poor!” On that night the Conference of Charity was born. Frederic Ozanam was the primary founder, inspiration, and soul of the Conference.

The students selected Bailly, the married adult, as President, a position he would hold for eleven years. At first, they referred to themselves as *The Conference of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul* to parallel their *Conference of History*; the latter was their social and study group, the former their service group. In a short time, they changed their name to *The Society of St. Vincent de Paul*. They retained the term *Conference* to refer to the individual unit which was usually parish-based.

The charter Vincentians sought out Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, for her assistance and suggestions in ministering to God's poor. Sr. Rosalie taught them how to minister to the suffering with gentleness and kindness and to respect their God-given dignity. It was she who introduced them to the correct use of vouchers for the poor.

Growth

Amazingly, the Conference began to mushroom. During the first five years, membership increased to more than two thousand in fifteen centers throughout France. The Society took fire from the spark within its membership. Members of the Society refer to their individual groups as Conferences and to themselves as Vincentians. From the beginning the key to their ministry to the poor and needy was home visitation. Members would always go in pairs to the homes of the poor after the exhortation of Jesus who sent his Apostles and disciples two by two to continue the mission.

No form of charity was foreign to the Society. Not only did Frederic and the others take care of the physical and material needs of others (food, shelter, clothing, firewood), they also involved themselves with tutoring, even setting up libraries for members of the military. During the bloody skirmishes, Vincentians attended to the wounded and the dying. In every work, members of the Society were solicitous to the spiritual and moral welfare of others.

Frederic, during his lifetime, witnessed the establishment of the Society in Italy, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, England, Germany, the United States, Holland, Greece, Turkey, Jerusalem, Switzerland, Austria, Mexico and Canada.

Indeed, Frederic Ozanam could say: "*Our little Society of St. Vincent de Paul has grown large enough to be considered A PROVIDENTIAL FACT...*"



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Serving in Hope

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