

Serving in Hope

MODULE III



Our Vincentian Heritage
Video/Formation Guide

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

Serving in Hope

Our Vincentian Heritage

Leader: *HERITAGE . . . is a body of beliefs and traditions, passed down from one generation to another which influences the present. A heritage survives and grows only because men and women inherit the tradition and re-create it every generation. It then becomes a living heritage, a living flame that has the power to enlighten, to guide and to enflame.*

And so we pray: (alternate sides)

- Blessed are you, Lord our God
for the traditions and beliefs of our Vincentian Heritage. We thank You, God of Mysterious Ways, for all those who have passed down this heritage from generation to generation, and that now You have given this holy heritage to each of us.
- We rejoice
that we are, each of us, special to You, that our names are written in the palm of Your hand and our place in history, our purpose for existing, is known within your heart, since endless ages.
- We are grateful
for that long line of holy people, who since 1833 have inspired others by their faithfulness to their Vincentian Vocation. They, by their very lives, shout out to us not to compromise our destinies, but to live fully within Your eternal design.
- Blessed are You, Inscrutable Lord,
for those events and persons, especially those who are poor, who have helped us to discover our mission and purpose, in our sometimes empty and seemingly insignificant lives.
- Blessed are You,
for Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam who call us out from the cocoon of comfort and contentment to embark upon that unique path which You have set forth for each member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

(Together)

- Blessed are You, Lord our God,
who has given to each of us a personal destiny and purpose in life. Amen

(Used with permission and adapted from: Prayers for the Domestic Church, by Edward Hays. P. 59.)

Serving in Hope

MODULE III

Our Vincentian Heritage **Video/Formation Guide**



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

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

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

MODULE II: *Our Vincentian Spirituality*

- Session 1:** Vincentian Charism
- Session 2:** Jesus, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor
- Session 3:** Contemplatives in Action
- Session 4:** Journey together to Holiness
- Session 5:** Sacraments and Vincentian Feasts
- Session 6:** Mary in Vincentian Spirituality

MODULE III: *Our Vincentian Heritage*

- Session 1:** Blessed Frederic Ozanam
- Session 2:** Society of St. Vincent de Paul
- Session 3:** The Rule
- Session 4:** Blessed Sister Rosalie Rendu, D.C.
- Session 5:** The Vincentian Family
- Session 6:** Vision of Charity

MODULE IV: *Our Vincentian Mission*

- Session 1:** "Let us go to the Poor ..."
- Session 2:** Service
- Session 3:** Solidarity
- Session 4:** Mutuality of Evangelization
- Session 5:** Justice
- Session 6:** Advocacy

MODULE V: *Our Vincentian Conference Life*

- Session 1:** Conference Spirituality
- Session 2:** Conference Fellowship
- Session 3:** Conference Service
- Session 4:** Conference Structure
- Session 5:** Conference Administration
- Session 6:** Partnership with the Parish

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.

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.

INTRODUCTION

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

QUIET PERIOD

Leader invites everyone: (allow 1-2 min. 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 III

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.1: VINCENTIAN CHARISM 6

- The spiritual heritage of Blessed Frederic Ozanam
- The five “Ozanam Principles”
- Our Vincentian Heritage as lived today

SESSION 3.2: SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL 12

- The Society as the living legacy of Frederic Ozanam
- The Society is a “Providential fact”
- Our Vincentian Heritage of the Society

SESSION 3.3: THE RULE 18

- The Rule as a gift of the Holy Spirit
- The wisdom of the Rule
- Our Vincentian Heritage found in the Rule

SESSION 3.4: BLESSED ROSALIE RENDU, D.C. 24

- Our Vincentian Heritage in the life of Sister Rosalie
- Sister Rosalie as guide and mentor of the Society
- The Beatification of Sister Rosalie Rendu

SESSION 3.5: THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY 30

- Members and Mission of the Vincentian Family
- Marian Associations and Lay Volunteer Organizations
- Women Founders and Saints in the Vincentian Family

SESSION 3.6: VISION OF CHARITY 36

- The “Vision of Charity” of our Vincentian Heritage
- The components of our “Vision of Charity”
- The “Vision of Charity” for the Vincentian Family

MODULE III

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.1:

Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand the spiritual heritage of Blessed Frederic Ozanam.
- ② Appreciate the five “Ozanam Principles”.
- ③ Recognize how our Vincentian Heritage is lived today.



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

The justice I possess is that which comes through faith in Christ. It has its origin in God and is based on faith. I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead. It is not that I have reached it yet, or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3: 9-12)

INTRODUCTION:

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

The heritage that Frederic Ozanam has bequeathed to us through his thought, his witness, and his work is so rich that it is almost impossible to grasp. Frederic led a fully human life, and his life was transformed by a holiness which he acquired progressively through the days of ordinary living that was rooted in prayer and meditation on scripture. Frederic was a husband and father; a champion of truth and justice; a lover of the poor and the founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The essential truths of the spirituality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam can be found in five principles that are foundational to his being, building blocks of who he was: his spiritual DNA. These principles were not merely intellectual principles stored in the safety deposit box of his head, but truths from which he lived and moved and had his being. These "Ozanam Principles" were stepping stones on his path to holiness: Faith; Divine Providence; the Will of God; Truth; Compassion and Jesus.

1) FAITH

Faith is the sacred fire, the dominating influence of Frederic Ozanam's life. Frederic wrote: "Faith is an act of virtue and therefore an act of the will...we must surrender our soul, and then God gives us the fullness of light." In his youth Frederic had suffered a crisis of faith, and at the very depth of his internal struggle, he went into the Church of St. Bonaventure, stood in a dark corner and in tears before the Blessed Sacrament begged God to lift his doubts, to dispel his darkness. He promised God that if God did, he would dedicate his life to the service of truth. Frederic surrendered his soul. The doubts left him, never to return.

Notes

Session 3.1

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

2) DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND THE WILL OF GOD

Divine Providence was a major principle in the life of Frederic Ozanam, as it was in the life of St. Vincent. Frederic saw the events of his life in the perspective of faith, as pieces of God's plan for him, God's Providence working out in his life. But Frederic was like most of us: he did not always see God's Providence being worked out at the moment; he saw it in retrospect. He, like us, struggled to discern and discover God's will in the events of his life. And his constant prayer was : "I will what you will, when you will, in whatever way you will, because you will it."

3) TRUTH

If faith was Frederic's sacred fire, truth was his sacred passion. This passion manifested itself in his faithfulness to the Catholic faith, in his professional life of teaching and writing, and in his ministry to the poor. Truth was his vocation, truth was his mission in life. Frederic knew when truth was lived and witnessed, it is a form of love. Truth in the mind is an idea; truth in the heart is love.

4) COMPASSION

Compassion in action is the core of Frederic Ozanam's spirituality. Compassion is faith in action. Frederic understood and lived the parable of the Good Samaritan, where compassion was not just sharing an emotion or sentiment, but the putting that feeling into action for our unfortunate neighbor who is sick, poor and in need. Compassion is a "feeling with" rather than a "feeling for" the poor.

5) JESUS

Frederic saw Jesus Christ in the poor and the poor in Jesus Christ. He believed the words of Jesus when he said, "As often as you did this to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me." (Mt.25: 40) Frederic saw the poor as a mediator, a bridge between God and us.

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

DISCUSSION:

Which of the "Ozanam Principles" speaks most to your own life?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

O God, you raised up Blessed Frederic, setting him ablaze with the spirit of your love, to encourage groups of lay people in service of the poor. Grant that following his example we may carry out your commandment to love, becoming like yeast in our world today. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING:

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

THE “OZANAM PRINCIPLES”

By Ronald Ramson, C.M.

On his 40th birthday, April 23, 1853, his last birthday on earth, Blessed Frederic Ozanam wrote his Last Will and Testament. In reality, it was the creed of his life: where his intellect and heart united. We find Frederic's beliefs and principles in that legal document. The “Ozanam Principles” that governed and drove Frederic Ozanam's life are: Faith; Divine Providence; Truth; Compassion and Jesus.

1) FAITH: The sacred fire and the dominating influence of Frederic's life.

Some years after suffering his crisis of faith, Frederic wrote: “I believed ever afterwards with a stronger faith, and deeply touched by such a grace, I promised God to devote my life and my strength to the service of that truth which had restored peace to my mind.” And a friend was to write about Frederic: “He has a sacred fire. There is such an air of interior conviction in this man, that without the appearance of doing so, he convinces and moves you.”

Faith was not only a virtue, not only his sacred fire, not only the dominating influence of his life, but it was a sacred doctrine, a sacred truth. Frederic wrote: “I cling to Catholic orthodoxy more than to life itself, loving and serving with all my heart the Roman Catholic Church.” Toward the end of his life, he said: “This dear Society is also my family. It is, after God, what preserved me in the faith after I left my good and pious parents. I love it, therefore, and cling to it with all my heart.” (Letter, July 9, 1853)

2) DIVINE PROVIDENCE: In trust Frederic always discerned the Will of God.

To act in fidelity to God's will requires a docility to Divine Providence. Frederic understood that he could imitate Jesus by submitting to God's Providence through conscientiously carrying out God's Will in all circumstances and at all times. Frederic expressed this belief by writing: “We must respect earth as the workshop of Providence, and our particular employment as the task which has been assigned to us.” (Letter, July 21, 1850)

Writing to the laity, Pope John Paul II said: “It is not a question of simply knowing what God wants from each of us in the various situations of life. The individual must do what God wants, as we are reminded in the words that Mary addressed the servants at Cana: ‘Do whatever he tells you.’” (Christifideles Laici, # 58) Frederic was able to discover God’s Will in his life through a receptive listening to the Word of God and the Church; fervent and constant prayer; recourse to a wise spiritual guide; and faithful discernment. Therefore, trusting in Divine Providence he could “Do whatever God told him.”

3) TRUTH: Frederic’s vocation and mission in life.

Speaking to his students, Frederic said: “Gentlemen, I have not the honor to be a theologian, but I have the happiness to be a Christian; the happiness to believe and the ambition to devote my mind, my heart and all my strength to the service of truth.” And to Amelie, his wife, he writes: “Truth has no need of me, but I have need of it. The cause of the faith is what I hold to in the roots of my heart; and in any humble way I can serve it, I will be worthily employed the years accounted me on the earth.” (Letter, October 13, 1843)

4) COMPASSION: Frederic believed that compassion is faith in action.

Adorning the wall behind Blessed Frederic’s tomb in the crypt of St. Joseph-des-Carmes Church in Paris is a fresco of the Good Samaritan. It is a most appropriate painting for his tomb because it provides us pictorially with one of his life principles, the core of his spirituality: compassion in action. Frederic believed that compassion is faith in action, and truth in the heart is love.

Frederic understood and lived the parable of the Good Samaritan. Frederic wrote: “The humanity of our days seem comparable to the traveler of whom the Gospel speaks. It has been attacked by the cutthroats and robbers of thought, by wicked men who have robbed it of what it possessed: the treasure of faith and love, and they have left it naked and wounded and lying by the side of the road.” So for Frederic, humanity is the victim. But who is the Good Samaritan for Frederic? He writes: “...weak Samaritans, worldly and people of little faith that we are, let us dare...to approach this great sick one. Perhaps it will not be frightened of us. Let us probe its wounds and pour in oil, soothing its ear with words of consolation and peace.”

Who are the “Good Samaritans”? We Vincentians are! But, you notice, that Frederic does not call us “Good Samaritans” but “weak Samaritans.” We are weak human beings who minister to wounded and robbed humanity by our acts of compassion, spiritual as well as physical. After all, we ourselves are members of humanity. We are the weak ministering to the weak. An essential companion piece to compassion for Vincentians is that we do not make moral judgments. In ministering to others, we do not set ourselves up as judge and jury. We follow Jesus’ mandate: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned...Give, and it will be given to you.” (Luke 6: 37-38)

5. JESUS: Frederic saw Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus.

Frederic saw the presence of God especially in the poor. This is the essence of Vincentian spirituality. He understood that Jesus identifies himself with the person who is thirsty, hungry, naked, sick or imprisoned... "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me."

Frederic confirms God's presence in the poor, when he says: "Both men and the poor we see with the eyes of the flesh; they are there and we can put finger and hand in their wounds and the scars of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads; and at this point incredulity no longer has a 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 your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love him otherwise shall we not love him in your persons?" (Letter, November 13, 1836) Frederic sees Jesus in the poor, but it is not the historical Jesus; Frederic sees the wounded, risen Jesus in them. And he sees in the risen scarred Jesus, the poor.

Frederic also sees the poor person as a mediator, a bridge between God and us. Jesus comes into our lives through the poor and thus mediates for us. He wrote: "The poor person is the messenger of God sent to prove our justice and charity, and to save us by our works." He also sees the poor person as our intercessor: "If you give in the name of God, and if the poor man prays for you, there is reciprocity of service. The poverty-stricken family, whom you helped, has more than repaid the debt, when the old man, the good mother, the little children bring your name before his throne."

Notes

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.2:
*Society of
St. Vincent de Paul*

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate the Society as the living legacy of Frederic Ozanam.
- ② Recognize that the Society is a “Providential fact.”
- ③ Understand the Vincentian Heritage of the Society.



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

"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: 16-17)

INTRODUCTION:

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

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which Frederic Ozanam founded on his 20th birthday, is a major element of his precious heritage. Founded exactly half way through his life on earth, it was his central concern, along with his family and his profession. It summoned up a great deal of his energy, thought and enthusiasm.

His contribution, the fruit of his intense faith, his ardent charity and his acute sense of friendship, was vital in the development of the Society, to which he communicated the initial spirit which still gives it life today. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is Frederic Ozanam's living legacy to us.

In faith Frederic knew that the Society was a "Providential fact," and it is difficult not to marvel at the dazzling growth on five continents of the work engendered by Frederic Ozanam and his first companions:

1833:	1 Conference-	7 members
1883:	4,000 Conferences-	76,500 members
1933:	13,200 Conferences-	180,000 members
2003:	47,500 Conferences-	650,000 members

Today, an international Society of men and women of all ages and conditions serve the poor in ¹³²132 countries on five continents. These volunteers bear witness and work on all the front lines of poverty. They reach out daily toward millions of human beings in adversity: victims of poverty, injustice, racism and violence. They faithfully provide a service which is filled with attention and a personal touch for all those who thirst for friendship and respect. Our Vincentian heritage is found in the vision of Frederic who saw the Society as "embracing the world in a network of charity."

As we begin the Third Millennium, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul also consists of thousands of institutions and works which offer, in all sorts of situations, help and protection that give new hope and means for survival to oppressed, marginalized or excluded persons. These works can be found in the entire spectrum of charitable, social and humanitarian activity in all its variety. For, indeed "No work of charity is foreign to the Society."

READING: (U.S. Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 45-47; 98)

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

“No work of Charity is foreign to the Society”:

The possibilities for Vincentian action are almost without limit. Being poor does not always, or necessarily, consist of being short of material goods. Being poor can also mean being physically and mentally handicapped, sick, crippled, old, ugly, or illiterate. Being poor can mean those who are or are made to feel alone, as often are immigrants, transients, orphans, the abandoned or rejected, and all those who find themselves among others who are indifferent or hostile. Being poor may mean being physically or morally chained, as prisoners, shut-ins, alcoholics, drug-addicts. All such forms of poverty, and many others, exist everywhere, and to the extent that the Society grows, the more it can reach the lonely and troubled who have need of care and friendship.

Whatever the need to be met, Vincentian helping is person-to-person:

core
From the beginning of the Society, the central and most basic activity of Conferences has been the visitation of the needy in the home. This action is the clearest symbol of the Vincentian charism which dictates the highest respect for the dignity of the poor. It is in the home environment that needy persons feel most free to entrust their stories of struggle to the helper. It is there, in the family setting, that Vincentians are asked to listen, offer humble advice, and render assistance.

The spirit of Cordiality:

Frank cordiality characterizes Vincentians. That cordiality is a natural result of the friendship that united the founders of the Society and has remained traditional in the Councils and Conferences. Members manifest mutual respect and affection, as they belong to a Community of faith, love, prayer and action.

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

DISCUSSION:

What aspects of the legacy and heritage of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul inspires you the most?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Let us pray 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.)

Frederic Ozanam: A Layman for Now

By Shaun McCarty, S.T.

The Church in general and Christians in particular face the perennial questions of modernity: How can we live the faith today? How do we discern, receive and hand on a living tradition that is at once faithful to the past and responsive to the present? How do we unite a world of ideas with one of action? How do we strive to lessen the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”? How do we try to mediate between the factions of a divided world so that we may all be one?

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

The writings and thoughts of Frederic Ozanam teach us that genuine Christian spirituality is the lived Gospel in response to a contemporary cultural situation and that the contemporary relevance of any Christian spirituality is illumined by its past heritage. Frederic Ozanam is one of the model individuals who have embodied Gospel values to a marked degree and whose vitality continues to incarnate the same Gospel values in a new and different time and culture. Like the Gospel itself, his life tends to reach beyond time and place. He perceived a tradition of Christianity, transformed and translated it in terms of his culture and he handed it on as a heritage for the future.

Frederic Ozanam and his followers would seem to speak to current issues of social justice in ways in which these issues might be more effectively addressed by Christians. His love for and dedication to the poor was expressed in both theoretical and practical ways. As teacher and writer, he sought social reform aimed at causes and systems. As a founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, he worked tirelessly and in concrete ways to bring help to those in need and influenced countless others to join him in the task. His words and deeds foreshadowed the social encyclicals and lay apostolic movement that would come later in the nineteenth century.

On November 5, 1836, Frederic wrote:

“For if the question which disturbs the world around us today is not a political question, but a social question; if it is the struggle between those who have nothing with those who have too much; if it is the violent shock of opulence and of poverty which shakes the earth under it, then our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between these irreconcilable enemies, and to make the ones divest themselves so that the other may receive as a benefit; so that equality may operate as much as it is possible among men; and to make charity accomplish what justice alone cannot do. It is a good thing, then, to be placed by Providence on neutral ground...in order to act as mediator.”

As Frederic Ozanam pursued this double-pronged effort to champion the cause of the poor by word and deed, the following observations might be made with particular challenge to our contemporary situation:

I. Our Vincentian Heritage

Frederic was unwilling to seek change by means of mere humanitarian reform. The love of God and neighbor and finding Christ in the person of the poor were the Vincentian heritage to which he made himself and his followers heir. And the protection of that fundamental charity that informed the works was a personal and corporate humility which saved the effort from the contamination of selfish pursuit or ambiguous motivations. Great insistence on anonymity in services rendered and on benefits received from serving the poor are a legacy preserved in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul.

This speaks to modern efforts for liberation and the need to ground these efforts in such charity and humility so as to avoid the pitfalls of neglecting the spiritual dimension which is essential to total human development of people and sustained dedication in their behalf.

II. Mediator

Consonant with this spirit of charity and humility, it is not surprising to find in Ozanam and his conception of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul that of a mediator. Though he took clear and strong stands on issues, his design was to bridge the gaps. Consequently he displayed great respect for those whose views differed from his own as well as insistence on finding solutions through peaceful rather than violent means because he perceived this as the Gospel way.

This appears to confront polarization and tactics today that tend to divide and conquer rather than to unite and to elicit free cooperation.

III. Personal involvement

For Frederic, the real school for those who would work for the poor was personal involvement in the lives of those to whom help was given—through visiting the poor and the sick and the underprivileged in the places where they lived and struggled. And it meant for Ozanam and

his followers not just bringing them material aid, but it involved attention to the deeper needs of the spirit. Further, such personal attention to the needs of the poor was not just a token and for a time, but was to endure through the years.

Does this not speak of an “education by action” for our own time and needs? Does it not remind us of a priority of action over theory...?

IV. Lay Vocation

Frederic had the insight of his vocation as a layman in the Church as well as the lay character of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The work to which they were committed was directly related to the Gospel as a visible and tangible concern of Christians as Christians for their brothers and sisters in need. He saw clearly the relationship of those charitable efforts to one's personal growth in faith. It was clear from the beginning that Frederic never meant to accomplish his great work for the Church, for the cause of Truth and in service of the poor, through a solitary venture. His entire disposition was to seek his goal in the company of others, in a community of faith.

Does this not speak to the hunger for spirituality, community and ministry found in today's society?

Notes

MODULE III

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.3:

The Rule

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate the Rule as a gift of the Holy Spirit.
- ② Understand the wisdom of the Rule.
- ③ Recognize the Vincentian Heritage found in the Rule.



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

"Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit. The Spirit scrutinizes all matters, even the deep things of God...No one knows what lies at the depths of God but the Spirit of God. The Spirit we received is not the world's spirit but God's Spirit, helping us to recognize the gifts he has given us. We speak of these, not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, thus interpreting spiritual things in spiritual terms. (1Corinthians 2:10-13)"

INTRODUCTION:

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

Shortly before he died in 1853, Blessed Frederic inaugurated a new Conference in Florence, Italy. At the meeting, he told the new Vincentians the story of the establishment of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul twenty years earlier. Frederic then said: "You see that we cannot in truth take the title of founders, for it was God who willed and who founded the Society."

These words should make us Vincentians feel justifiably proud and humble at the same time and invoke feelings of deep gratitude as well: "God willed and founded our Society." Frederic's words echo the same sentiment of St. Vincent de Paul when addressing his religious communities, for Vincent always reminded his followers that it was not he but God who founded them.

Earlier in his life, Frederic stated that the "Society of St. Vincent de Paul was indeed a Providential fact." Frederic was convinced that God in his Providence had brought the Society into existence and was directing its rapid expansion throughout Europe, the Near East and the Americas.

If the Society is a gift of God—"willed and founded by God"—then it is also true that the Rule is also a gift, a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit moved and prompted the original authors with his inspiration, insights and clarity in the composition of the Rule.

The Rule is a great gift given and passed on to us by Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the pioneers of the Society through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Rule is a gift originally authored by three men: Emmanuel Bailly, the first President of the Society, Francois Lallier, the Secretary General, and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. The Rule was adopted by the membership of the Society on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1835.

Notes

Session 3.3

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

The Rule is amazingly simple, immensely practical and based on good, solid common sense. It has a wealth of wondrous direction and guidance, which is invigorating for our spirit and purpose. The Rule keeps us honest and true to who we are and what we are about in the service of God's poor. The Rule roots us in God. It forever keeps before us our spirituality and our need to advance in it. The Rule is not an end in itself. It is a means—a means of assisting us in our spiritual lives and in our ministry.

The Rule calls us to solidarity with Vincentians locally, nationally and internationally. The very first paragraph of the Rule reminds us that we are “an international Catholic organization.” We are more than a local association, parochial or diocesan; we are more than a national group. We are an international Catholic organization.

St. Vincent said to his community: “If you keep the Rule, the Rule will keep you.” A Rule does keep us: keeps us unified, keeps us properly focused, keeps us authentic. The Rule provides us with a standard of uniformity and connectiveness. One of the ways solidarity within the Society is achieved is through fidelity to the Rule.

As any viable and reliable association, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has borders, directions, guidelines; otherwise it would have died years ago. But the fact that our Society has existed for so long and done so much good for so many of our suffering brothers and sisters, proves that it is indeed a “Providential fact.” The Rule is the adhesive that has kept the Society from unraveling.

The Rule is a gift of the Holy Spirit and as is the case with any gift, it must be accepted, otherwise it is not a gift. Freedom and grace is involved. A gift freely given, must be freely received. The Rule has honored the fidelity of its followers to the spirit of the Founders for over 170 years and thus testifies to the Rule's credibility, effectiveness and worthiness.

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

DISCUSSION:

In what ways does our Conference live the Rule?

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

Father, grant us the wisdom and integrity to persevere in fidelity to the Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Committed to growing in spirituality, living in a community of faith and serving those who are poor and suffering, may we follow those who have gone before us, becoming a visible sign of Christ and a witness to your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING:

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

THE RULE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

By Ronald Ramson, C.M.

The growth of the Society from a single Conference into an organization of many Conferences necessitated regulations that would help preserve the objectives and spirit of the original foundation. In 1835, two years after its founding, the Society formulated its Rule, a series of Articles, based upon the practical experiences of the first Vincentians.

Vincentian Experience and Heritage

The Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was derived out of the deep truths of the first Vincentians' experience, tradition and certain bedrock spiritual principles. The lived-truths of Vincentian experience were the matrix of the Rule. The experience of working with the poor gave them firsthand empirical knowledge of what worked and what did not. The experience of collaborating together, of relating together in meetings, of governance, all provided first-hand empirical knowledge. They learned from the school of success and failure and brought that to the composition of the Rule.

The founders brought to the Rule a two hundred year tradition of ministering to the poor as done by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. One of their original, major mentors was Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity who gave the charter members of the Society the insights and spirit of the Vincentian tradition as taught by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac.

The Rule of the Society is therefore derived from the bedrock spiritual principles of St. Vincent and St. Louise: their mind, heart and spirit. These principles teach us their incarnational spirituality which is to be Christ to others and to see Christ in others, especially the least of our brothers and sisters.

The Rule

When Emmanuel Bailly, Francois Lallier and Frederic Ozanam authored the first Rule, their experience told them that it was time for regulations. The Rule helped to stabilize a rapidly expanding Society. The lived reality of growing numbers told them that it was time for order and to put things down on paper. The actuality of having hundreds of men doing ministry warranted a Rule. The Rule would give structure and organization, clarity and definition. The Rule identified them as Vincentians: who they were and what they did. The Rule gave authority and set the boundaries.

The “Explanatory Notes” of the original Rule dated December, 1835 verifies this: “We are now entering upon that formal organization we have long wished for. It has been delayed, for our association has already existed some years. But were we not bound to ascertain that God wished that it should continue, before determining the form which it should assume?”

Was it not necessary that it should be well established—that it should know what Heaven required of it—that it should judge what it could do by what it had done, before framing its rules and prescribing its duties? Now we have only to embody, as it were, in Regulations, usages already followed and cherished; and this is a guarantee that our Rule will be well received by all, and will not be forgotten.”

“Our association originated in religious motives; we must, therefore, look for the rules of our conduct nowhere but in the spirit of religion—in the examples and words of our Savior—in the instructions of the Church—in the lives of the Saints. Such are the reasons why we placed ourselves under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Vincent de Paul, to whom we owe particular devotion, and whose footsteps we must perseveringly endeavor to follow.”

Revisions of the Rule

The Rule is stable but not static. When Vincentian experience from time to time revealed the need for clarification or reinterpretation, commentaries to the individual Articles of the original Rule were appropriately introduced. In 1935 and in 1953 a thorough reworking of the Rule and Commentaries was undertaken by the Council General in Paris. Substance was not affected. One could readily discern in the Society’s Rule and Commentaries of the 1950’s, the Rule of the 1830’s.

In the 1960’s, the President General of the Society put before the Society a challenging program of “renewal” based on considerations of spirituality, universality, extension, youth, training, adaptation and cooperation. The Society throughout the world responded enthusiastically to the challenge of the renewal, and the directives of the Second Vatican Council (1963-65) brought about a further intensification of effort.

Then at the 1973 International Assembly the Society promulgated the latest version of the Rule which is divided into three principle parts:

Part I: Focuses on basic principles of the Society. This is known as the Charter of the Society. It applies to all Vincentian members and units throughout the world. These five Charter statements define the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, discuss Vincentian spirituality, relate poverty to the Vincentian, describe the organizational network of the Society and look at the meetings of the Conferences.

Part II: Deals with Conference and Council structures.

Part III: Specifies the organization, functioning and authority of the Council General, the international governing body of the Society.

As we walk into the new millennium, the Holy Spirit will continue to call forth revision and renewal of the Rule.

Gift of the Holy Spirit

The Rule of the Society stands as a rallying point for celebration and thanksgiving. It is truly a gift of God, a gift of the Holy Spirit, a blessing. With only a few changes, the Rule of the Society has continued as the guide and blueprint for the Society for more than 170 years. This, alone, is a tribute to its efficacy and to the Spirit who inspired it.

The Rule has worked effectively in countries on five continents, in diverse cultures, in a variety of languages and dialects, sometimes amid horrific civil upheavals and under chaotic conditions, through benign monarchies and audacious dictatorships, through atheistic communism, republics and democracies. The Rule has kept the Society alive and productive. The Rule has honored the fidelity of its followers to the spirit of the Founders. The Rule works.



MODULE III

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.4:

Blessed Rosalie Rendu, D. C.

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Recognize our Vincentian Heritage in the life of Sister Rosalie.**
- ② Understand how Sister Rosalie guided and directed Frederic Ozanam and the founding members of the Society.**
- ③ Celebrate the beatification of Sister Rosalie Rendu, D. C.**



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light."
(Matthew 11:28-30)*

INTRODUCTION:

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

Jeanne Marie Rendu was born September 9, 1786 at Confort, France. She was the eldest of four girls. Her parents, simple and faith-filled, were small property owners and enjoyed a certain affluence and true respect throughout the area.

Jeanne Marie was three years old when the Revolution broke out in France. From 1790 it was compulsory for the clergy to take a civil oath of support for the government. Numerous priests, faithful to the Church, refused to take this oath. Some were put to death and others had to hide to escape being captured. With deep faith and trust in God, the Rendu family home became a refuge for these priests and it was here that the Bishop of Annency found asylum as a hired hand.

It was in this atmosphere of solid faith, always exposed to the danger of condemnation, that Jeanne Marie was educated. She would make her first Communion one night by candlelight in the basement of her home. The example of her parents and this extraordinary environment forged her character.

Jeanne Marie attended a boarding school of the Ursuline Sisters in Gex, and it was there she discovered the hospital where the Daughters of Charity cared for the sick. Soon God's call, that she had sensed for many years, made itself clear: she would become a Daughter of Charity. And on May 25, 1802, at the age of only 16, Jeanne Marie arrived at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris.

After a period of formation, Jeanne Marie received the name of Sister Rosalie and she was sent to the house of the Daughters of Charity in the Mouffetard district to serve the suffering poor. This area was the most impoverished district of Paris with poverty in all its forms: psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual. There disease, unhealthy slums, and destitution were the daily lot of the people who were trying to survive. Sr. Rosalie would remain there 54 years!

Notes

Session 3.4

READING: (U.S. Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, p.198-199 and Apostle in a Top Hat, by James P. Derum, p.54-56)

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

Emmanuel Bailly, the President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, sent the founding members to Sister Rosalie for guidance and direction as they began their work of charity. She gave them a list of needy families to visit in the Mouffetard district and she taught them how to serve the poor with respect and compassion.

Sister Rosalie said to them: "God has already given you spiritual wisdom, or you would not be sacrificing your precious free day to His poor. Because you see Christ in His poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility, as His servant. Always remember, messieurs, that if we had lived 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. 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."

One day Sister Rosalie said, "Last night I dreamed that I stood at the judgment seat of God. God received me with great severity and was about to pronounce my sentence when, suddenly, I was surrounded by an immense crowd of people carrying old boots, shoes, and hats. They presented all these things to God saying: 'She was the one who gave us all these things.' Then Jesus looked at me and said: 'Because you gave all these old clothes in my Name, I open heaven to you. Enter, for all eternity!'"

The grace of Sister Rosalie to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is still witnessed today as Vincentians continue to serve the poor with the integration of feminine and masculine gifts. The Church has recognized the virtues of Sr. Rosalie by declaring her "Blessed" on November 9, 2003.

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

DISCUSSION:

As a Vincentian today, what do the words of Sister Rosalie mean to you?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Let us pray together the words of Sister Rosalie)

“Serve well those who are poor and always address them with much kindness. If you do not act in this manner they will insult you. The ruder they are, the more dignity and respect you must have. Remember that our Lord is hidden behind those rags! ... We must not make them wait. An hour lost from their work is one less loaf of bread for a hungry family.” Amen

ENRICHMENT READING:

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

BLESSED ROSALIE RENDU, Daughter of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul
By Kieran Kneaves, D.C.

Every day, in all kinds of weather, Sister Rosalie crisscrossed the streets and alleyways of the Mouffetard district, with her rosary in hand and a heavy basket on her arm, she walked with her God. She would speak to God of the family she was going to visit, praying for the relief of their sufferings, concerns and anxieties. “Never have I prayed so well as in the streets,” she would say.

Her faith, solid as a rock and clear as a spring, revealed Jesus Christ in all circumstances. She daily lived the words that Saint Vincent de Paul spoke to the first Daughters of Charity: “You will go and visit the poor ten times a day, and ten times a day you will find God there!” Sr. Rosalie always told those who went to visit the poor that, “It is Jesus himself we are going to serve. What respect and devotion we must have toward his suffering members! What patience and kindness must we not have toward these poor people, both the good and the bad, as there always are!”

Sister Rosalie’s prayer life was intense, as one of her Sisters affirmed, “...she continually lived in the presence of God. She had a difficult mission to fulfill and we were always assured of seeing her go to the chapel or finding her on her knees in her office.”

Service of the Poor

The Mouffetard district was one of the poorest of Paris: it had the most beggars in the streets, the most workers out of work, the poorest lodgings and two-thirds of the population lacked firewood in the winter. Sister Rosalie untiringly cared for, fed, visited, consoled and comforted those who were poor and destitute. She would often say, “There is something that is choking me and takes away my appetite...the thought that so many families lack bread”...and her feminine intuition would then suggest what to do, the solution to create. For the service of the poor she dared to undertake everything with intelligence and boldness. Nothing would stop her if it concerned helping someone back on their feet.

It can be said of Sister Rosalie that she had the “gift of humanness.” She was close to the poor, she understood them, and she loved them with her heart and with her faith; there lay her secret. But also, in order to fight against injustice and poverty, she awakened the conscience of those in power and those with money. She was indeed, a friend of the poor and the rich. She would say, “There are many ways of providing charity: the assistance of money or assistance in kind that we give to the poor will not last long. We must aspire to a more complete and longer lasting benefit: study their abilities, their level of education and try to get them jobs to help them out of their difficulties.”

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

It was not far from the Mouffetard district to the Latin Quarter, and so young people from all the schools, aspiring to all sorts of careers could be seen in her office—students of law, medicine, education and engineering, coming to serve the poor. Tenderly and respectfully Sister Rosalie would personally accompany them, be concerned about their life, support them, assure a link with their families, and she would ask each one what they could give to the service of the poor—to one, their pen, to another, their service and to another, their words and to each one, a few moments of their time to bring assistance to those in need.

Sr. Rosalie always recommended patience, mercy and courtesy to them. “Love the poor, do not blame them too much...remember that the poor are even more sensitive to your behavior than to help.” She thus taught Frederic Ozanam and the first members of the Society how to make home visits to the poor. With her they learned how to see Jesus in the poor. Giving them families to visit, she would give them advice on the Christian way to go to them, to respect them and to consider them as brothers and sisters.

From this time it is said, that the destinies of Frederic Ozanam and Sister Rosalie mingled in the love of the poor, thus forging lasting bonds between the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Daughters of Charity. Furthermore:

“It is scarcely imaginable to retrace the life and work of Frederic Ozanam without evoking the memory of Sister Rosalie in so much as their collaboration was close in the service of the poor...The providential convergence of these two destinies have marked the history of charity in the nineteenth century.” (Hess, *Frederic Ozanam*, p. 125)



Blessed Rosalie Rendu, D.C.



Blessed Frederic Ozanam

On September 8, 1853 Frederic Ozanam died, and he was beatified on August 22, 1997. Providentially the feast of Blessed Frederic Ozanam is celebrated on September 9, Sister Rosalie’s birthday.

On February 7, 1856 Sister Rosalie died. A huge crowd, estimated at about 50,000 people, from every rank of society, flocked to her funeral.

In the cemetery of Montparnasse she was buried in a simple tomb surmounted by a cross engraved with these words: "To our good Mother Rosalie, from her grateful friends, the rich and the poor." Even to this day, flowers and prayers continue to be brought to this gravesite: a lasting yet discrete homage to this humble Daughter of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac.

Beatification

Sister Rosalie was an extraordinary woman: bright, sensible, dynamic, strong, cordial, and loving. She was blessed with a good character and a good sense of humor. Her energy, creativity, fidelity, and courage shine out in the accounts of all who knew her. The Church beatified Sister Rosalie on November 9, 2003 and now she shines like a star, so that in the midst of our darkness we can see, through her example, how to live our vocation to the poor.

(Reference: Sister Rosalie Rendu—A Daughter of Charity with a Heart on Fire, Editions du Signe, 2003.)



Notes

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.5:

The Vincentian Family

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Identify the members and mission of the Vincentian Family.
- ② Understand the Marian Associations and Lay Volunteers Organizations in the Vincentian Family.
- ③ Appreciate the Women Founders and Saints in the Vincentian Family.



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

"We are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us. One's gift may be prophecy; its use should be in proportion to your faith. It may be a gift of ministry; it should be used for service. One who is a teacher should use their gift for teaching; one with the power of preaching should preach. Whoever gives alms should do so generously ... and those who perform works of mercy should do so cheerfully."
(Roman 12: 5-8)

INTRODUCTION:

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

The Vincentian Family consists of all the Associations or Congregations whose apostolate is inspired by the Vincentian charism of service to those who are poor and destitute. The Vincentian Family is a worldwide, living reality. A countless number of men and women live and breathe the spirit, tradition, and spirituality of the one whom people call the Father of the Poor: St. Vincent de Paul. The following constitute some of the major branches of the Vincentian Family:

The Ladies of Charity:

In 1617, St. Vincent founded the Confraternities of Charity in Chatillon, France by organizing the lay women in the parishes to: "honor Our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy Mother and to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually." Their motto is **"To serve rather than be served"** and currently there are almost 250,000 Ladies of Charity, also known as the AIC (International Association of Charity), serving in 42 countries throughout the world.

The Congregation of the Mission (C.M.):

In 1625, St. Vincent founded his community of priests and brothers to evangelize the poor through words and works, especially the poor people in the countryside through missions to the people, and the formation of the clergy. Their motto is **"He has sent me to evangelize the poor"** and currently there are about 4,000 missionaries of priests and brothers serving in 80 countries throughout the world.

The Daughters of Charity (D.C.):

In 1633, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac co-founded the Daughters of Charity to "consecrate their lives to God and to live in community in order to dedicate themselves to the service the poor." Their motto is: **"The Charity of Jesus crucified urges us"** and there are 26,000 Daughters serving in 80 countries throughout the world.

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

After the French Revolution, the Vincentian Family experienced a significant renaissance together with the founding of:

The Sisters of Charity

In 1809, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, using the Rule of St. Vincent, founded the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg, Maryland, and they quickly spread throughout the United States. In 1850 the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg joined the Daughters of Charity in France. The Sisters of Charity of New York, Cincinnati, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Kansas formed separate congregations. The Sisters of Charity in the United States belong to a Federation representing 13 Religious communities representing over 4000 members.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

In 1833, Frederic Ozanam, along with his companions, founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Its purpose was "following the Vincentian spirituality of finding Christ in the poor by enfolded the world in a network of charity." The motto of the Society is: **"No work of Charity is foreign to the Society,"** and today there are about 650,000 members serving the poor in 132 countries world-wide.

The Vincentian Family

Throughout the centuries, the Vincentian Family has loved God and found Jesus in the those who are poor. Most of the members are little known or talked about. Yet as long as such people walk the earth we can have unshakable confidence in the future. Linking the mottos together creates a profound **Mission Statement for the Vincentian Family:**

The Charity of Jesus crucified urges us:

- To preach the gospel to the poor
- To serve rather than be served
- For no work of charity is foreign

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

DISCUSSION:

What does the above "Mission Statement of the Vincentian Family" call your Conference to do?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

Lord Jesus, you who willed to become poor, give us eyes and a heart directed toward the poor; help us to recognize you in them—in their thirst, their hunger, their loneliness, and their misfortune. Enkindle within our Vincentian Family unity, simplicity, humility, and the fire of love that burned in St. Vincent de Paul. Strengthen us, so that, faithful to the practice of these virtues, we may contemplate you and serve you in the person of the poor, and may one day be united with you and them in your Kingdom. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING:

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

ASSOCIATIONS IN THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

When speaking of the Vincentian Family we include all the Associations or Congregations whose lifestyle and apostolate are inspired by the gift of the “Vincentian charism.” Therefore, together with the branches already presented in this Module, we will now discover more members of our “Family”:

Vincentian Marian Youth:

In 1835, the first Children of Mary Association was organized and it received Pontifical Approbation in 1847. This lay youth group has as its purpose: “1) To form members to live a solid faith following Jesus Christ the Evangelizer of the poor; 2) To live and pray like Mary, with simplicity and humility; 3) To arouse, animate and sustain the missionary spirit of the association, especially through missionary experiences to those who are poorest and to youth.” This organization is now called “Vincentian Marian Youth” and it is undergoing a great renewal throughout the world.

The Miraculous Medal Association:

In 1847, the Association of the Miraculous Medal was formed at the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris. The members of the Association wear the Miraculous Medal and they spread devotion to Mary as the model of Christian living and the sanctification of its members, especially through service to the poor. There are approximately 7,000,000 members worldwide.

The apparitions of Mary to St. Catherine Laboure in 1830 happened precisely when the Vincentian Family began to be reborn after having been dispersed by the French Revolution. The Miraculous Medal, which was the result of these apparitions, restored trust in the power of prayer and devotion to Mary the Mother of God. It is said that Frederic Ozanam was wearing the medal when he founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in 1833, In 1843, and he placed the Society under the protection of the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception.

Vincentian Service Corps:

In 1983, the Vincentian Service Corps was begun by the Congregation of the Mission in New York City, and similar volunteer groups are now sponsored by the Daughters of Charity and other Provinces of the Vincentian Priests. The Vincentian Service Corps provide young adults with a year experience of living in community and working with poor in the spirit of St. Vincent and St. Louise.

Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI):

In 1999, the Lay Vincentian Missionaries came about from the heart of the Vincentian Family. Its goal is: “to foster, facilitate, sustain and coordinate the missionary presence and work of the laity in the missions in the world confided to or animated by the Vincentian Family. This association assists young lay men and women, single and married, who want to spend several years of their lives in a foreign mission.

WOMEN FOUNDERS AND SAINTS OF THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

St. Louise de Marillac

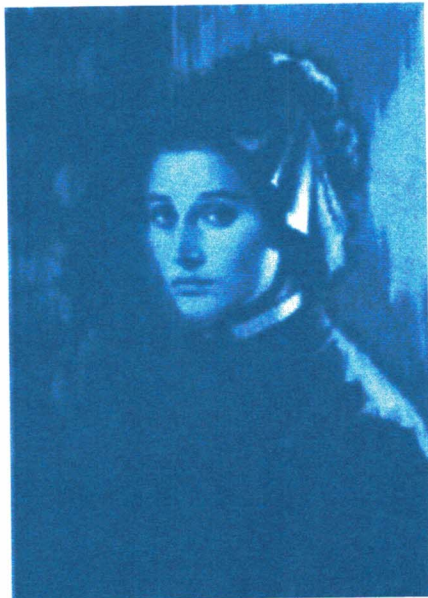
On November 29, 1633 Louise de Marillac, together with St. Vincent de Paul, founded the Daughters of Charity in Paris. She trained these Sisters to read, to write and to serve the poor in health care, social ministry and education. Above all she rooted the Daughters of Charity in the Vincentian spirituality of finding Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus, teaching them to be contemplatives in action. She taught the Sisters to serve the poor “with respect, mildness, cordiality and compassion.”



St. Louise de Marillac
(1591-1660)

As wife, mother, teacher and foundress Louise welcomed the grace of God into her life, which transformed her fretful heart into a courageous, generous, and compassionate heart that loved intensely. She had a heart that welcomed poor, hopeless, alienated, and abandoned people. She took a small group of women and molded them into a community of total dedication: “Given to God for the Service of the Poor.” She also organized, directed, and animated the Confraternities and Ladies of Charity. Louise was able to do this because she loved and hoped in God.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
(1774-1821)

In the providence of God, Elizabeth Ann Seton, an Episcopalian, entered the Catholic Church in 1805. She then founded the Sisters of Charity at Emmittsburg, Maryland in 1809. Adapting the Rule of the Daughters of Charity in France to life in the United States, Elizabeth and her Sisters of Charity began the first parochial school system, opened orphanages and served in hospitals. Elizabeth Seton taught her community the Vincentian spirituality of compassionate service: to live as Jesus fed, healed, listened to, challenged, and embraced his friends and enemies. Indeed, loving service makes Jesus' love manifest in a world desperate for that love. Elizabeth knew this and lived it.

Elizabeth's spirituality grew with her experiences as wife and mother, teacher and foundress, convert and community member. Mother Seton was a mother to her five children, her students, and her community. As a loyal and trusted friend, Elizabeth's great love and hopeful spirit continues to sustain and nourish us today.

Notes

MODULE III

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.6:

The Vision of Charity

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate the “Vision of Charity” that is rooted in our Vincentian heritage.
- ② Identify the components of our “Vision of Charity.”
- ③ Understand the “Vision of Charity” for the Vincentian Family.



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

"If I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I have to feed the poor and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13: 2-23)

INTRODUCTION: "Unifying Elements in the Vincentian Family" by Benjamin Romo, C.M.

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

We can describe our Vincentian heritage as a "Vision of Charity," a style of Christian life in the Church and in the world. It is a way of being. It is not something that one adds to the person. It is not a garment that one puts on or takes off according to circumstances, opportunities or determined times. It is rather to live as Jesus, 24 hours a day. Our "Vision of Charity" is a gift that fashions and marks our lifestyle, our relationships and our actions, and it consists of:

1. Vincentians know Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor:

There is nothing more important in the spiritual experience of the Vincentian than the experience of Jesus, Evangelizer of the Poor. This is the foundation of the Vincentian "Vision of Charity" by which we discover and follow Jesus, eyes fixed on him who lived close to the poor, listened to them, helped and pardoned them, gave them to eat, journeyed with them and proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was for them.

2. Vincentians love Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ, and they serve those who are poor "corporally and spiritually":

Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus are the two supports of the Vincentian heart and its "Vision of Charity." A passion for Jesus commits us to an effective compassion toward the poor. To Vincentians, the tough and crude poor are the suffering sacrament of the Lord. That is why the poor, their homes and dwellings, the streets and hospitals are "holy Vincentian places," where the poor are served wholistically—"corporally and spiritually."

Notes

Session 3.6

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

3. Vincentians serve the poor by personal contact:

In our "Vision of Charity" one serves the poor through direct personal contact. We are Vincentians because we are with the poor, and we know them personally; programs for assistance are not abstract, but are developed after recognizing the wounds of the poor.

4. Vincentians have an affective, effective, inventive and communicative love:

Love is a deeply affective compassion that must become effective service carried out in joy. St. Vincent tells us that our love must be "inventive to infinity." Vincentians see and find resources, organize and invent forms of charity that become the gift of life to the poor. Vincentians are enthusiastic for this work of God, and they want to invite others to this holy and urgent work. Now, as in the time of St. Vincent, we can say that the poor who do not know where to go or what to do, the ones whose suffering gets worse every day, these are our "burden and sorrow," and the charity of Jesus impels us, sends us to serve them.

5. Vincentians allow themselves to be evangelized by the poor:

The poor come and deliver us from a life too centered on ourselves. They heal our wounds produced by our middleclass outlook, our near-sightedness. They give a sense of meaning to our lives. To draw near to the poor is to draw near to God.

6. Vincentians are missionary:

Being missionary signifies going out to meet others. St. Vincent called us to go where the needs are the greatest and where the poor are the "poorest and most destitute." Availability and mobility are the fundamental attitudes of our "Vision of Charity."

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

DISCUSSION:

Which element of the "Vision of Charity" is most meaningful to you?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

Lord Jesus, deepen our "Vision of Charity," make us responsive to the Christian calling to seek and to 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 how to live our Vincentian Heritage in faithfulness and love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING:

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

"LOVE IS INVENTIVE TO INFINITY": Vincentian Visioning

By Gertrude Foley, S.C.

Is there any history more depressing than the history of the poor? Poverty, when it goes on and on and on, grinds away the human spirit. Poverty, when it goes on and on, dehumanizes the poor person and de-faces the poor in our midst. Poverty, when it goes on and on, generates still other social evils, and threatens us all with hopelessness and despair.

Vincentian Family Network: A World Wide Web

Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M. has inspired us with the challenge: "What a powerful force we could have by networking the various branches of the Vincentian Family, and those "infected" by the Vincentian spirit! What a tremendous impact we could have on the lives of the poor." The thought of networking is exciting! The potential synergy of the gifts and talents of all those "infected" by the Vincentian spirit inspires hope and awe.

We can envision what impact we could have on the lives of the poor, when in fact, we have a resource that our founders: St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, St. Elizabeth Seton and Bl. Frederic Ozanam did not have. We have the potential for a "world wide web," not of electronic media but of men and women already aware, organized, equipped, and involved in service to the poor of our times throughout the world.

Nevertheless, we share something of our founders' experience: the questions, the doubts, the temptations to despair as they faced the enormity of this challenge. Certainly, we will ask how can we make a network happen? However, we will go on to ask how it is possible to look without despair at the seemingly endless destructive potential of poverty? How is it possible never to give up on projects and programs that seem to be such weak attacks on such immense problems? Make no mistake about it, our founders had these same questions, doubts and temptations.

Our Vincentian Vision

Our founders generated the remarkable Vincentian Vision: the charism of service that is organized, practical, flexible and adaptable. This apostolic tradition is holistic in its emphasis

on both physical and spiritual assistance. Deep in their hearts and spirits, our founders were seized by a profound truth. They listened and heard deeply the Good News of salvation addressed first to them. In their hearing, they then recognized and embraced the mutual identification that must exist among Jesus, the poor, and the servants of the poor.

Vincentians must clothe themselves with the spirit of Jesus, which is essentially a spirit of charity, compassion and tenderness; we must conform our actions and intentions to Jesus, especially in his commitment to the poor. But we would trivialize our charism, our Vincentian Vision, if we limit it to mean only works of service. Unless we are as passionate as our founders were to grow daily into this identification with Jesus and his mission, we cannot claim the name Vincentian.

Our founders felt empowered and responsible in putting on the mission of Jesus rather than powerless and guilty in the face of what have always looked like overwhelming odds. With intrepid, courageous love, a love that was effective not merely affective, a love that was “inventive to infinity,” they calmly invented new ways to address the urgency of need that they saw all around them.

Prayerful calm attentiveness

The Vincentian apostolates of charity emerged from St. Louise and St. Vincent’s “prayerful and calm attentiveness” to the revelation of the urgent needs of the most abandoned of the sick, the most abandoned of the uneducated poor, the most abandoned of the aged, the most abandoned of the mentally ill, the most abandoned of the orphaned, the homeless and the hungry.

This “prayerful calm attentiveness” was handed down to Bl. Frederic, Bl. Rosalie Rendu, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and down to us today. The poor were not faceless and nameless; they were men, women, and children right in their own neighborhoods and parishes. The poor were the children of God, and so the servant of the poor had to find ways to bring them closer to this God who loved them. They did not do it all at once and they did not do it all by themselves.

God’s Providence

The Church of Vatican II offers us the right moment for the Vincentian Vision. The Vincentian network among the Ladies of Charity, Vincentian Priests and Brothers, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Charity and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul providentially calls us to envision the synergy that is possible in our efforts for those who are poorest in the world. Standing in the empowering identification with Jesus and with the poor, clear-sighted and clearheaded about the size of the challenge before us, let us employ every talent, skill, and strategy in our power to focus this synergy on behalf of those who are poor. Go to the poor in the Vincentian way: start small with what is at hand and possible, seek good advice, actively listen, wait in discernment, then once you know what God’s will is—act! And, we can be sure of it: God our Providence, will go with us to create the future. *And so we must ask ourselves: How can we make the Vincentian network happen?*

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