

# *Serving in Hope*

## MODULE II



# *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

## Video/Formation Guide

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



In those who are poor . . .

# *Vincentian see the face of Christ*



*“Amen, I say to you, whatever  
you did for one of these least brothers or sisters  
of mine, you did for ME.”*

(Matthew 25: 31-46)

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

First Printing: August 2003  
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# *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*

## VIDEO/FORMATION GUIDE SERIES

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**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 2:** Society of St. Vincent de Paul

**Session 3:** The Rule

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**Session 3:** Encourages our Community of Faith

**Session 4:** Creates our Relationships

**Session 5:** Demands our Work for Justice

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### 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 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 the Session.

## **OPENING PRAYER/QUIETING DOWN PERIOD**

**Leader invites group to:**

- Become relaxed and aware of God's presence with us.
- 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: (allow 1-2min of silence)**

- To quietly reflect on the readings.
- 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 closes with the Closing Prayer.  
(The process for each Session should take about 15-20 minutes. One Session at a time may be conducted at a Conference Meeting, or combined together for a Retreat Day.)



## MODULE II

### *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

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## MODULE II

### *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

## SESSION 2.1:

### *Vincentian Charism*

#### Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will better:

- ① Understand the meaning of “charism.”
- ② Identify the essence of our Vincentian charism.
- ③ Appreciate the charism of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.





**OPENING PRAYER: (Together)**

*There are different gifts but the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord; there are different works but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ... But it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills. (1 Cor.12:4-11)*

**INTRODUCTION:**

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

The word “charism” is from the Greek and means “favor” or “free gift.” As a genuine gift, it is not earned or merited; it has to be freely given by the giver and graciously accepted by the receiver. Charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit, and manifest the work of God for the common good of the body of believers, the Church. These charisms are intended to be at the service of charity: the good of people and the needs of the world. (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* #799)

In the course of his life and ministry, Vincent came to see that his charism—the gift given him by the Holy Spirit to use for building up the Church—was to preach the good news to the poor and to make the love of God a reality in the lives of the poor. Vincent’s charism is captured in the grace of “finding the face of Christ in the poor.”

Jesus stands at the center of our Vincentian charism. Jesus’ words, “You will always have the poor with you,” are the *raison d’être* for Vincentian existence. The poor are the “preferential option” for Vincentians. Vincentians seek their holiness in the service of the poor.

The fire and light of St. Vincent’s and Bl. Frederic’s charism is lived out in our actions, by our person to person ministry and our home visits. It is there that we show respect for the dignity and integrity of the poor as we serve in charity and justice.

God’s grace strengthens, supports and energizes the practice of our Vincentian charism which is rooted in the words of Jesus and exemplified in the lives and ministry of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

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



# Notes

## Session 2.1

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

Letter from **Pope John Paul II** on February 14, 2001, to Mr. José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha, International President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul:

The St. Vincent de Paul Society represents an outstanding form of Charity that is carried out on all the continents; the service of the poor which, as St. Vincent loved to recall, is a way of serving Christ. Through its daily commitment, **the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a constant reminder to the Church of its vocation to show Christ's preferential love for its poor.** This vocation fills the Church's life, prayer and action, inviting her to make her own the tender, compassionate look of Christ, who reminds every person of the value of their dignity and their unique place in God's heart.

The spiritual life and the apostolic works, the charism of Frederic Ozanam, (your precursor and example, whom I had the joy to beatify in Paris in 1997) were deeply marked by this contemplation of Christ's face in the poor. Such a spiritual attitude is essential for your apostolic works and for the enthusiasm of your Conferences. I therefore encourage you in your personal contact with the poor always to be witnesses to charity as well as justice, contributing to the individual's overall development, after the example of your founder, Blessed Frederic.

"Love is endlessly inventive." These words of Saint Vincent de Paul marvelously express the reality in the Church of how the Spirit inspires many charisms, so that Christian communities will be the sign of the infinite tenderness of our Father in Heaven. By making your specific contribution to the mission of the Church, you are helping to build a society that is founded on love and solidarity. You are realizing the deep desire that set the heart of Blessed Frederic Ozanam on fire: to embrace the whole world in a network of charity.

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

### DISCUSSION:

**How have you seen and experienced the Vincentian charism being lived in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul today?**



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

*"A patron is a model one must strive to imitate, as he himself imitated the model of Jesus Christ. He is a life to be carried on, a heart in which one's own heart is enkindled, an intelligence from which light should be sought; he is a model on earth and a protector in heaven. A twofold devotion is owed him, imitation and invocation ... Let us work in the light of St. Vincent de Paul: let us honor our Father in this patron so worthy of love, and we shall live long." (Letters, p.143)*

**ENRICHMENT READING:**

(For your prayer and reflection before the next session)

**THE SPIRITUAL WAY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

(*Vincent de Paul and Charity* by André Dodin, CM. p. 53-61)

**A Doctrine in a Life**

Vincent was versatile, prolific and humble to such a degree that he eludes all schemes of simplifying his life and classifying him. His originality was not in matters of doctrine, but in life and in experience. Our best chance of grasping the shape of his originality comes from the three areas in which he felt most at ease and was considered a master by his contemporaries: **experience, faith and practical wisdom.**

**Experience**

Vincent knew that great ideas, tightly reasoned arguments, beautiful thoughts at prayer and finely turned phrases in preaching had only relative value. He was one of those who, according to Pascal, "judge from the heart, because they choose to approach things from the point of view of values, and are not accustomed to look for the principles involved." Vincent affirmed this in his own words: "We believe a person, not because he is well informed, but because we consider him good and we love him. Our Savior himself let his love be known to those whom he wanted to have faith in him."

The rhythm and steps of the "spiritual way" of Vincent are revealed in these favorite words of his: "It is necessary to give oneself to God ... in order to serve the poor." Action for Vincent consisted in rendering Christ present and letting him act in oneself, in making oneself present to Christ and in acting for him.

Vincent proclaimed the radical priority of action. If being comes before doing, so, living the truth comes before teaching it. Vincent told us: "We must begin by establishing the kingdom of God in ourselves and only then in others ... It's necessary to tend to our interior life. If we fail to do that, we miss everything."



Action in this sense was not merely an expenditure of physical energy or something instinctively satisfying. For Vincent it was the main and perhaps the only way to unite oneself to invisible reality, to God's will and to God himself. "We have to sanctify our occupations, by seeking God in them and by doing them to find God in them rather than to get them done." Only this intention of going beyond the visible in our actions gives value to action.

### **Faith**

Christ lives on, after his death, in the Church which is his living presence in every time and place and the living expression of his Spirit. We might call it the home of Jesus. If this is so, then, just as Jesus addressed himself to the poor, and just as he lived as a poor person, and just as he is represented to us by the poor, so the Church of Jesus is centered on the poor and has to organize itself around them. Like Jesus, the Church, animated by the Spirit of God, must address itself first of all to the poor, who in the eyes of faith are the privileged assistants of God. It is they who open to us the gates of eternity. When we have the faith "to turn the medal over," as St. Vincent said, we will see in poor people the living image of the life and death of Jesus.

The poor have a mysterious effect on us. By their presence, they ask us to adapt to them. In taking Christ's attitude toward them, we find dispositions growing in ourselves which lead to evangelization, especially, to a love that is open to the faces of poverty and humility. In this way the life of Jesus begins to take hold in human hearts.

Without doubt, this life in and through Christ remains hidden and mysterious. Without the detachment and humility which empties us of self, we cannot truly live in Christ nor can Christ act in us. It's in persons empty of self that Christ not only dwells, but acts and bears fruit.

### **Practical Wisdom**

For Vincent practical wisdom, simplicity and purity of intention were all one reality. Vincent appealed most often to three precepts which gave a distinctive character to his life in Christ and in God. The first precept is "purity of intention and singleness of purpose." Vincent often repeated, "It is necessary to begin with God, to look to God first, to ask for a share in God's Spirit and a share in God's view of things. It is necessary to begin with the things of God. When we take care of God's business, God will take care of ours."

The second precept expresses and regulates our rootedness in the invisible. When do we know whether the actions which give us to God grasp us totally? The answer is: when they effectively embrace "the extremes." Affective love must always be coupled with effective love, otherwise it is an illusion. "It is not enough for me to love God," Vincent proclaimed, "if my neighbor does not love God." Union with our neighbor is necessary for union with God.

The third precept deals with rules for action. We have to use time and events, to adapt ourselves more deeply to God and literally be in communion with what God does and does not will. For Vincent, then, the heart and soul of genuine action was to be "firm and invariable concerning the goal, gentle and flexible concerning the means."



Vincent had a gift for presenting his thoughts and sentiments concretely and clearly. He moved effortlessly from reflections to stories about daily life, gracefully weaving the visible and invisible together. More than just calling Jesus to mind, Vincent through his words, introduced Jesus to people and put them in the presence of his mystery among the poor.

### **The Spirit and Mystery of Charity**

Vincent said, “Let us be committed and keep our hands to the plow.” Yet it would be a mistake to interpret this saying rigidly. True commitment is firm but thoroughly flexible. It is full of vital energy. It becomes strong and rich by its open desire for communion with all things, and by its determination to let the sunlight of divine kindness melt the steel-plated armor of self-love.

The poor of God, whom Vincent loved, disturb our consciences rather than guarantee us good ones. The poor person does not forget God, for the reason that he or she cannot live without God. Poor men and women derive their power and nobility from the humiliated Christ, who has only their voice to make himself well understood. The eternal vocation of the poor is this: to denounce self-love wherever it exists. Their power is immense, their insights acute. In the Church, they are the rich ones, the lords. Wherever they go, they light a fire which does not go out. In spite of their rags, they nurture all who live to serve them. Vincent became one of their most devoted servants. To all who, hungering for God, surrounded Vincent and asked for a “doctrine,” he silently offered them the bread of the poor.

Notes



## MODULE II

### *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

#### SESSION 2.2:

### *Jesus, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor*

#### Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Describe the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul.
- ② Understand Jesus as Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.
- ③ Appreciate how Vincentians are called to be Beatitude-people.





**OPENING PRAYER: (Together)**

*Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it is written: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord." (Luke 4:17-19)*

**INTRODUCTION:**

*(The Way of Vincent de Paul by Rev. Robert P. Maloney, CM. p. 20-27)*

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

Spirituality is a governing vision and a driving force, enabling a person to transcend himself or herself. It is, on the one hand, the specific way in which a person is rooted in God. It is, on the other hand, the specific way in which he or she relates to the created world. It is insight as the source of action.

For Vincent de Paul, there is only one driving force: the person of Jesus Christ. He tells us, "Jesus Christ is the Rule of the Mission, the center of our life and activity ... and we will find true freedom only when Christ takes hold of us."

Vincent makes a clear explicit choice. The vision he offers is not one of Christ as teacher, nor as healer ... but as *Evangelizer of the Poor*. St. Vincent's spirituality flows from his contemplation of this *Christ*. The driving force that generates both the incredible activity and the gentle contemplation of this great saint is his vision of the *Evangelizer of the Poor*.

*Evangelization* means "Good News" or Gospel, and Vincent's disciples are called to enter into the following of Christ in the very terms which, in Luke's gospel, Jesus opens his public ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor ..."

Blessed Frederic said: "Sons of Saint Vincent de Paul, let us learn of him to forget ourselves, to devote ourselves to the service of God and the good of men. Let us learn of him that holy preference which shows most love to those who suffer most."

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



# Notes

## Session 2.2

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

### READING:

Vincent says: “Let us walk with assurance on the royal road on which Jesus Christ will be our guide and leader.” Vincentians are not the center of things but the ones who center things on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the driving force in St. Vincent de Paul’s life. He calls Jesus the center of his life and activity. Vincent had a distinctive image of Jesus, as Evangelizer and Servant of the poor, and his life revolved around this relationship with Jesus.

For followers of St. Vincent de Paul, spirituality involves a growing relationship with Jesus. Vincentians strive to grow in intimacy with their Lord and Savior. This means coming to know what he knows and coming to love what he loves.

The heart of Jesus’ preaching is the Beatitudes. They speak of basic attitudes of being and dispositions of life. In their originality and profundity the Beatitudes depict a self-portrait of Jesus and portray his charity. (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1717)

Vincentians are Beatitude-people; they opt for the Beatitudes that confront them with decisive choices concerning earthly goods. The Beatitudes purify their hearts in order to teach them to love God above all things. Vincentians understand Pope John Paul II’s words: “*The Beatitudes are a call to action.*”

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

### DISCUSSION:

**How have you seen and experienced Vincentians being “Evangelizers of the Poor”... bringing good news to the poor by healing the broken hearted?**



**CLOSING PRAYER: Let us pray together:**

*"How blest are the poor in spirit; the reign of God is theirs.  
 Blest too are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled.  
 Blest are the lowly; they shall inherit the land.  
 Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall have their fill.  
 Blest are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs.  
 Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God.  
 Blest too the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God.  
 Blest are those persecuted for holiness sake; the reign of God is theirs.  
 Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander  
 against you because of me.  
 Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets  
 before you in the very same way." (Matthew 5:3-12)*

**ENRICHMENT READING:**

(For your prayer and reflection before the next session)

**"JESUS, EVANGELIZER AND SERVANT OF THE POOR"**

*(The Way of Vincent de Paul by Rev. Robert P. Maloney, CM- p. 29-47)*

Vincent de Paul's vision of Christ is an original one. For him, Christ is most of all the Evangelizer of the Poor. He is a missionary Christ, coming from the Father and returning to him, emptying himself of his condition as Son of God in order to free his people from the bondage, both corporal and spiritual, in which they are chained. He identifies with, and makes his home within, the poor themselves.

His vision is universal, impelling him to preach the good news to the poor even to the ends of the earth. This Christ draws others together, male and female, rich and poor, and forms them to share in his mission. The virtues that particularly characterize him are five missionary ones: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal. Even in the midst of great activity he stands before his Father constantly in prayer, seeking his will and trusting in providence.

Need I add how strikingly contemporary is the vision of this seventeenth-century saint? Today we find Vincent's preferential love for the poor echoed in one contemporary Church document after another. His stress on a broad concept of evangelization, including human promotion and liberation from various forms of human bondage, or what Vincent calls "serving the poor both corporally and spiritually," are the centerpiece of the modern social encyclicals and numerous other episcopal and papal writings. The importance of lay involvement in ministry and the need to revitalize ministerial formation both of the clergy and the laity are themes that resonate throughout the Church. Renewed interest in apostolic spirituality and prayer is one of the signs of the times today.

In what ways will contemporary Christology pursue the path along which this wonderfully realistic man walked: focusing on Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor? How will it further articulate, and concretize, the ramifications of his vision? That is surely the contemporary challenge.



## **The Five Missionary Virtues**

For Vincent de Paul, simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal were the characteristic virtues of a missionary. These virtues are so central to St. Vincent's thinking that in efforts at renewal all those who share in the Vincentian tradition must grapple with their meaning and the forms they might take in the modern world:

### **Simplicity**

The spirit of Jesus Christ is one of simplicity, which consists in speaking the truth, in saying things as they are, without concealing or hiding anything, and in referring things to God alone. St. Vincent is so convinced of its importance that he calls simplicity "my gospel," "the virtue I love the most." "Do you know where Our Lord dwells?" he asks ... "It is among the simple." Simplicity is lived in frankness, integrity and genuineness.

Simplicity consists in referring things to God alone, or purity of intention. In this sense simplicity is doing everything for love of God and for no other end. It entails avoiding "human respect." Simplicity also involves an unadorned lifestyle.

### **Humility**

Humility, the virtue of Jesus Christ, which he teaches us "by word and example," entails the recognition that all good comes from God. It involves an acknowledgement of our own lowliness and faults, accompanied by exuberant confidence in God. Vincent urges us, above all, to consider "that admirable model of humility, Our Lord Jesus Christ." Humility helps us to accept the truth both about our frailties and our gifts, knowing that everything is given to us by God for others, and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without his grace.

Humility is recognizing that we are completely dependent upon the Lord, that there is nothing we have not received. We are also very much dependent on others. The humble person recognizes interdependence both as a sign of their limitedness and as a source of enrichment. We need others and cannot do without them. We are also called, like Jesus, "not to be served but to serve." As servants of the poor, we must be willing to do humble things.

### **Meekness**

Jesus himself tell us that he is meek, "Learn from Me to be meek and humble of heart." This virtue for St. Vincent is the ability to handle anger either by suppressing it or by expressing it, in a manner governed by love. If anger is handled badly, it can be terribly destructive. Unleashed, it can result in violence and injustice. Repressed, it can result in resentment, sarcasm, cynicism, bitterness, and /or depression. Meekness enables us to control, moderate and even suppress anger for a period of time, or sublimate it.



Meekness entails approachability and affability and involves the ability to endure offenses with forgiveness and courage. Meekness combines gentleness and firmness, and leads us to friendly assurance and invincible good will.

### **Mortification**

For St. Vincent, mortification is the subjection of passion to reason, and it aims at indifference and detachment. Vincent said: “Let us keep this example before our eyes. Let us never lose sight of the mortification of our Lord, seeing that, to follow him, we are obligated to mortify ourselves after his example. Let us model our affections upon his, that his footsteps may be the guide of ours in the ways of perfection. The saints are saints because they walk in his footsteps, renounce themselves, and mortify themselves in all things.”

For a Vincentian, mortification leads to a selflessness, a dying to our ego and a life of self-sacrifice. Members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.

### **Zeal**

Zeal is love on fire. Vincent told us “If love of God is the fire, zeal is its flame. If love is the sun, then zeal is its ray.” “Charity when it dwells in a soul takes complete possession of all its powers. It never rests. It is a fire that acts ceaselessly.” Zeal is love in practice. Zeal is the virtue of missionary action, as Vincent said: “Let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.”

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## MODULE II

# *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

## SESSION 2.3:

# *Contemplatives in Action*

### Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand our call to be “contemplatives in action.”
- ② Identify “incarnational spirituality.”
- ③ Appreciate how Vincentians grow spiritually through service.





**OPENING PRAYER: (Together)**

*"Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me ... Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25: 31-46)*

**INTRODUCTION:**

*(Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, by Fr. Robert P. Maloney, CM, p. 176-177)*

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

A contemplative spends time in prayer and meditation. One of the reasons a Vincentian prays and meditates is to contemplate the presence of God in events, in people and especially in the poor. Vincentians are called to be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer. Prayer and action go hand in hand in a healthy Vincentian spirituality. Divorced from action, prayer can turn escapist. Conversely, service divorced from prayer can become shallow.

An apostolic spirituality is at its best when it holds prayer and action in tension with one another. The person who loves God "with the sweat of his brow and the strength of his arms" knows how to distinguish between beautiful theoretical thoughts about an abstract God and real personal contact with the living Lord contemplated and served in his suffering people.

Vincentian spirituality was formed through the lived experience of St. Vincent and St. Louise de Marillac. We have a charism that has been created through the mutuality of this holy woman and this holy man who brought their feminine and their masculine insights, gifts, talents together in finding the face of Christ in the poor. And, together they give us a heart so that the poor could find the goodness of God in us.

Frederic Ozanam and his companions had a marvelous teacher when they were just beginning to form the Society. Her name was Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. She was beloved by the poorest of the poor of Paris, she knew them by name and they knew her. Sr. Rosalie taught Frederic, and his companions, how to treat the poor with dignity and respect, and how to be contemplatives in action. She taught them to see the face of Christ in the poor.



# Notes

## Session 2.3

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

### READING:

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

Central to an understanding of Vincentian spirituality is the Mystery of the Incarnation. St. Vincent de Paul promoted the Mystery of the Incarnation among his followers. He says: "Honor the Incarnation, a mystery beyond words." Vincent teaches: "Since Christ willed to be born poor ... he made himself the servant of the poor and shared their poverty. He 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."

Vincentian spirituality is horizontal, incarnational, rooted in the enfleshed humanity of Jesus. St. Vincent grounds this teaching in those words of St. Matthew: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me." Vincent echoes these words of Jesus when he says: "in serving the poor, we serve Jesus Christ."

The Mystery of the Incarnation, so loved by St. Vincent and St. Louise, Bl. Frederic and Bl. Rosalie, was not just a matter of doctrine to be believed, but to be put into practice by the corporal and spiritual acts of mercy. Vincentians who minister to the least of their brothers and sisters find in them the person of Jesus, the Incarnated Jesus. And this encounter with Jesus, this interaction, transforms them.

Vincentians expect that God comes in the unexpected: in unexpected people, times, ways and places. God wears a human face. To see Jesus in others, to be Jesus to others are all aspects of the Incarnation that makes the Mystery come alive for Vincentians and so relevant for them.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam was a man of prayer. He understood it as his life-line and foundation for who he was and what he did. Prayer nourished his life and ministry. Frederic believed in the teaching of St. Vincent: "Give me a man of prayer, and he will be able to do all things; he can say with the Apostle, 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.'"

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



**DISCUSSION:**

Is our Conference work reflective of both prayer and action?

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

*“Both men and the poor see with eyes of the flesh; they are there and we can put finger and hand in their wounds and scars of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads; and at this point incredulity no longer has place and we should fall at their feet and say with the Apostle, ‘Tu est Dominus et Deus meus.’ You are our masters, and we will be you servants.” (Letter #137)*

**ENRICHMENT READING:**

(For your prayer and reflection before the next session)

**“UNITING ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION AS VINCENTIANS”**

(*Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul*, by Fr. Robert P. Maloney, CM, p. 171-184)

All of us have noted, with some joy, a renewed interest in spirituality today. There exists a hunger, a profound and authentic desire for wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, for community in the face of isolation and loneliness, for liberating transcendence, for meaning in life, for values that endure. Below I offer five foundation stones for a Vincentian apostolic spirituality that unites action and contemplation.

**1. Our Vincentian Spirituality is deeply incarnational:**

Our spirituality is rooted in the enfleshed humanity of Jesus. Vincent rallies priests, sisters, brothers, lay men and women to follow Christ the missionary, the servant, the evangelizer of the poor. He captured the deepest sense of the gospels, which ring with the conviction: Jesus is the absolute center. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus says. “No one comes to the Father except through me.” “I am the vine, you are the branches.”

Different spiritualities focus on various aspects of Jesus’ humanity—Christ the teacher, Christ the preacher, Christ the healer—but Jesus himself, fully enfleshed, is always the absolute center. The focus of our Vincentian apostolic spirituality must be the humanity of Jesus the missionary of the Father, the Evangelizer of the Poor—in his union with His Father, in his personal integrity, in his zeal for the mission that he received, in his deep human love especially for the most abandoned, in his desire to form other evangelizers, in his passion for the truth, in his ability to bridge the poles of anger and gentleness, in his hunger and thirst for justice. Jesus comes from the Father and goes to the Father. He is united with the Father in contemplation, spending whole nights in prayer. He is united with his brothers and sisters, whose flesh he shares, giving himself to them even to death.



**2. Our holiness, our being grasped by God, is intrinsically bound up with our mission:**

It is especially through our mission, by our contact with the most abandoned, that we seek to love and serve the Lord. The 25th chapter of Matthew's gospel is a pillar in our spirituality: "When I was hungry you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink ..." It is precisely through seeing and loving Christ in the person of those served that Vincentians seek genuine union with the Lord.

Today in our era when the Church proclaims again and again her preferential option for the poor, those relegated to the margins of society stand more and more at the center of the mission of the Church as a whole. Our Vincentian spirituality of seeing Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ, immerses us more and more deeply in the mission of the Church today.

In an era where the rights and dignity of the human person have come to be increasingly emphasized, we are conscious that in giving our lives to the service of the poor, we must take into account their own desires, their own hopes, their own values, and their own real needs. They themselves must become agents of their own human and spiritual promotion. So our Vincentian spirituality demands that we listen more than we speak, that we accompany more than we take charge, that we allow ourselves to be evangelized by those we serve.

**3. Our Vincentian prayer has its own dynamic, flowing from and leading to action:**

We are called to be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer. St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac were incredibly active, but they were also persons of deep prayer. Prayer and action go hand in hand in a healthy Vincentian spirituality. Vincent tells us that prayer is for the soul what food is for the body. And that prayer is refreshment in the midst of difficult daily work in the service of the poor. One thing is very clear. Vincent felt that the vitality of the mission depended on our fidelity to daily prayer. He minced no words about it: if we are unfaithful to prayer, he stated, we will disappear.

Vincent listened to God's voice in events and people. His conversion is not narrated in terms of a dramatic experience of grace occurring during prayer, but rather in terms of his realizing that God was speaking to him through tragic human situations: the miserable lot of the country poor, the abandoning of infants on the streets of Paris, the ravaging wars in the provinces.

**4. Our growth in God's life also flows from the bonds of deep charity forged in fellowship:**

Fellowship in community is an essential element of our identity. An integral part of our basic spirituality is the commitment to build up a fellowship of faith and love with those who have pledged to pursue the same mission. Therefore, there must be clearly defined times when members serve together, pray together, share the Eucharist, eat together, relax in one another's company, and have fun together so that deep bonds of charity are formed.



## 5. Our simplicity of life and humility:

Our prayer should be characterized by simplicity, humility, and detachment. Listening lies at the heart of prayer, as does availability. The challenge in Vincentian prayer is to stand before the Lord with great detachment, saying simply: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Listening is at the heart of Vincentian service. The first service that one owes to the poor consists in listening to them. Just as love of God begins by listening to his Word in prayer, so the beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them. Vincentians must become good listeners and the indispensable quality for good listening is humility which prevents us from becoming judgmental. Listening can be a greater service than speaking. The poor are looking for a heart that will listen and lead them to their own decisions in empowerment rather than enablement. One of the most important signs of respect for the human person is attentiveness in listening. Listening brings truth, wisdom, and the assurance of being loved.

### Conclusion:

I am convinced that nothing is more important, as we face the future, than a profound spirituality that unites action and contemplation. The great temptation is to be so caught up in our works that we lose contact with the energizing vision, the driving force that animates those works. Our works must flow from our experience of God, of his Spirit. A deeply incarnational love of Christ must impel us, a profound spirituality must root us, so that all those whom we serve see that God is entering their lives through our ministry. When we are laboring in the midst of the poor, do the needy sense that God is touching them? Do they recognize us as God-people? If the life of the Spirit is fully alive in us, then Vincentians will surely be a striking sign in the world that the Kingdom of God is at hand.





## MODULE II

### *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

#### SESSION 2.4:

### *Journey Together To Holiness*

#### Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand our “journey together to holiness.”
- ② Appreciate the importance of being a “community of faith.”
- ③ Recognize the purpose of the Society as the sanctification of its members.





**OPENING PRAYER: (Together)**

*"It is God's will that you grow in holiness ... Remain in peace with one another. We exhort you to admonish the unruly; cheer the fainthearted; support the weak; be patient toward all...always seek one another's good and, for that matter, the good of all. May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness. May he preserve you whole and entire, spirit, soul, and body."  
(1 Thessalonians 4:1;13-23)*

**INTRODUCTION:**

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

To "journey together to holiness" is a Vincentian belief and value—we do not undertake the journey alone. Vincentians are called to journey together toward holiness, to be on fire with the love of God and to deepen and strengthen their own faith and fidelity, primarily through:

- Visiting the poor together in pairs after the example of Jesus who sent the disciples out two by two (Lk 10:1); and in the tradition of the Society since the time of Frederic Ozanam.
- Attending the Conference and Council meetings. Vincentians meet as brothers and sisters in Christ in communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. It is essential that there is a spiritual bond and a bond of friendship between members in a common mission which they develop together to help the poor and marginalized.
- Conference meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy, where members pray and serve together and grow in holiness. Praying and reflecting on their Vincentian experience, brings insights into themselves, others, and God's goodness.

Vincentians, joined together in a "community of faith," encourage each other in a spirit of prayer and recollection. Blessed Frederic Ozanam said, "God, who draws the clouds together to scatter the lightning, also draws souls together, to radiate love." Vincentians bring more with them than the food, clothing, and money for rent and utilities. They mutually sustain one another by their witnessing, friendship and discipleship. Two on a home visit are co-workers with and for Jesus; they are living instruments of Jesus. They are assisting in the extension of Jesus' own ministry.



# Notes

## Session 2.4

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

### READING:

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

The Church calls all men and women to holiness because Jesus does. He says: "Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt. 5:48) Pope John Paul II says that the call to holiness is, in fact, the essential vocation of all Christians.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul calls its members to holiness; such was the intent of its founders in 1833 and such is its intent today. Therefore, Vincentians take upon themselves a two-fold charge to pursue holiness of life: the first from the Church and the second from the Society—the one, universal, and the other specific.

Several months before his death, Blessed Frederic told members of the Society in Livorno, Italy: "The Society has only one purpose: to sanctify its members in the exercise of charity and to help the poor in their corporal and spiritual needs." In the mind of St. Vincent, the person who deals with holy things has to be holy. As Vincentians deal with holy things, the poor, they are called to be holy.

Pope John Paul II, quoted a famous historian of Christian spirituality, about Vincent: "It was not love for men that led him to sanctity; rather, it was sanctity that made him truly and effectively charitable; it was not the poor that gave him to God, but, on the contrary, God who gave him to the poor." God acts in the same way in the lives of all Vincentians. Holiness makes them truly and effectively charitable. It is God who gives them to the poor.

Holiness is living in faith, hope and love, in our families, our work and our ministry for the poor. Vincentians are called to live as the first Christians: "The community of believers were of one heart and one mind." (Acts 4:32)

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

### DISCUSSION:

**How is your Conference a "journey together to holiness?"**



**CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)**

*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. Amen*

**ENRICHMENT READING:**

(For your prayer and reflection before the next session)

**“A COMMUNITY OF FAITH”**

(*The Way of Vincent de Paul*, by Fr. Robert P. Maloney, CM, p. 130-134)

*Be united with one another, and God will bless you. But let it be by the charity of Jesus Christ, for any union which is not sealed by the blood of our Savior cannot endure. It is therefore in Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ that you ought to be united with one another. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of union and of peace. How can you attract people to Christ if you are not united with one another and with him? (St. Vincent de Paul)*

Jesus lived in community with his apostles. They shared their lives intimately with each other. They prayed together often. Jesus instilled in his followers the great vision that his Father had given him of a kingdom of justice, love and peace which they could begin to experience and work toward even now. He asked them to preach that kingdom to others, but first to make it real in their own lives. They shared a common purse, from which they paid for food and lodging. When they returned home from preaching, they spent time together resting and enjoying each other's company.

The early Christians were so struck by this example that they idealized about what community should be like: “The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common.” (Acts 4:32)

Below is an outline of four key concepts in regard to a faith community:

**1. A “Community of Faith” is a gift of God and a human creation:**

All true community and friendship find their source in God. Jesus' union with his Father is the paradigm for the intimate bonds that link his followers together in the Spirit. Since its source is in God, all community is ultimately a gift. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts the God-giveness of community quite strikingly:



*"It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the kingdom of God and any day may be taken from us ... Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren." And he also speaks of the need for us to respond to God's gift: "In a Christian community everything depends on whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable." (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p.9-10, 72)*

So while community is God's gift, we are his instruments in creating it. Without us it cannot come into being. St. Paul emphasizes the human effort that goes into building community:

*"I plead with you ... to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. (Eph. 4:1-3).*

## 2. A "Community of Faith" does not stifle diversity:

A true community is enriched by the varied gifts of different members. The New Testament abounds in imagery when it describes community. It is a body with all its varied members. It is a vine with many branches. It is a pilgrim people with diverse gifts. The images focus on unity in diversity.

Diversity is not the enemy of community. It is part of its richness and to put this more effectively: "Be thankful for the variety of gifts and difference of personality. When you put your own potential and insights at the service of your community; your unity will grow stronger and richer, and together you will create that spaciousness which finds room for everyone."

## 3. A "Community of Faith" is being with and for the other person:

A true community is not simply physical or functional presence. People can have physical presence to one another as strangers in an elevator. They can have functional presence to each other if they work together on an assembly line in a factory. But true community is being with and for the other. It is personal concern and care. The Vincentian spirit strongly emphasizes the personal dimension of community. Members are called to renew the principle elements of the Vincentian way of living and acting, first of all by following Christ the Evangelizer as a community, which generates in us special bonds of love and affection; in this spirit we should, like good friends, join reverence for one another with genuine esteem. In this, we will echo the New Testament: *"This is how all will know you for my disciples: Your love for one another."* (Jn 13:35)

## 4. A "Community of Faith" is always being created:

A true community is not a static reality; it involves initiative, to get things going. It involves forgiveness, to heal what has gone wrong. It involves on-going formation. It is always being created. It consists of real people who work at building it up.



*"You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit." (Eph 2:20)*

A true community is possible only through God's love as it works in us through Christ:

*"I do not pray for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you: I pray that they may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (Jn 17:20-21)*



## MODULE II

### *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

## SESSION 2.5:

### *Sacraments and Vincentian Feasts*

#### Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand the Sacraments of the Church.
- ② Appreciate the Society as a Catholic lay organization.
- ③ Identify the special Vincentian feasts.





**OPENING PRAYER: (Together)**

*Come to him ... like living stones, yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1Peter 2: 4-5,9)*

**INTRODUCTION:**

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

Sacraments are external signs of the action of God's grace in the life of a believer, they are the "masterworks of God." There are seven sacraments instituted by Christ:

**SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION**

**Baptism:** Baptism incorporates us into the Church and gives us a rebirth as daughters and sons of God, and heirs of heaven.

**Confirmation:** Confirmation seals our Baptism and confirms our commitment both to the Church and to the work of Christ in the world. It helps us focus on the missionary dimensions of the baptismal commitment.

**Eucharist:** Eucharist celebrates our life together as a community, the presence of Christ in our midst, the Word that is proclaimed and explained. We celebrate our unity with Christ in communion and service.

**SACRAMENTS OF HEALING**

**Reconciliation:** Reconciliation (Penance) celebrates and reminds us of God's mercy and helps us to experience divine forgiveness, to forgive ourselves and to become reconciled with others. Forgiveness brings us back to spiritual health in the family of God.

**Anointing of the Sick:** Anointing of the sick celebrates and reminds us of God's compassion and helps us to experience spiritual, and sometimes physical, strengthening when we are ill.



### SACRAMENTS OF VOCATION

**Holy Orders:** Ordination is a sacrament of service by which some are called by God, through the Church, to be spiritual leaders.

**Matrimony:** Matrimony joins two people in marriage for a lifetime of dedication to each other's well-being and the well being of their children.

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

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

### The Society is a Catholic lay organization:

Catholicity touches deeply the members, both individually and collectively. Vincentians reaffirm their baptismal promise to live as a follower of Jesus Christ. The Catholic sacraments point to what is sacred, significant and important for Christians. The Sacraments are the source of grace and strength throughout the life's journey of each Vincentian.

Vincentians know that, in the light of their Baptism they are obliged by justice to care for the needs of others. The love of Christ impels them to be of service to the poor, to represent the goodness of God in the eyes of the poor. The members understand that the purpose of the Conference's charity is to give witness to Our Lord and to the Church which he founded.

Together with St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic, Vincentians understand that the Eucharist increases their union with Jesus, strengthens their charity and commits them to the poor. St. Vincent spent one hour each morning before the Blessed Sacrament before celebrating Mass. And a day did not go by, when Bl. Frederic would not make a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and he attended Mass daily whenever possible. Many Vincentians follow their example.

The grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, enables Vincentians to ask for forgiveness, to accept and to give forgiveness. Knowing the mercy of God, they bring mercy and compassion to their homes, to their Conferences and to the suffering and forgotten. During their lives, St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic often received the Sacrament of Reconciliation.



The Sacrament of Marriage was a powerful means of holiness for Frederic and Amelie Ozanam, as it is for countless Vincentians throughout the world. Vincentians have discovered that Christian spouses help each other to attain holiness in their marriage covenant, in their lives together and by the rearing and education of their children.

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

## DISCUSSION:

**How do the Sacraments of the Church influence your Vincentian commitment and that of your Conference work and meetings?**

## CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

*Father, grant that we who are nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, may realize the depth of our needs, respond more spontaneously to the suffering of others, and come to love You more deeply by service to our neighbor. Amen*

## ENRICHMENT READING:

**(For your prayer and reflection before the next session)**

## VINCENTIAN FAMILY FEAST DAYS

**Throughout the Church year, Vincentians celebrate special feasts :**

### JANUARY 4: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Elizabeth Ann Bayley was born in New York on August 28, 1774, and was brought up in the Episcopal faith. She married William Seton, bore five children, and was widowed on December 27, 1803. After overcoming many obstacles, she converted to the Catholic faith on March 14, 1805. She dedicated her life to works of charity and education and founded the community of the Sisters of Charity in 1809. Elizabeth died in Emmitsburg, Maryland, on January 4, 1821. Part of her community was united with the Daughters of Charity in Paris in 1850, and the others remained the Sisters of Charity in the United States. Elizabeth Seton was canonized as the first American saint in 1975.

### FEBRUARY 7: Sr. Rosalie Rendu

Rosalie Rendu was born at Confort, France on September 9, 1786. She entered the Daughters of Charity on May 25, 1802, just after the Community was reestablished in France after the French Revolution. Her zeal for the poor drove her to establish the means to educate poor children, to care for infants, to support the elderly unable to care for themselves, and to supervise young working girls. One of her disciples in her mission of service was Frederic Ozanam, founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. After fifty years of dedicated service to the poor in the Mouffetard district in Paris, she died on February 7, 1856. Pope John Paul II beatified Sr. Rosalie on November 9, 2003.



**MARCH 15: St. Louise de Marillac**

Louise de Marillac was born August 12, 1591. She married Antoine LeGras on February 5, 1613, had a son named Michel, and was widowed on December 21, 1625. St. Vincent de Paul then became her spiritual director, and under his guidance she became very active in caring for the poor and in visiting the Confraternities of Charity. With Vincent, Louise co-founded the Daughters of Charity on November 29, 1633. She died March 15, 1660, and was canonized in 1934. In 1960, Pope John XXIII proclaimed her the patron saint of all Christian social workers.

**APRIL (Last Sunday): Ozanam Sunday**

Frederic Ozanam was born on April 23, 1813 in Milan, Italy. On April 23, 1833 Frederic and six companions founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Also, St. Vincent de Paul was born on April 24, 1581. To commemorate these events the Society in the United States celebrates the last Sunday of April as Ozanam Sunday.

**JUNE (Friday following Second Sunday after Pentecost): Feast of the Sacred Heart**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has been solemnly consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus from February 5, 1872. An Act of Consecration was drawn up at the request of the Society in 1872 and this act of consecration is renewed annually by all units of the Society. (See *Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the U.S.*, p. 211)

**SEPTEMBER 9: Blessed Frederic Ozanam**

Frederic Ozanam was schooled in law, literature and philosophy, and he taught at the university level in Lyon and Paris. Frederic and six companions founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul on April 23, 1833. On June 23, 1841 Frederic married Amelie Soulacroix, and their only child, Marie, was born in 1845. This exemplar of the lay apostolate in the realms of family, society and intellect succumbed to ill health and died on September 8, 1853. Pope John Paul II beatified Frederic Ozanam in Paris on August 22, 1997, declaring September 9 as his feast day.

**SEPTEMBER 27: St. Vincent de Paul**

Vincent de Paul was born at Pouy, France on April 24, 1581. He was ordained a priest on September 23, 1600. Vincent devoted himself entirely to the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor, and to that purpose established the Confraternities of Charity, later known as the Ladies of Charity in 1617. In 1625 he founded the Congregation of the Mission, his community of priests and brothers. With Louise de Marillac, he co-founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633. Vincent died in Paris on September 27, 1660 and was canonized in 1737. Pope Leo XIII appointed him patron saint of all works of charity of the Catholic Church in 1883.

**NOVEMBER 27: Feast of the Miraculous Medal**

The medal of the Immaculate Conception was manifested to Sister Catherine Labouré in the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, France, November 27, 1830.



**NOVEMBER 28: St. Catherine Labouré**

Catherine Labouré was born May 2, 1806 in Fain-les-Moutiers, France. When she was nine years old her mother died, and she turned with great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary to be her mother. She entered the Daughters of Charity on April 21, 1830, and as a novice, the Virgin Mary appeared to Catherine asking her to have a medal struck in her honor. Due to the numerous miracles obtained from faith and prayer to Mary, this medal became the “Miraculous Medal.” Catherine Labouré was canonized in 1947.

**DECEMBER 8: Feast of the Immaculate Conception**

Bl. Frederic Ozanam had a great devotion to Mary and he declared Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception as the patroness of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

**SPECIAL MASSES:**

Each parish Conference should have a Mass offered on five occasions each year for the following persons and groups:

1. For Four Intentions of the Society:
  - a. The Church
  - b. The Sovereign Pontiff
  - c. The United States of America
  - d. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
2. The Deceased Members of the Conference
3. The Deceased Poor
4. The Sick and Troubled who seek Divine Help and Cure through the intercession of Blessed Frederic Ozanam
5. For the Canonization of Frederic Ozanam

**Vincentian Saints, Blesseds and Others:**

The Vincentian Family includes a large number of saints, blesseds and venerables. In the *Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the U.S.*, (Chapter 11, p. 187-200), you will find the lives of men and women who attained personal holiness while being active members of the Society.





## MODULE II

### *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

#### SESSION 2.6:

### *Mary in Vincentian Spirituality*

#### Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand the role of Mary in Vincentian Spirituality.
- ② Identify the “Vincentian” mysteries in Mary’s life: The Immaculate Conception, Annunciation and Visitation.
- ③ Appreciate the Miraculous Medal.





**OPENING PRAYER: (Together)**

*The angel said "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you ... Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God. You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus ... The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God ... for nothing is impossible with God." Mary answered: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say." (Luke 1:28-38)*

**INTRODUCTION:**

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

Throughout history, the Vincentian Family has accorded a privileged place to Mary, the Mother of God. Spirituality expresses a relationship with life according to the Spirit, following Christ, in a new way of being and living in the Lord. Marian devotion is not found only in devotional practices, it consists in finding the inspiration to follow Christ in Mary.

Mary stands out as a challenge and an inspiration to embody Christian attitudes and values. Mary is presented to us as the most perfect disciple of Christ and the first Christian, because in her life she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God. She heard the word of God and acted on it; charity and the spirit of service were the driving forces of her actions.

Mary is the perfect disciple of Jesus; she followed him from the Annunciation of the Angel to the foot of the Cross. Mary unreservedly allowed herself to be guided by the Spirit: she was filled with the Holy Spirit; her life was life in the Spirit.

Frederic's personal devotion to Mary was woven into the various stages of his life: devotion of youth, the moral challenges of young adulthood, the transformation of becoming a parent, and the acceptance of suffering and death.

On the feast of the Assumption, August 15, Frederic, three weeks away from death's door, insisted on walking to church. He said, "It may be my last walk in this world, and I desire that it shall be to pay a visit to my God and His Blessed Mother." Frederic died on the feast of the Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, September 8, 1853. It is fitting for this man to die on the feast of Mary to whom he had been greatly devoted all his life.

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



# Notes

## Session 2.6

**READING:** *Marian Spirituality and the Vincentian Charism*,  
by Corpus Delgado, CM

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

St. Vincent focused his attention on three events, three mysteries in Mary's life: the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation and the Visitation. These mysteries constitute the support and spirit of the fundamental steps of her progression toward Christ and her life with God. Vincent's contemplation of Mary was found in the center of his spirituality: "We must be given to God to serve the poor."

**The Immaculate Conception:** Within this mystery St. Vincent saw the humble Virgin, who emptied herself so as to welcome God and allowed herself to be filled with God. Welcoming God, being filled with God, clothing oneself with Christ, self-emptying, as did Mary the Immaculate One, is the first event that Vincent stressed regarding the Virgin Mary.

**The Annunciation:** Humility prepared and sustained Mary in the offering of herself to God. Knowing God and recognizing God as the only Lord, humbly knowing one's smallness before God, giving oneself to God to serve one's neighbor in order to accomplish God's work, is the second event that Vincent discovered in Mary. Like Mary, we must give ourselves to God to accomplish his work.

**The Visitation:** Emptied of ourselves and given to God, our life is at the service of the poor. St. Vincent discovered this third event of the spiritual journey in Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Vincent suggested Mary's promptness, as exemplified within the Visitation, as a model of service to those who are poor.

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

### DISCUSSION:

**How do you experience Marian Spirituality in your life as a Vincentian?**



**CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)**

*Then Mary said: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my savior, for he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness; all ages to come shall call me blessed. God who is mighty has done great things for me, holy is his name; his mercy is from age to age on those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm; he has confused the proud in their inmost thoughts. He has deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. The hungry he has given every good thing, while the rich he has sent empty away. He has upheld Israel his servant, ever mindful of his mercy; even as he promised Abraham and his descendants forever." Amen*

**ENRICHMENT READING:**

(For your prayer and reflection before the next session)

**THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL**

St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac embedded our Vincentian Spirituality in love and devotion to Mary. Throughout history, and in each branch of the Vincentian Family, Mary has been accorded a privileged place and is recognized and invoked as our "Mother."

Vincent and Louise unreservedly affirmed Mary's Immaculate Conception. The belief that Mary was conceived without sin was so strongly rooted in the faith of the people that it was already being celebrated as a feast even though the Church did not proclaim the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception until December 8, 1854, almost 200 years after Vincent's and Louise's deaths.

**Miraculous Medal**

The medal of the Immaculate Conception, commonly called the Miraculous Medal, belongs in a very special way to the Vincentian Family. The medal was manifested to Sister Catherine Labouré in 1830, when she was a novice in the Daughters of Charity in Paris, France.

On November 27, 1830, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, appeared to Sr. Catherine in the Motherhouse Chapel. Our Lady manifested the pattern of a medal to Catherine: the front of the Medal represents Mary standing on the earth, her foot crushing the head of the serpent, and her hands outstretched to all who ask her assistance. Her feet rested on a globe. The following, in Sr. Catherine's own words, is a description of the apparition of Our Lady:

I saw rings on her fingers, each ring was set with gems which emitted rays. I could not express what I saw, the beauty and the brilliance of the dazzling rays. They are the symbols of the graces Mary sheds on those who ask for them. A frame formed around the Blessed Virgin, and written in letters of gold were: **O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.**



Mary then said, *“Have a medal struck after this model. All who wear it will receive great graces ... abundant graces will be given to those who have confidence.”*

At this instant the tableau seemed to turn, and I beheld the reverse of the Medal: a large M surmounted by a bar and a cross; beneath the M were the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, the one crowned with thorns, the other pierced with a sword. The twelve stars represent the twelve tribes of Israel, the Apostles, or perhaps the stars in St. John’s vision, in which “a great sign appeared in Heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” (Rev. 12:1)



The medal was made according to Our Lady’s design in 1832. By 1834 it was freely circulated and in a short time was worn by millions in all parts of the world. In its wake followed innumerable wonders. Miracles of health being restored; of sickness banished; of bad habits broken; of special graces given; of dangers averted; of blessings bestowed—until the little Medal of the Immaculate Conception became known by the name it bears today: “The Miraculous Medal.” The medal itself has no power; however, when worn in faith and with prayer to the Mother of God, miracles of health, peace, blessings, protection and conversion occur.

### Catherine Labouré

While the Miraculous Medal became well known throughout the world, Sister Catherine Labouré devoted her life to the service of the poor elderly, in silence and humility for the next forty-six years. Until her death on December 31, 1876 Catherine kept the secret that she was the one to whom Mary appeared and confided the medal. She was a woman of profound prayer and service, a true “contemplative in action” in the spirit of St. Vincent and St. Louise.

In 1933, at the time of her beatification, her body was found completely whole, without decay, and is now at the side altar in the Miraculous Medal chapel of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. Catherine was declared a saint by Pope Pius XII on July 27, 1947, and she was named the “Saint of Silence.”

### Frederic Ozanam

Frederic Ozanam founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in 1833 in Paris, and would have been aware of stories of “miracles” occurring around France from those who wore the medal. Also, being a friend of Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, he was one of the first to receive a “miraculous medal,” and he carried this medal with him until his death. He had great devotion to Mary, and prayed to her with great trust and confidence.



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# *Serving in Hope*

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

*58 Progress Parkway*

*St. Louis, Missouri 63043-3706*

*314-576-3993*