

Serving in Hope

MODULE V



Our Vincentian Rule

Video/Formation Guide

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

Our Vincentian Rule

“JOY AND HOPE”

In 2005 the Church celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Vatican II Document: “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.” The document is known by its first three words in Latin: “Gaudium et Spes” which translates to “Joy and Hope.” I would like Vincentians to consider our renewed Rule, as “The Pastoral Constitution of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the Modern World.” It also might be entitled “Gaudium et Spes”: “Joy and Hope.” Joy and hope speak to how we see ourselves as Vincentians and what we bring with us in our ministry to those who are poor and suffering.

The opening paragraph of the Church’s Pastoral Constitution could well serve as an introductory paragraph to our Rule because it speaks to the core of the renewed Rule: love of God, love of the poor and love of one another. The opening paragraph is:

“The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage toward the Father’s kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.” (#1, Gaudium et Spes)

And so an introductory paragraph to our renewed Rule could read:

“The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage toward the Father’s kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the poor and suffering of this world.”

(A Reflection from Fr. Ron Ramson, CM)

Serving in Hope

MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule **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:** Justice and Charity
- Session 2:** Catholic Social Teaching
- Session 3:** Life and Dignity
- Session 4:** Family, Community and Rights
- Session 5:** The Poor and Work
- Session 6:** Solidarity and Creation

MODULE V: *Our Vincentian Rule*

- Session 1:** Defines our Vocation
- Session 2:** Captures our Spirituality
- Session 3:** Encourages our Community of Faith
- Session 4:** Creates our Relationships
- Session 5:** Demands our Work for Justice
- Session 6:** Guides through our Statues

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

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

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

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 V

Our Vincentian Rule

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- The importance of a Rule.
- The Origin, Purpose and Scope of the Society.
- Our personal encounter with the poor.

SESSION 5.2: THE RULE CAPTURES OUR SPIRITUALITY 12

- Our call to draw close to Christ.
- The virtues of the Society.
- The spirituality of St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic.

SESSION 5.3: THE RULE ENCOURAGES OUR COMMUNITY OF FAITH 18

- Our call to be a “Community of faith and love.”
- The responsibilities of Conferences.
- The role of Councils.

SESSION 5.4: THE RULE CREATES OUR RELATIONSHIPS 24

- Our Vincentian and Catholic network of charity.
- Our relationship with the Church hierarchy.
- Our relationship with others.

SESSION 5.5: THE RULE DEMANDS OUR WORK FOR JUSTICE .. 30

- The call of the Church to the lay faithful.
- Our Vincentian call to work for social justice.
- Our call to become the “voice of the voiceless.”

SESSION 5.6: THE RULE GUIDES THROUGH OUR STATUTES .. 36

- Our heritage of being “bound together.”
- The three Parts of the Rule.
- International and National Statutes.

THE RULE: PART I 41

MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.1:

The Rule Defines our Vocation

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate the importance of having a Rule.
- ② Recognize the Origin, Purpose and Scope of the Society.
- ③ Understand our call to have a personal encounter with the poor.



OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

“...I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you. The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise.... God has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of any merit of ours but according to his own design.” (2 Timothy 1:6-9)

INTRODUCTION:

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

Today, faithful to the spirit of our founders, we are the Vincentians who have the responsibility and the privilege to **“stir into flame the gift of God”** given to us in the renewed Rule of the Society, approved in 2003.

Christians look to the Gospel teachings of Christ to guide their life’s journey. While the New Testament scriptures provide instruction to the whole Church, there is also a recognition that the journey will be different for each of us depending on our talents and how we are called to use them. As early as the third century, groups of believers with specialized callings banded together in distinctive communities. These communities began to live under agreed guiding principles called the “Rule”. It is the Rule of St. Benedict, written around 550, that is the model for the Western Church.

After Benedict, the founders of the major religious orders and movements in the Church, including Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Ignatius of Loyola and Vincent de Paul, wrote a “Rule” for the communities they founded. This “Rule” was written out of their experience and their lives, and it clearly defined the spirituality, heritage, structure and regulations of the organization which the founders felt were necessary for authenticity, fidelity and accountability to their vocation.

As a growing lay organization the founders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul also recognized a need to define the mission of their new organization. In 1835, just two years after the foundation of the Society, Emmanuel Bailly requested Francois Lallier to take on the task of capturing the Society’s spirituality, structure and identity in the form that had served many other Church organizations—a written “Rule”.

Notes

Session 5.1

And now our “Rule” has been renewed and revitalized out of our lives and experiences—out of the lives and experiences of over 650,000 Vincentians in 135 countries on the 5 Continents of the world. In the Providence of God, we have been given this renewed Rule, and it captures the heart and soul of being a Vincentian today.

RULE, Part I-Section 1:

The Origins of the Society and Service to the Poor

Praying with our renewed Rule let these words penetrate your heart:

As **Vincentians**, we are called to be an International Catholic voluntary organization of lay people, dedicated to the poor and to the Church. Our purpose is to follow Christ through service to those in need by bearing witness to His compassionate and liberating love. We must always show commitment through person to person contact and to serve in hope.

As **Vincentians**, we are called to give any form of personal help to anyone in need, to alleviate suffering or deprivation, promoting human dignity and personal integrity. Therefore, we seek out and find those in need, the forgotten and the victims of exclusion or adversity.

As **Vincentians**, in fidelity to the spirit of our founders, we constantly strive for renewal and adapt to changing world conditions, so that priority can always be given to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society. Therefore,

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Are we:

- the channels of peace and joy of Christ?
- conscious of our own frailty and weakness?
- the presence of the Risen Christ—nurturing the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace?
- grateful for the blessings received from those we visit?

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Do we:

- pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance during our home visits?
- serve the poor cheerfully and without judgment?
- help the poor to feel and recover their own dignity?
- see the suffering Christ in the poor?
- observe utmost confidentiality?
- establish relationships based on trust and friendship?

(Quietly read the text on pages 43-45)

DISCUSSION:

How are you inspired and challenged by Part I - Sec. 1 of our renewed Rule?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)**OUR FOUNDERS**

The renewed Rule begins with a new insight into the Origins of the Society by stating:

“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide Christian community; founded in Paris in 1833, by a group of young Catholic lay people and an older person, who joined together to create the first Conference. The Society wishes to remember them all with gratitude, as they set an example of dedication to the poor and to the Church. From **Le Taillandier**, who received the first inspiration, to **Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Deveaux, Félix Clavé**, all of them knew, in their humility, how to seek the wise advice and support of the one who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society, **Emmanuel Bailly**. The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charism of each one.” (1.1)

Indeed, we stand in gratitude for the gifts and talents of each one of our Founders, who joined together with Blessed Frederic Ozanam to found the Society of St. Vincent de Paul:

EMMANUEL BAILLY (1794-1861): *“The first President-General and Spiritual Advisor.”*

Emmanuel Bailly was born in the Pas de Calais Department in the north of France. He soon settled in Paris and worked there as a journalist, editor and publisher. Six children were born to him and his wife, Sidonie, two of whom entered religious life. Throughout his life, Emmanuel Bailly acted as a kind of godparent to young people whom he met during the course of his work. He founded the Conference of History where students could meet to discuss and debate a wide range of issues. It was here that Frederic and his companions were challenged: “What is your Church doing now? Show us your works and we will believe you.”

It was therefore quite natural that Ozanam and his five friends should come to Bailly in order to submit their plans for undertaking charitable work. Bailly provided them with a meeting place, he encouraged them to define their ideas and agreed to guide their efforts by becoming their Spiritual Advisor. Having a great devotion to St. Vincent de Paul, and being familiar with his writings, he linked the Charity Conference to the great Vincentian spiritual family by sending the founding members to Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity. In 1844 Bailly retired as the Society's President-General but he remained a member of the Council until the end of his life in 1861.

AUGUST LE TAILLANDIER (1811-1886): *"The one who received the first inspiration."*

Auguste Le Taillandier was born in Rouen (Normandy). He belonged to a family of trades people, who had been living in that region since the 17th century. He and his family moved to Paris so that he could continue his legal studies. He there met Ozanam, becoming one of his friends. He joined the History Conference, as a virtually silent witness, since he never participated in the discussions which so captivated his friends. In 1833 he told Ozanam that he thought rhetorical arguments were leading nowhere and that it would *be better to join together in some charitable work*, instead of discussions about history, literature and philosophy. And thus, *"he became the one who received the first inspiration."* Le Taillandier was actively involved in the first Charity Conference, in addition to other charitable actions, such as giving religious instruction to apprentices and making visits to prisoners and former prisoners. He then returned to his home town of Rouen, married and had five children, and became regional director of one of France's oldest and most distinguished insurance companies. He founded a Conference in Rouen, and became its president.

PAUL LAMACHE (1810-1892): *"The passionate defender of justice."*

Paul Lamache was born at Saint-Pierre- Eglise in Normandy. He belonged to an ancient family of landowners and administrators, on the fringe of Norman nobility. Paul Lamache settled in Paris to study law. In 1832 he met Ozanam and joined him in the History Conference where he took an active part in debates, then in the Charity Conference. After completing his law studies, he married. He wrote many articles for different revues, in which he participated in the great debates of that age. He was the first Catholic writer to declare himself strongly against slavery. He became equally involved in the support of the freedom of education. He was successively appointed Rector of the Departmental Academy in the Cotes- du-Nord (Brittany); Professor of Roman Law at the University of Strasbourg; Professor of Administrative Law in Bordeaux and then in Grenoble.

FRANCOIS LALLIER (1814-1886): *"The one who formulated the first version of the Rule."*

Francois Lallier was born in Burgundy. He made Ozanam's acquaintance at the Law Faculty and was to remain, until his death, "one of his closest friends". Ozanam chose him, moreover, as godfather for his daughter, Marie. He was one of the keenest participants in the History Conference's debates. He was actively involved in the steps taken to found the Society: with Bailly, first of all, and then with the Archbishop of Paris. In 1835 he was entrusted by Bailly to formulate the Articles of the St. Vincent de Paul Society's Rule. He was an excellent lawyer, renowned for his precise use of language and he applied himself avidly to such work. In 1837 he was appointed the Society's Secretary-General and signed circulars which form an important part of our Vincentian tradition. In 1839, after stepping down from Council-General, he married and returned to live in his native town, and there he worked as a magistrate.

JULES DEVAUX (1811-1880): *"The first Conference treasurer."*

Jules Devaux was born in Normandy, and he was the son of a country doctor, probably from peasant stock. In about 1830 he settled in Paris to complete his medical studies. It was there that he met Ozanam and his friends, who participated in the History Conference. He took part in the Conference but did not seem to have been very active there. He attended the early meetings of the Society's foundation. He was the first Conference treasurer. He left Paris in 1839, after submitting his medical thesis, and settled in Normandy. After his mother's death, he temporarily abandoned medical practice and traveled especially in Germany. He tried to found the first Conference there but its establishment was postponed. The remainder of his life is not well known. He died in Paris in 1880.

FELIX CLAVE (1811-1853): *"The least known of our Society's founders."*

Felix Clave, a native of Toulouse, settled in Paris about 1831. It is unknown what kind of studies he undertook but he was cultured and frequented a social milieu somewhat above that into which he had been born. He associated himself with Ozanam's friends and was a member of the delegation which approached Bailly, as well as taking part in the Charity Conference's meetings. He himself founded a Conference in the district of Paris where he lived. Then he left to work in Algeria, and he tried to found a Conference there but was unsuccessful. In 1839 he left Algeria and went to Mexico, where his brother-in-law was living. Clave returned to France, married and published several works, among which was a collection of poetry. Eventually, his nervous troubles increased and his wife had to resign herself to committing him to an asylum. He died at 42 years of age, two months after Frederic Ozanam's death.

(Biographical notes taken from the book: *Origines et fondateurs de la Societe de Saint-Vincent de Paul*.)



MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.2:

The Rule Captures our Spirituality

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate our call to draw close to Christ.
- ② Understand the spirituality of St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic.
- ③ Recognize the Essential Virtues of the Society.



OPENING PRAYER:

"We know that affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope. And this hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit..."
(Romans 5:3-5)

INTRODUCTION:

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

The Holy Spirit gave Frederic Ozanam and Vincent de Paul the gift of a clear vision of what it means to follow Jesus. Their understanding of who Jesus is and what we are to do as a Christian is a gift that is shared with us in our Rule. It is a blessing and a grace that has guided and guarded the Society for over 170 years. The Rule has been lived by ordinary men and women who have carried in their hearts and minds an extraordinary mission.

St. Vincent told the first Daughters of Charity: "Love your Rule and keep them as the road which God intends to lead you to Himself." Vincent knew that the Rule is the spiritual path to holiness. Therefore, the Rule is not just a written document, for indeed, the Rule embodies our heart and our soul. Therefore, we don't just read the Rule so that we can know it in our minds, we must meditate and pray with the Rule so that the words and spirit of our Founders can penetrate our hearts.

RULE, Part I-Section 2: Vincentian Spirituality and Vocation**Praying with the Rule let these words penetrate your heart:**

As **Vincentians**, we draw close to Christ so that it is no longer we who love, but Christ who loves through us, and in our caring the poor can catch a glimpse of God's great love for them. We aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ as we deepen our own faith and fidelity. Indeed, being a Vincentian is a vocation for every moment of our lives, and it calls us to be more sensitive and caring in our family, work and leisure.

As **Vincentians**, we are called to journey together towards holiness, and this journey is made through visiting and dedicating ourselves to the poor. The faith and courage of the poor often teach us how to live. We know the importance of attending the Conference/Council meetings in order to share fraternal spirituality which promotes a life of prayer and reflection.

Notes

Session 5.2

As **Vincentians**, we are devoted to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary. By meditating on our Vincentian experiences of service to those who are poor, we find a spiritual knowledge which transforms our concern into action and our compassion into practical and effective love.

Praying with the Rule, we ask...Are we inspired by Bl. Frederic to:

- seek to renew faith in Christ and in the humanizing effect of the teachings of the Church?
- envision the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world?
- attain holiness as a layperson through living the Gospel fully in all aspects of life?
- have a passion for truth, democracy and education?

Praying with the Rule, we ask...Are we inspired by St. Vincent to:

- love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms?
- see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ?
- share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ?
- heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

Praying with the Rule, we ask...Do we practice our Essential Virtues:

Simplicity...by:

- our frankness, integrity, genuineness?

Humility...by:

- accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts and talents?
- knowing that all that God gives us is for others?
- knowing that we can achieve nothing without His grace?

Gentleness...by:

- our friendly assurance and invincible goodwill?
- our kindness and patience in our relationships?

Selflessness...by:

- dying to our ego through a life of self-sacrifice?
- sharing our time, possessions, talents and ourselves in a spirit of generosity?

Zeal...by:

- having a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

(Quietly read the text on pages 45-47)

DISCUSSION:

How are you inspired and challenged by Bl. Frederic, St. Vincent and our Essential Virtues?

CLOSING PRAYER:

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)**CHRISTOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP**

Kathryn LaFleur, S.P.

“Who do you say that I am?” (Mt. 16:13-18)

When Jesus came to the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples this question: Who do people say that the Son of Man is? They replied, “Some say John the Baptizer, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “And you,” he said to them, “who do you say that I am?” “You are the Messiah,” Simon Peter answered, “the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blest are you, Simon son of John! No mere person has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.”

This question which Jesus posed to his disciples is a question that at some point challenges the heart and spirit of every Christian. For each of us it is a question that if entered into deeply may call us to reevaluate our ministry, our leadership, our lifestyle; it might well bid us to a greater depth of conversion in our lives.

Indeed, for both Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam, the personal lived reality of the unfolding mystery of the answer to Jesus’ question “Who do you say that I am?” became the focus and force of their spirituality, and in turn of their mission.

The Christ that set Vincent on fire for the poor was Christ the evangelizer of the poor; the Christ announcing his public ministry in the words of Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings 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 4:18)

St. Vincent's spirituality and mission flow from his contemplation of Christ the evangelizer, and it is here that Vincent sees a loving, trusting relationship with the Father, compassion for the poor, love for the sinner, and particular interior qualities that speak to his own heart. It is Christ the evangelizer who came to liberate people from sin, from bondage of every type and to heal them spiritually and corporally that Vincent takes unto himself. The incarnate Jesus Christ of Vincent continues to live and to suffer in the poor. Vincent tells us: "In serving the poor, you serve Jesus Christ...how true that is!" And "...the poor represent for you the person of Our Lord, who said: 'Whatever you do for one of these, the least of my brethren, I will consider it as done to me.'"

In entering into the life and mission of Christ through prayer and lived experience, Vincent interiorized and held out to his followers certain qualities, interior attitudes or virtues of Christ the evangelizer that were to be hallmarks of their spirituality—the lived reality of their faith. In Christ, Vincent saw these virtues:

Simplicity: For Vincent, simplicity was his gospel. It was the virtue that Christ lived in word and deed. "I am the way, the truth..." In the Vincentian tradition it calls us to dedication to truth and to an avoidance of any duplicity, hence to singleness or purity of intention.

Humility: In his incarnation, and in his mission, Jesus exemplified the virtue of humility. Being God, he became like us in all things but sin. For us, humility calls us to recognize the gifts and talents that we have as coming from God, to acknowledge our weakness and to have a deep trust in God's Providence. Vincent lived this reality of humility and exhorted his followers to do the same. On the topic of motivations for humility, Vincent, in 1659 said to his missionaries: "But to honor the words and sentiments of our Lord, we shall merely say that it has been recommended to us by himself, 'Learn of me who am humble.'"

Meekness: For Vincent this virtue according to Father Maloney is the ability to handle anger either by suppressing it or by expressing it in a manner governed by love. It is approachability and affability. It combines gentleness and firmness. In Vincent's words: "Our Lord Jesus Christ is the meek master of human beings and of angels. By the practice of this same virtue of meekness you will go to him and bring others to him as well."

Mortification: Jesus is the example of mortification. To follow Jesus, Vincent reminds us that we are called to take up our cross daily. We are called to die to ourselves, to empty ourselves as did Christ in service to others. We die to ourselves in whatever ways call us to leave everything to follow Jesus, to put on Christ. Vincent wrote to Antoine Durand: "It is essential for you to empty yourself in order to put on Jesus Christ."

Zeal: This is the virtue of missionary action. Vincent said, "If the love of God is the fire, zeal is its flame. If love is the sun, then zeal is its ray." Vincent writes: "Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows."

As we pray and reflect on our renewed Rule for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we see how Frederic Ozanam, and the Founding members, captured the heart and soul of the virtues recommended by St. Vincent, as we find in (2.5.1):

ESSENTIAL VIRTUES

Vincenzians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:

- **Simplicity**—frankness, integrity, genuineness.
- **Humility**—accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts, talents and charism, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.
- **Gentleness**—friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, sweetness and patience in our relationship with others.
- **Selflessness**—dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.
- **Zeal**—a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

The question Jesus posed to his disciples, “Who do you say I am?”, continues to be asked today. Who is Christ for each of us? Who will continue his mission of evangelization? Will we have the courage to answer with our lives as did St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic: “Here I am Lord, I come to do your will.” ?

MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.3:

The Rule Encourages our Community of Faith

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have
greater insight to:

- ① Recognize our call to be a “Community of faith and love.”
- ② Appreciate the responsibilities of Conferences.
- ③ Understand the role of Councils.



OPENING PRAYER:

“God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. ... God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus. He has made him our wisdom and also our justice, our sanctification, and our redemption. This is just as you find it written, ‘Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord.’”
(2 Corinthians 1:27-31)

INTRODUCTION:

**RULE, Part 1-Section 3: Members, Conferences, Councils—
Communities of Faith and Love**

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

Praying with our renewed Rule let these words penetrate your heart:

As **Vincentians**, we meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of us. Our Conferences are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. We are united together through spiritual bonds, friendship and a common mission to the poor and marginalized.

Praying with the Rule, we ask...Do we:

- meet regularly and consistently, weekly or every two weeks?
- meet in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy?
- encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and a spirit of prayer?
- recognize the importance of a Spiritual Advisor?
- realize that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money?

Praying with the Rule, we ask...Are we:

- aware of being a worldwide community of Vincentian friends?
- defending the rights of those most rejected by society?
- welcoming to young members?
- preserving the spirit of enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination?

Notes

Session 5.3

Praying with the Rule, in our Conference we ask...Do we:

- make all decisions by consensus after prayer, reflection and consultation; and when necessary put matters to a vote?
- handle funds with the utmost care, prudence, generosity?
- keep accurate records of all money received or spent?
- allot funds only to branches of the Vincentian Family?

Praying with the Rule, as leaders we ask...Are we:

- authentic servant leaders?
- fulfilling our responsibility of promoting Vincentian spirituality?
- encouraging the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of each member?
- promoting the formation and training of members and officers?
- improving the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of our service to the poor?

Praying with the Rule, as Councils we ask...Do we:

- assist Conferences to develop their spiritual life?
- facilitate Conferences to intensify their service and to diversify their activities?
- encourage existing Conferences to expand?
- create and sustain new Conferences?
- promote Special Works?
- conduct formation courses and encourage Vincentians to attend?
- foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian Family?
- provide communication to and from Conferences and Councils?

Praying with the Rule, as Councils we ask...Are we:

- promoting the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world?
- responding to the Society's network of charity by regular and rapid exchange of news and information?
- seeking to form youth conferences?
- ensuring that decisions are made as close as possible to the local environment and circumstances?
- giving freedom of action to Conferences and Councils in order that they can help the poor spontaneously and effectively?

(Quietly read the text on pages 47-50)

DISCUSSION:

In what ways does the Rule challenge you to be a “Community of Faith and Love” in your Conference and Council?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)**BEING CREATIVE IN VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP**

Eduardo Marques

(A member of the Society for 27 years, belonging to Conferences in Brazil, United States and France.)

“Following Christ’s example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavor to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have the special responsibility of promoting Vincentian spirituality.” (Rule 3.11)

Leadership can be defined in different ways, and there are many different kinds. However, the following definition expresses the essence of leadership: “The skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being of common good.” (James C. Hunter) This definition incorporates a key element of Vincentian Leadership. A leader can influence people to work enthusiastically to accomplish his/her own goals, which may not always correspond to the common good. Here we are stating explicitly that the Vincentian leader is a **servant**, *a servant of the common good*.

Servant leadership forces us to think of others before ourselves: the first element of servant leadership is the desire to serve. In fact, there are many ways to cultivate various traits of Vincentian Leadership, but there is only one which makes them an intrinsic part of one’s life: **the genuine desire to serve**, that is, to put others ahead of oneself, to make a difference by helping others for the better.

First Vincentian Leadership Trait:

St. Vincent de Paul is an example of just such a person with the desire and ability not only to exhibit service and Vincentian Leadership traits, but also to teach them. The first Vincentian Leadership trait, taught by St. Vincent, is the ability to learn. We must learn about the needs of others and ascertain the best way to serve them. Vincent was able to identify others' needs better than they could express them. This is possible only when we live as others live and we evaluate how their lives could be better when compared to our own standards. Vincent was able to read each event as if it was a message to him personally. This ability gave him the skill to constantly analyze any situation, to see what could be an improvement to those he was serving, and to ultimately identify an innovative solution. Vincent told us that indeed "Love is inventive to infinity!"

Second Vincentian Leadership Trait:

Influence based on authority not on power, which is related to style, is the second trait of Vincentian Leadership. Many times St. Vincent referred to himself as the least important member of the Congregation of the Mission, despite having founded it. Even though he suffered melancholic moods—self-admittedly very difficult—Vincent was able to exercise his influence based on knowledge, experience and infinite faith in Divine Providence. There is no better way of encouraging people than in demonstrating that it is not only our competence at stake, but also a matter of one's personal relationship with God.

Third Vincentian Leadership Trait:

Example by behavior forms the third trait. The will to serve must be constantly expressed in decisions, actions, and presentation. St. Vincent was an example of a person who would make any sacrifice for his cause. He wrote some 30,000 letters, expressing his ideas and care for his co-workers and friends. In any situation, but particularly in crisis, a leader's faith, values and long-term vision is tested. The consistency of example and principle is the key element in building credibility of leadership. Daily actions have the power to express two dimensions of Vincentian Leadership: first, the consistency between the will to serve and the intrinsic values of the leader; and, second, the real importance of short-term actions when compared with long-term vision.

Having long-term vision is a key trait of a Vincentian Leader. St. Vincent may well have known that some of the works he created would last for centuries and be spread throughout the world. Two centuries later, following his example, Frederic Ozanam, the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, had a long-term dream: spread a small band of members, grouped in a unit called "Conference" to every place in the world. In his own words, Frederic Ozanam introduced the concept of global networking to the nineteenth century: "I would like to embrace the whole world in a network of charity." Long-term vision encompasses at least two values relevant for Vincentian Leadership: First, it creates a common purpose to serve. Second, it provides fundamental criteria to evaluate short-term happenings and actions. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, launched by a group of young students, could have failed some months after it was founded. However, it grew so successfully that today it has more than 600,000 active members in over 140 countries, operating in the same manner it was founded, with the same vision and the same mission. The Society been so successful because:

1. *The Society of St. Vincent de Paul learns from the past:*

From its beginnings the Society developed a strong desire to learn from previous leaders. Initially, Ozanam learned the importance of serving the poor from St. Rosalie Rendu. As students from a prestigious university they had a deep desire to learn and study. The Society learned to take risks, and developed a conservative approach to dealing with change, making decisions based on tradition and the International Rule in a centralized manner.

2. *The members of the Society have an intrinsic will to serve:*

Direct volunteer service, listening to the needs of the poor and sharing their sufferings, is only sustainable if the server has the means to serve. Direct contact with poverty leads the membership of the Society to create innovative ways to reduce it, either through the formation of new Conferences or the launching of social works. Growth is a response to the exposure to poverty.

3. *The members of the Society strive to grow in holiness:*

The first objective of the Society is to provide a means to be holy through service to the poor. As this holiness is a relationship between the person and God, there is no need to pretend to serve. In other words, genuine service is a fundamental behavioral trait of the members of the Society.

4. *The Society has a distinctive mission and vision:*

The operational model of the Society is based on three components: first, direct service to the poor through home visits; second, the grouping of members in small faith communities called Conferences; and third, the members are laity who strive for holiness through a clear and complete set of values. Also, through the International Rule the leaders of the Society have clear performance measures, including quantitative and qualitative growth and the maintenance of the initial spirit of the Society.

Notes

MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.4:

The Rule Creates our Relationships

Learning Objectives

**After completing this Session you will
have greater insight to:**

- ① Recognize our relationship within the
Vincentian and Catholic network of charity.**
- ② Understand our relationship with the
Church hierarchy.**
- ③ Appreciate our relationship with others.**



OPENING PRAYER:

“...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. There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, and is in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

INTRODUCTION:

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

The very founding of our organization was created in an environment of collaboration with other institutions, beginning with the Daughters of Charity through the mentoring of Sr. Rosalie. The founders also knew, respected and collaborated with the hierarchy of the Church. They were active in their parishes and worked with their pastors. They respected the work of other religious and non religious charities and many of them, including Frederic, were active in civil and Church politics.

The relationships between the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other religious and civil organization needed to be defined. Within the first ten years we find frequent references in the letters of Frederic Ozanam, Emmanuel Bailly and Francois Lallier clarifying activities that should be encouraged or discouraged by the young Society still working out its unique mission. Their vision of how this organization of Catholic laity works with other institutions for the benefit of the poor is captured simply in our Rule.

As generations of Vincentians lived the Rule, from time to time a need for clarification, reinterpretation and renewal was called forth in the designs of Providence. St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic knew that because the Rule was rooted in faith, it would promote unity in diversity, discipline in flexibility, and freedom in accountability. They knew that the Rule would not be static, and they trusted that at different times in history, the Holy Spirit would lead their followers to renew the Rule so that they would be adapted to meet the needs of the poor in each generation. Thus, in the providence of God, new life and hope would always be alive in the hearts and souls of Vincentians.

Our renewed Rule challenges us to have new eyes to see and new ears to hear the cries of those who are poor today by providing guidance and clarity to all of our collaborative relationships.

**Rule, Part I- Section 4: Relationships within the Vincentian
and Catholic Network of Charity
Section 5: Relationships with the Church Hierarchy
Section 6: Other Relationships**

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Are we:

- twining to help others in need, nationally and internationally?
- promoting spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help with others who have less resources?
- providing financial, technical, medical and educational support for projects that encourage the poor to become self-sufficient?
- committed to ecumenism and cooperation in works of charity and justice?
- participating in the Church's ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and initiatives?
- preserving the Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society?

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Do we:

- consider working with Vincentians in other countries or areas?
- participate in the emergency initiatives of the Society to provide funds for disasters, war or major accidents?
- cooperate with the Vincentian Family in spiritual development and common projects?
- collaborate with the Church's pastoral initiatives at every level?
- have a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church?
- inform the diocesan bishop of our activities annually?
- manage our activities and assets with full autonomy?
- accept the principle of affiliate groups?
- contact State agencies to help in the struggle against injustice?

(Quietly read the text pages 50-53)

DISCUSSION:

What relationships inspires me? What relationships challenges me?

CLOSING PRAYER: (together)

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)

Encyclical Letter
DEUS CARITAS EST
 Pope Benedict XVI

In the first encyclical Letter, Dec. 25, 2005, Pope Benedict challenges us to a new understanding of collaborative relationships, and so we need to reflect and pray with the following excerpts:

(1) “God is love, (*“Deus Caritas est”*) and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” (1 John 1:16) These words from the *First Letter of John* express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, St. John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us”.

We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. St. John’s Gospel describes that event in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should...have eternal life”(3:16). ...Since God has first loved us(1John 4:10), love is now no longer a mere “command”; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us....For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others.

(25) Two essential facts emerge:

a) **The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility:**

- of proclaiming the word of God,
- celebrating the sacraments, and
- exercising the ministry of charity.

b) **The Church is God’s family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas-agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter “by chance” (Luke 10:31), whoever they may be.**

(27) In today’s complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church’s social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.

(30)...I now wish to consider the overall situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world today.

- a) Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures. This “togetherness” at times gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, yet our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others challenges us to share their situation and their difficulties. Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual. Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbors in need. The Second Vatican Council had made this point very clearly: “Now that, through better means of communication, distances between peoples have been almost eliminated, charitable activity can and should embrace all people of all needs.”

On the other hand—and here we see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization—we now have at our disposal numerous means of offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need, not least the modern systems of distributing food and clothing, and of providing housing and care. Concern for our neighbor transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council rightly observed that “among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is a growing, inescapable sense of solidarity between all people.” State agencies and humanitarian associations work to promote this, the former mainly through subsidies or tax relief, the latter by making available considerable resources.

- b) This situation has led to the birth and the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies, which have borne fruit. Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favoring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.

(31b) The Christian’s program—the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus—is a “heart which sees”. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. Obviously when charitable activity is carried out by the Church as a communitarian initiative, the spontaneity of individuals must be combined with planning, foresight and cooperation with other similar institutions.

(34) Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (1Cor.13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.

(35) There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord’s hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Cor. 5:14)

Notes

MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.5:

The Rule Demands our Work for Justice

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Identify the call of the Church for the lay faithful to work for social justice.
- ② Understand our Vincentian call to work for social justice.
- ③ Appreciate our call to become the “voice of the voiceless.”



OPENING PRAYER:

Jesus, opening the scroll read: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners..." Then he said, "Today, this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21)

INTRODUCTION:

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

In his encyclical letter, Dec. 25, 2005: "**Deus Caritas Est**" (God is Love), Pope Benedict XVI continues to challenge us by saying:

"The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society...is proper to the lay faithful...they cannot relinquish their participation in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote the common good. The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly...it remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as 'social charity.'"(29)

"Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, ...charity workers need a 'formation of the heart': they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirit to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love."(31a)

"The figures of the saints such as...Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac...stand out as lasting models of social charity....the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love." (40)

Rule, Part 1—Section 7: Relationship with Civil Society—Work for Social Justice

Praying with the renewed Rule let these words penetrate your heart:

As **Vincentians**, we are committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all our charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in our struggle for justice, we must keep in mind the demands of charity.

As **Vincentians**, we should speak out clearly against situations where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation.

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Are we:

- concerned not only with alleviating need but also with
- identifying the unjust structures that cause it?
- committed to identifying the root causes of poverty?
- promoting a culture of life and a civilization of love?
- looking towards the sustainable development and protection of the environment?
- speaking out against the injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion of those we serve?
- fostering new attitudes of respect and empathy for the poor?
- promoting understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups?
- working with families and communities?

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Do we:

- envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities, and development of all people are promoted?
- listen to the voice of the Church calling us to create an equitable and compassionate social order?
- see the issues of social justice from the perspective of the poor whom we visit?
- help the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves?
- speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves?
- oppose discrimination of all kinds?
- work to change the attitudes of prejudice, fear or scorn?
- defend the right of each person to be responsible for his or her own life?
- refrain from identifying with any political party?

(Read quietly the text pages 53-54)

DISCUSSION:

What social justice issue challenges you?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)**EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF SOLIDARITY**

Dennis Holtschneider, CM

Some stories come along at the right moment in your life. Here's a story that has never left the back of my head since the day I heard it...

A villager is walking by the river early one morning. The villager looks out into the water and sees a baby floating down the river. Horrified, the villager races into the water, grabs the baby, and brings the baby to shore. The baby is fine. Relieved, the villager looks back into the water and sees another baby floating down the water. The villager again dives into the water and rescues this baby as well. Once more, the villager looks into the water . . . and sees dozens of babies floating down the river. The villager calls out an alarm, and the entire village comes running to the river to rescue as many babies as they can before the water carries them away. This is a village that is mobilized. Every villager is at the river, trying to save the babies from the water. This is a village that is improving lives. Many of the babies are being saved. But the babies keep on coming . . . because no one is going upstream to find out who is throwing the babies into the water in the first place.

You may have heard this story before. It's simple but it came along at a time in my own life when it changed the way I looked at the world. I was drawn to the Vincentian way of life because of its charity, and the way real, flesh-and-blood people were assisted. I loved working in the soup kitchen; teaching people to read in the literacy classroom; building up the self-confidence and spirituality of youth in an inner city youth groups; getting people into housing; spending time cooking, cleaning, speaking with, and housing people overnight in the shelters; referring people to social services that would make a difference; referring people to legal aid to help them stay in this country... and so much more. Those were tangible projects. When I went to bed that evening, I had done something real.

Session 5.5

Then came this baby-in-the-river story, and it was like I opened my eyes and saw something I hadn't looked at before. I had wondered about the conditions that made other people's lives so different from my own, but it was such a big question, and I really didn't know much about it, that I usually set the larger questions aside, and just continued doing charitable work. This story made me stop and wonder if I was just like those villagers who kept rescuing the babies, and never solved the problem. What difference was my charity - and life - making?

I have come to believe that it is not enough to give food and shelter, important as that is. If I do nothing to change the situations and structures that make people poor, then I've only dabbed a bleeding wound. I haven't stopped the bleeding. I now believe that God wants us to stop the bleeding. He wants us to go upriver, to fix the problem, not just minister to the symptoms of the problem.

We must be advocates for the poor. We aren't professionals. I know that. We aren't government officials, policy wonks, economists, analysts, or anyone important who can change society. But even if we aren't professionals, we must be advocates. Advocates are important. There aren't enough professionals out there to make a political difference. Things change because enough people come together and create energy. The professionals can't make that change, only large groups like us... Vincentian Advocates.

I've been wondering about the larger Vincentian Family itself. In Vincent's day, no one even thought of changing larger structures to keep people from becoming poor in the first place. They thought about charity. But in our age and time, we have realized that if we make changes to our laws, to our government programs, to our city and educational policies, that many more people can be helped that way than can ever be taken out of poverty by our charitable works. So, I've been thinking for some time about what the Vincentian Family in the U.S. can do. We don't have policy experts among our ranks, or politicians, or economists. What can we do? What do we have to give?

It crystallized for me during the recent presidential election. No one mentioned the poor. Neither side - republican or democrat - mentioned the poor. **The poor were invisible in the last election.** And that's where we can help. We know the poor. We may not be policy experts, but we know the poor. I want to make a proposal today. And I want to propose something that would require all of the Vincentian Family to work together in the United States: **Let's get the poor into the public eye. Let's make the poor visible again, and let's do it together:**

Some possibilities:

- On a local level, let's get every group of boy scouts and girls scouts, and neighborhood associations, schools, churches to do something for the poor. To see the poor, to meet them, not just drop off bags of clothing for people they'll never meet.
- More regionally, let's meet with elected officials, and give them tours of the neighborhoods we work in. Let's tell them the stories and needs of the poor.

- Let's meet with local newspapers, give them story ideas.
- Let's get people at our churches and institutions to write letters about the needs of the poor.
- When there's a larger issue, get them human interest stories.
- Nationally, let's hire a PR firm to help us figure out how to get the needs of the poor back on the political agenda.
- Let's mobilize the national foundations to put the poor back on the map of public concern.
- Let's work with existing national organizations, such as Network and others, to provide them our access and knowledge of the poor.
- And let's use the poor to do this. Empower them to speak on their behalf.
- Let's work across church lines.

Let's create a national visibility for the poor. Let's foster a national desire to do something to help the poor. In the end, this is only one idea. The larger point is contained in the story about those poor babies floating down the river. It's not enough to give charity. Not in this world. Not at this time. The poor need our advocacy as well as our handouts.

Notes

MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.6:

The Rule Guides Through our Statutes

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate our heritage of unity by being “tightly bound” together locally, nationally and internationally.
- ② Identify the three Parts of the Rule.
- ③ Understand the need for International and National Statutes.



OPENING PRAYER:

“...I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions;...and I will work wonders in the heavens and in the earth...” (Joel 3:1-3)

INTRODUCTION:

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

The Rule unites us together in an International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the spirit and vision of Frederic Ozanam. Three years after founding the Society in Paris, Frederic returned home to Lyon and began a Conference. On October 22, 1836 he wrote to Emmanuel Bailly, his friend and mentor who had become the first President of the Society:

“... one of the principle ends of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul established in this town (Lyon) is union with the Society of Paris. Our work here is nascent, but it is living. It is feeble, but it can become strong by preserving its bonds with the mother work. It is our intention then, to keep ourselves tightly bound to you. To this end, we will address you at the times of the general assemblies, and ...will render an account of our operations. We hope that the two Conferences of Nimes and Rome will do the same. You could, in return, send us some advice from Paris along with some encouragement and news of general interest. It would be useful also to bind together the dispersed members of the Society... In that way, ten years from now, we could be more than a thousand, united in works and prayers and the strength of this union would be very great. Could we not ...require all of them to send once or several times a year reports to the central Society?” (Frederic Ozanam)

Four of our founders may have been law students but it is doubtful that even they could have foreseen how complicated it would be for their small “Conference of Charity” to become an international society with thousands of Conferences in over a hundred countries. Indeed, the Rule is a grace that has unified the Society, through prayer and accountability, for over 170 years. The Rule has kept us “tightly bound” in solidarity with all Vincentians locally, nationally and internationally.

Because the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is part of a changing world,

we now must adapt to the demands of legislative requirements, social and technological transformations. In the spirit of Frederic Ozanam who said: “We must be flexible, we need to change and move with the times”, the renewed Rule acknowledges the need for the Society to adapt to the changing world by constantly striving for renewal in our ways of serving the needy .

Vincentians find their vocation to grow in holiness through service to the poor. And so sometimes the details of governance and the structure of our National and International Councils seems far removed from our service and our home visits. However, these policies promote our unity and without them the service we provide even in our local Conference would be diminished. Without an agreed upon model, dissention and petty disputes easily arise. Time is spent unnecessarily figuring out organizational strategies when the wisdom of past generations has already provided a roadmap. Therefore, all Vincentians need to have an appreciation and an understanding of our international and national Statutes that serve and free us to live out our vocation.

When we are called to carry on a ministry in the Church we must be held to a great accountability to the grace that has been placed in our hands. The wisdom of the Church has mandated the establishment of the mission, spirituality, accountability and governance of all Church organizations. Therefore, the policies and procedures, called Statutes, are of crucial importance as they translate the spiritual mission and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul into the everyday operations and provides a framework for every Vincentian in the world. The “Rule,” approved in 2003 and 2006, captures all of this in three parts:

Part I: The Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Part II: The Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Part III: The Statutes of the National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The new Rule has been designed and written in a way that the basic spirituality and principles contained in Part I of the document will remain the same while allowing the Statutes in Part II and Part III (regulations and policies) to be updated when needed. Part I and II can be changed only by the International Council. Part III can be changed by the National Council, with approval from the International Council.

DISCUSSION:

In what ways have you found the grace of the Society by being “guided and unified” locally, nationally and internationally?

CLOSING PRAYER:

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

(The entire Rule: Part I, II and III is available from the National Council.)

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)**“REVISE IN ORDER TO REVITALIZE”**

Javier Alvarez, CM

The primary objective for the study and discernment of renewing the Rule of the International Confederation of St. Vincent de Paul was to “Revise in order to Revitalize.” To revitalize does not mean to begin again, it means rather that we have to continue to breathe new life into our Rule so that we can respond with greater inspiration to the calls of the poor today. To revitalize then, is to hand on a new fire, to give fresh zeal to our values so that these may retain all their force in the face of new situations that are given to us by the Providence of God.

Every period in the history of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has recognized the need for the charism and spirit to be revitalized so that the Society’s mission might be better carried out as times and circumstances demanded. For almost 100 years the ongoing need for revitalization evolved at quite a slow rate because such was the rhythm of life in those days. Today, we know from experience that life is evolving at a much faster rate and so we need to be on the alert so that we can act accordingly and preserve the early values of our charism.

Each revision of the Rule was guided by two criteria indicated by the Second Vatican Council:

- to return to the original inspiration of the Society, and at the same time,
- to adapt to new conditions.

These two criteria must always be applied simultaneously. If we kept only the first criterion in mind there would be a fixation with the past, a simple return to history without any impact on the present. If we kept in mind only the second criterion the Rule would be at the mercy of current trends and we would run the risk of losing or weakening our identity. And so we need to remember, that in order to understand and interiorize our renewed Rule we have to view them from the aspects of identity and relevance.

Session 5.6

The renewed Rule which has been approved by the International Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must now penetrate us both personally and as an International Confederation, so that it becomes a part of our lives. If we do not apply this revised Rule in some depth to our lives then there is a risk that we will continue to live at a superficial level and our lives will be rather shallow. The renewed Rule of the Society is asking us to revitalize our lives, to accept the new Rule, study it, assimilate it and interiorize it in prayer, so that the spark of Vincentian life may shine more brightly. The Rule can be renewed, revised and updated, but if each Vincentian does not make the effort to become holy, does not deepen their commitment to follow the spiritual path of St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic, all will be to no purpose.

The Church regards a Rule as something of an identity card. The Rule is a treasure that we have to guard carefully, a precious gift of the Holy Spirit, a heritage that God has placed in our hands for us to watch over wisely, for it contains our founding charism, spirituality, mission and traditions. The Rule must become the primary source book of spirituality for each member of the Society. The theological principles embodied in the Rule give us a rock-solid foundation. Indeed, by renewing the Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Society has made a big effort to renew the wineskin that contains the new wine of our vocation. But, now it is the challenge of each Vincentian to become revitalized...to become the new wine of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in order to hand on the new fire Internationally, Nationally and Locally.

Notes



Rule



Confederation international of Society of Saint Vincent de Paul



Rule

PART I:

Rule

OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

PART II:

Statutes

OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

PART III:

Statutes

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

Confederation international of Society of Saint Vincent de Paul



PART I:

Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIETY & SERVICE TO THE POOR

1.1 Origins

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide Christian community; founded in Paris in 1833, by a group of young Catholic lay people and an older person, who joined together to create the first Conference. The Society wishes to remember them all with gratitude, as they set an example of dedication to the poor and to the Church. From Le Taillandier, who received the first inspiration, to Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Deveau, Félix Clavé, all of them knew, in their humility, how to seek the wise advice and support of the one who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society, Emmanuel Bailly.

The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charism of each one. Among them, Blessed Frederic Ozanam was a radiant source of inspiration.

The Society has been Catholic from its origins. It remains an international Catholic voluntary organisation of lay people, men and women.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF OUR SERVICE

1.2 The Vincentian Vocation

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.

1.3 Any form of personal help...

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.

1.4...to anyone in need

The Society serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions.

1.5 To Seek Out the Poor

Vincentians strive to seek out and find those in need and the forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity.

1.6 Adaptation to a Changing World

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.

OUR PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POOR

1.7 Prayer Before Personal Encounters or Visits

Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for the peace and joy of Christ.

1.8 Reverence for the poor

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

Members observe the utmost confidentiality in the provision of material and any other type of support.

1.9 Empathy

Vincentians endeavor to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve. Rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.

1.10 Promotion of self-sufficiency

Vincentians endeavor to help the poor to help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community.

1.11 Concerns for deeper needs and spirituality

Vincentians are sincerely concerned with the deeper needs and the spiritual well-being of those they help, always observing a profound respect for their conscience and the faith they believe in, listening and understanding with their hearts, beyond both words and appearances.

Vincentians serve in hope. They rejoice in discovering the spirit of prayer in the poor, for in the silence, the poor can perceive God's Plan for every person.

The acceptance of God's Plan leads each one to nurture the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace in themselves, their families and all those whose lives they touch. Vincentians are privileged to foster these signs of the presence of Risen Christ in the poor and among themselves.

1.12 Gratitude to those we visit

Vincentians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognise that the fruit of their labors springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the poor they serve.

2.VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY & VOCATION

Faith in Christ and the Life of Grace

"Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Romans 5,1-2).

2.1 Love in Union with Christ

Convinced of the truth of the Apostle St. Paul's words, Vincentians seek to draw closer to Christ. They hope that someday it will be no longer they who love, but Christ who loves through them (Gal 2,20 "... I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God"), and that even now, in their caring, the poor may catch a glimpse of God's great love for them.

2.2 The journey together towards holiness

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

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

Therefore, their journey together towards holiness is primarily made through:

- Visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live. Vincentians assume the needs of the poor as their own.
- Attending the meeting of the Conference or Council, where shared fraternal spirituality is a source of inspiration.
- Promoting a life of prayer and reflection, both at the individual and community level, sharing with their fellow members. Meditating on their Vincentian experiences offers them internal spiritual knowledge of themselves, others and the goodness of God.
- Transforming their concern into action and their compassion into practical and effective love

Their journey together towards holiness will be all the more fruitful if the members' personal lives are characterised by prayer, meditation on the Holy Scriptures and other inspirational texts and devotion to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary, whose protection we have always sought, and to the teachings of the Church.

2.3 Prayer in Union with Christ

In every Conference throughout the world and in their personal lives, Vincentians raise their prayers to God, united with the prayer of Christ, on behalf of one another and their masters the poor, whose suffering they wish to share.

2.4 The Spirituality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

The spirituality of one of its founders inspires Vincentians profoundly. The Blessed Frederic Ozanam:

- Sought to renew faith, among all people, in Christ and in the civilising effect of the teachings of the Church through all time.
- Envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world.
- Attained holiness as a layman through living the Gospel fully in all aspects of his life.
- Had a passion for truth, democracy and education.

2.5 The Spirituality of St. Vincent

Having been placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul by the founding members, members of the Society are inspired by his spirituality, manifest in his attitudes, his thoughts, his example and his words.

For Vincentians, the key aspects of St. Vincent's spirituality are:

- To love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms;
- To see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ;
- To share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ the Evangeliser and Servant of the poor;
- To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2.5.1 Essential virtues

Vincentians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:

- Simplicity – frankness, integrity, genuineness.
- Humility – accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts talents and charism, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.
- Gentleness – friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, sweetness and patience in our relationship with others.
- Selflessness – dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.
- Zeal – a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

2.6 A vocation for every moment of our lives

The Vincentian vocation affects all aspects of members' daily lives, making them more sensitive and caring in their family, work and leisure activities. Vincentians are available for work in the Conferences only after fulfilling the family and professional duties.

3. MEMBERS, CONFERENCES, COUNCILS – COMMUNITIES OF FAITH & LOVE

3.1 Membership

The Society is open to all those who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbor in need. (See Article 6.4 of the Rule).

3.2 Equality

The Society, in each of its Conferences (the primary basic unit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), makes no distinction regarding gender, wealth, occupation, social status or ethnic origin.

3.3 Meetings of the Vincentian members

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

3.3.1 Frequency of the meetings

The Conferences meet regularly and consistently, usually weekly, but at least every fortnight (twice a month).

3.4 Fraternity and simplicity

Meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.

3.5 Preserving the spirit

Members of all ages strive to preserve the spirit of youth, which is characterised by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination. They are willing to make sacrifices and take risks for the benefit of the poor wherever they may be: by sharing their discomfort, needs, and sorrows and defending their rights.

3.6 Councils

Conferences are grouped under various levels of Councils.

Councils exist to serve all the Conferences they coordinate. They help the Conferences to develop their spiritual life, to intensify their service and to diversify their activities so that they may always be responsive to the needs of those who suffer.

Councils at appropriate levels are particularly called to: create new Conferences, to help existing Conferences to expand, to promote Special Works, to prepare training courses and encourage Vincentians to attend them, to foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian Family, to promote cooperation with other organisations and Institutions, to develop friendship between members in the same area, to provide communication to and from Conferences and higher Councils. In summary, to promote the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world.

3.7 Young members

Young members keep the Society young. They see with new eyes and often look far ahead. The Society works constantly to form Youth Conferences and welcomes young members into all Conferences. Their experience in a community of faith and love and their exposure to poverty deepen their spirituality, spur them to action and help them to grow as human beings. The senior members assume the responsibility of assisting them along their path of training, respecting their personal choices and their aspirations of Vincentian service.

3.8 Aggregation and Institution of Conferences and Councils

The visible unifying link within the Society is the Aggregation of the Conferences and the Institution of the Councils declared by the Council General.

3.9 Subsidiarity and freedom of action

The Society embraces the Principle of Subsidiarity as its basic standard of operation. Decisions are made as close as possible to the area of activity to ensure that the local environment and circumstances (cultural, social, political, etc.) are taken into consideration. In this way, the Society promotes local initiatives within its spirit. This freedom of action of Conferences and Councils, which has been kept faithfully since the origins of the Society, enables them to help the poor spontaneously and more effectively, free from excessive bureaucracy.

In exercising this freedom of action to face the challenge of poverty in their area, Vincentians feel called to pray together for guidance and strength and for that creative imagination which is the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, "Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 3,1).

3.10 Democracy

All decisions are made by consensus after the necessary prayer, reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate, matters are put to a vote.

3.11 Presidents as servant leaders

Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavor to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.

3.12 Formation of members

It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor and help them be aware of the benefits, resources and opportunities that are available for the poor. The Society also offers members higher training in order to better help to raise the cultural and social level of those who request this support.

3.13 The spirit of poverty and encouragement

Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Adviser is very important.

3.14 The use of money and property for the poor

Vincentians should never forget that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money.

Nevertheless, the Society uses money and property to help relieve the suffering of those in need. The Society's funds must be handled with the utmost care, prudence and generosity. Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. Accurate records must be kept of all money received or spent. The Society may not allot funds to other organisations, except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family, save under exceptional circumstances.

3.15 Communication

The vitality of the Society's network of charity depends on the regular and rapid exchange of news and information. Such communication broadens the members' horizon and enhances the interest of members in the experiences and challenges of their brothers and sisters throughout the world. The Vincentian response to communication is a willingness to learn and a desire to help.

4. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE VINCENTIAN & CATHOLIC NETWORK OF CHARITY

4.1 Twinning

Conferences and Councils help others in need, both at the national and international level. This is one of the activities most cherished by the Society. The awareness of acute poverty in a great number of countries and the Vincentian preferential option for the poor spurs Conferences and Councils to assist others with less resources or in particular situations. This direct link between two Conferences or Councils, consisting of sharing prayer, a profound friendship and material resources, is called twinning. This activity contributes to world peace and to understanding and cultural exchange among peoples.

4.1.1 Prayer as the basis of friendship

Twinning promotes spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help. Funds and other material resources can be provided to enable a Conference or Council to help local families. Financial, technical, medical and educational support is given to projects which are suggested by the Society locally and which encourage self-sufficiency. Even more important is support given through prayer, as well as through mutual communication regarding what has been accomplished and what is happening among Vincentians in each area, including news about persons and families.

4.1.2 Vincentians' personal commitment

The Society urges the Vincentians to consider undertaking a personal commitment for a particular period of time to work with Vincentians in other countries or to spread Conferences.

4.2 Emergency assistance

When disasters, war or major accidents occur, the Society launches emergency initiatives on the spot and provides funds for the local Society to help victims.

4.3 The Vincentian Family

Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help, form a single family. Gratefully remembering the support and encouragement the first Conference received from Blessed Rosalie Rendu, the Society maintains and develops close relationships with other branches of the Vincentian family, while preserving its identity. It cooperates with them in spiritual development and common projects, as well as with the Church's charitable pastoral initiatives at every level, whenever this may be mutually enriching and useful to those who suffer.

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH HIERARCHY

5.1 A close relationship

Faithful to the clear intentions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the Society has a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Respect of the members for the hierarchy provides the foundation for harmonious reciprocal cooperation.

5.2 Autonomy

The Society is legally autonomous as to its existence, constitution, organisation, rules, activities and internal government. Vincentians freely choose their own officers and manage the Society's activities and assets with full autonomy, in accordance with their own Statutes and the legislation in effect in each country.

5.3 Moral recognition

The Society recognizes the right and duty of the diocesan bishop to confirm that none of its activities is contrary to Catholic faith or morals. The Society, whenever possible, informs the diocesan bishops of its activities annually, as a sign of ecclesial communion.

6. OTHER RELATIONSHIPS—ECUMENICAL & INTER-FAITH RELATIONSHIPS

6.1 Every member should foster ecumenism

Each Vincentian should seek to deepen a personal commitment to ecumenism and to cooperation in works of charity and justice as a contribution towards the achievement of that full and visible unity of the Church for which Christ prayed, ‘that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (Jn 17:21).

6.2 The Society is committed to ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation

Following the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul recognizes, accepts and encourages the call to ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation which arise from its charitable activity. It is prepared to participate in the Church’s ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives within each country, in harmony with the diocesan bishop.

6.3 The adoption of practical initiatives

Conferences and Councils should establish a dialogue with their counterparts in other Christian churches or ecclesial communities and other faiths, with regard to cooperation in charitable work, wherever this is appropriate.

6.4 Ecumenical and inter-faith membership

In some countries, circumstances may make it desirable to accept as members Christians of other confessions or people of other faiths who sincerely respect and accept the Society’s identity and its principles insofar as differences of faith allow. The Episcopal Conference should be consulted.

6.5 Preserving the Catholic credo and ethos

The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The President, Vice-President and Spiritual Adviser should, therefore, be Roman Catholic. They may, in certain situations depending on national circumstances, and after consultation with the local diocesan Bishop, be members of churches and ecclesial communities which share the Catholic belief in, among other issues, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the seven Sacraments and devotion to Mary.

6.6 Affiliated groups can work very closely with us

The Society accepts the principle of affiliated groups. These groups consist mainly of members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities who are attracted by the work of the Society and/or its spirituality. They are welcome to participate in the charitable work, appropriate Council discussions and the fraternal life of the Society, but are not eligible for office in the Society. Groups from non-Christian religions may also be similarly affiliated.

6.7 Relationships with state agencies & other charities

When the problems they encounter are beyond their competence or capacity, Vincentians may contact State Agencies and other more specialised charitable organisations, provided that such action helps the Society in its struggle against injustice and respects the spirit of the Society.

7. RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY – WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

7.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

7.2 A vision of the civilization of love

Affirming the dignity of each human being as created in God's image, and Jesus' particular identification with those who are excluded by society, Vincentians envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted.

As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and the civilization of love. In this way, the Society shares the Church's mission to evangelise the world through visible witness, in both actions and words.

7.3 Vision of the future

The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

7.4 The practical Vincentian approach to social justice

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those we visit who suffer from injustice.

7.5 A voice for the voiceless

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.

7.6 Facing the structures of sin

Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak out clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements.

7.7 Striving to change attitudes

Vincentians oppose discrimination of all kinds and work to change the attitudes of those who view the weak or those who are different with prejudice, fear or scorn, attitudes which gravely wound the dignity of others.

The Society strives, with charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, so that all are able to understand, recognise and defend the right of each person to be responsible for his or her own life. The Society promotes understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.

7.8 Political independence of the Society

The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a non-violent approach.

It is good that some members follow and fully participate in their political vocation in such a way that they bring Christian values to political matters. Those members who hold political offices will be asked, always with charity, not to hold any mission of representation in the Society during their term of political office.

7.9 Working with communities

The Society should work not only with individuals in need but also with families and communities. It can help an excluded or deprived local community to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity which leads it to improve its economic, social or environmental well-being, always retaining the personal contact of members with those who suffer.

PART II:

Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

(Approved: General Assembly, Rome—October 2003)

1. THE CONFEDERATION, HEAD OFFICE AND MEMBERS
2. THE COUNCIL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
3. THE PRESIDENT GENERAL, THE BOARD OF THE COUNCIL GENERAL AND THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE STRUTURE
4. THE INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
5. THE PERMANENT SECTION/GOVERNING BOARD
6. INSTITUTION, AGGREGATION AND DISSOLUTION
7. AMENDMENTS TO AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RULE AND THE STATUTES

PART III:

Statutes of the National Council of the United States of America

(Approved: General Council, Paris—May 2006)

MEMBERSHIP

CONFERENCES/COUNCILS AND THEIR WORK

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

ACCOUNTABILITY

Rule

The entire Rule: Part I-II-III
is available from the
National Council of the United States
Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.
58 Progress Parkway
St. Louis, MO 63043
314-576-3993 x210

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Organizational Chart

International Council

Paris, France

140 Countries—5 Continents—44,600 Conferences and 800,000 Members

USA National Council

St. Louis, Missouri

*64,300 Active, 27,083 Associate and 59,251 Contributing Members
A total of more than 150,000 members in 8 Regions throughout the U.S.*

(Arch)Diocesan Councils

51 (Arch)Diocesan Councils

District Councils

380 District Councils uniting and supporting the Conferences

Conferences

*4,433 Conferences, the basic unit of organization in Catholic Parishes,
Universities and Special Works.*

The National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul provides leadership and support for the growth and health of the Society's Councils, Conferences and Special Works. The National Council enables the Society to better serve its local communities by creating materials for the spiritual formation of the members; networking information on advocacy and justice issues; facilitating the response to the needs of those who are poor throughout the world by Twinning and giving assistance to victims of disaster.



August 2014

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