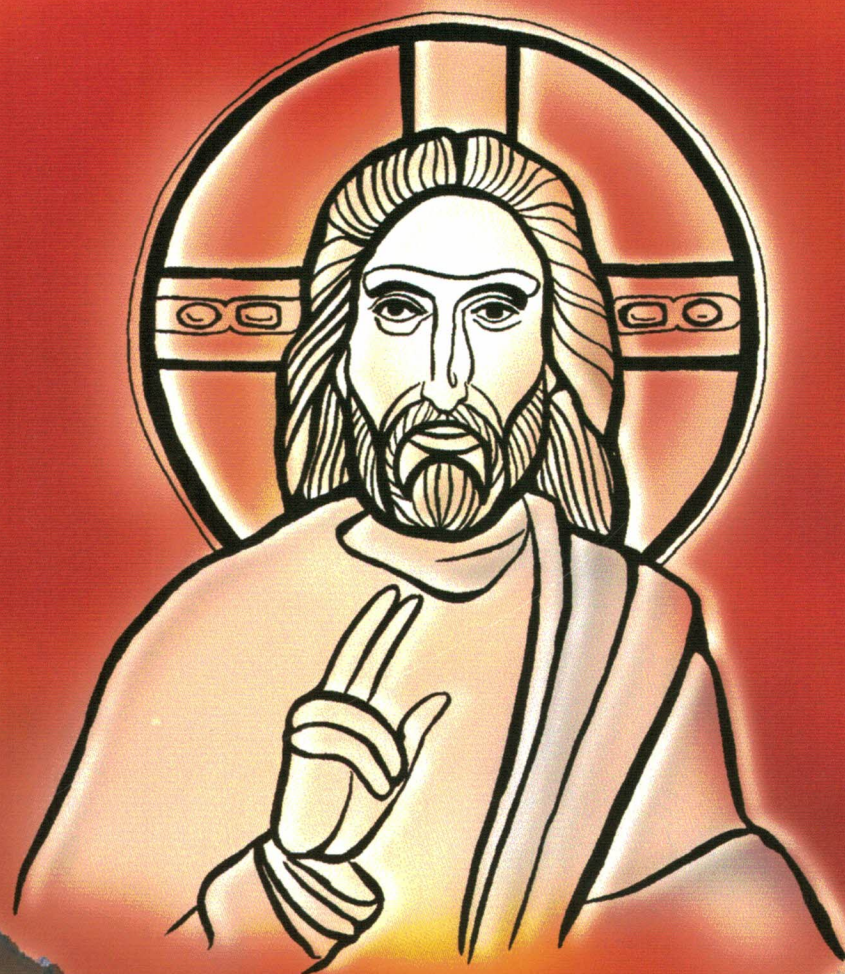


Serving in Hope

MODULE VI



Our Vincentian Conference

Video/Formation Guide

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

FONDATEURS DE LA SOCIÉTÉ SAINT-VINCENT-DE-PAUL*



Jules DEVAUX (1811-1880)



Auguste LE TAILLANDIER (1811-1886)



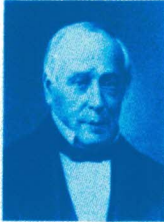
Frédéric OZANAM
(1813-1853)



Paul LAMACHE (1810- 77)



François LALLIER (1814-1886)



E. J. BAILLY (1793-1861)

THE FIRST VINCENTIAN CONFERENCE

Rule, Part I:1.1 tells us:

“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. 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 organization of lay people, men and women.”

Serving in Hope

MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference **Video/Formation Guide**



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

**IN SPECIAL GRATITUDE TO THE
Conference Resources and Concerns Committee
DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF PHOENIX**

Preface

Serving in Hope is a video-assisted resource for the spiritual formation of the member 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, invites you to discuss insights and to record your responses, and give you enrichment readings to read between sessions.

Serving in Hope consists of a 5 minute Video Introduction for the program and a 3 minute Video Introduction for each of the six Sessions in the Module together with a 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 the Sessions can be combined 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 Rosalie Rendu, DC
- 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 Statutes

MODULE VI: *Our Vincentian Conference*

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

OPENING PRAYER/QUIETING DOWN PERIOD

Leader invites the group to:

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

INTRODUCTION

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

QUIET PERIOD

Leader invites everyone: (allow 1-2 min of silence)

- To quietly reflect on the readings
- Introduces the suggested Discussion Question.

SHARING

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

CLOSING PRAYER

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

(The process for each Session should take about 15-20 minutes. One Session at a time may be conducted at a Conference Meeting, or combined together for a Retreat Day)

MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference

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• The Essential Element of Spirituality	
• The importance of prayer and spiritual formation	
Part II:	10
• The role of the Spiritual Advisor	
• Vincentian Discernment	
Session 6.2: OUR FRIENDSHIP	
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• Involving Youth and Young Adults	
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• Called to be a “Voice for the Poor”	
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• Rules and Guidelines for Home Visits	
• Home Visit Teams	
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• The role of the Pastor	
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• Maintaining a beneficial relationship with your Pastor	
• Communication is essential	
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MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference

SESSION 6.1:

Our Spirituality

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session
you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate the Essential Element of Spirituality in the Conference.
- ② Comprehend the importance of Prayer and Spiritual Formation.
- ③ Recognize the role of the Spiritual Advisor.
- ④ Understand the Vincentian Discernment process.



SESSION 6.1: OUR SPIRITUALITY

Part II

Notes

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

A lawyer stood up to pose this problem to Jesus: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?" Jesus replied, "What is written in the law?" He replied: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" Jesus said, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you shall live." (Luke 10: 25-28)

THE JOURNEY TOWARDS HOLINESS

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

Rule, Part I: 2.2 states:

"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.

...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."

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is an international organization of lay persons, Catholic in character, who seek, in a spirit of justice and charity and by person-to-person involvement, to help those who are suffering.

To provide this personal and neighborly help, Vincentians organize themselves into small working groups, known as "Conferences," which are the first line of action. Vincentians regard the Conference as the paramount unit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It is at this grass-roots level that the great majority of Vincentians find themselves engaged in the person-to-person service with troubled persons and families in their immediate neighborhood.

From the foundation in 1833, the Essential Elements of the Society have been Spirituality, Friendship and Service. That is why the Rule calls us to make the journey together towards holiness.

Therefore, Spirituality is the *first* purpose of the Society. Our goal is not to bring help to the poor, at least when defined as material or financial assistance, but **to bring the love and peace of Christ to those who are suffering.** Vincentians enhance their own spirituality by finding their Master, Christ, in the person of those they serve.

SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality serves as the life of a Conference, its vitality. Vincentian spirituality is based on the very real presence of Christ in those whom we serve. God became man through his Son and, in doing so, He brought great dignity to all humankind. He also brought good news to the poor, hungry and oppressed. Vincentians understand and believe this, and also know that when they come to the aid of poor friends or neighbors, they are serving Jesus, their friend and neighbor. This is the core of Vincentian Spirituality.

Without Spirituality, our Conference becomes just another welfare organization dispensing food, clothing and money. By bringing God into this picture, the dispensing turns into loving help and concern for the individual we are trying to assist.

Rule, Part I: 2.2 continues:

“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.”

And so, Vincentians share a marvelous vision of the love of God extended to both rich and poor. Vincentians are thankful for the grace of serving the poor and finding the face of Christ, often disguised in so many ways, in the faces of those they serve.

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE CONFERENCE

Rule, Part I: 2.3 states:

“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.”

Therefore, it is essential that all Conference meetings open with a Prayer, a spiritual reading using the **Vincentian Reflections** and a discussion with everyone participating. The normal time for this part of a Conference meeting is 10 to 15 minutes. The **Vincentian Reflections** are found on www.svdpusa.org (under Spiritual Resources).

After the Conference business meeting is concluded, a closing Prayer is said. This can be from the standard Vincentian prayer card or the Conference can innovate.

Rule, Part 3: Statute 4 and 9 calls:

Conferences and Councils to deepen the spiritual dimension of their vocation through the commissioning of leadership, the annual renewal of our commitment, and celebrating Vincentian feasts throughout the year.

“Vincentian Celebrations: *Rituals and Ceremonies*” is a resource from the National Council which offers prayer services for: Annual Commitment, Commissioning Ceremonies, Funeral/Wake Services, Feast Day Celebrations and Vincentian Meetings.

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

DISCUSSION:

How do we live the Essential Element of Spirituality in our Conference?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, grant us the wisdom and strength to persevere when disappointed or distressed. May we never claim that the fruitfulness of our apostolate springs from ourselves alone. United in prayer and action, may we become a visible sign of Christ and may we give witness to His boundless love, which reaches out to all and draws them to love one another in Him. Amen

SESSION 6.1: OUR SPIRITUALITY

Part II

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Live on in me, as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing....If you live in me, and my works stay part of you, you may ask what you will—it will be done for you. My Father has been glorified in your bearing much fruit and becoming my disciples." (John 15: 4-8)

THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR

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

Rule Part I: 3.13 states:

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

A spiritual advisor, besides leading the prayer, reading and discussion at meetings, is the person who constantly "brings us back" to the spirit of St. Vincent and St. Louise, Bl. Frederic and Bl. Rosalie during discussions and debates. The Spiritual Advisor takes an active part in the Conference meeting, observing and making recommendations in order that the Conference stay focused on its mission.

Therefore, each Conference of the Society must have an active Spiritual Advisor. The pastor or a member of the parish clergy is ideal, but often their parish obligations prevent them from serving in this role. A religious sister, brother or deacon can be invited to be the Spiritual Advisor. However, it may be difficult to find a member of the clergy or a religious who has the time to serve in this role.

Today, in the Providence of God, we stand in the grace of Vatican II which called forth the vocation of the laity. We also stand in the spirit of the first Conference of Charity where the Catholic layman, Emmanuel Bailly, fulfilled the role of the Spiritual Advisor for the founding members of the Society. Therefore, in this grace and heritage, we often find that in our Conferences there is someone, rooted in Vincentian spirituality, who is waiting for the invitation to be called forth to serve in the role of Spiritual Advisor.

VINCENTIAN DISCERNMENT**By Fr. Hugh O'Donnell CM**

As our Conference faces decisions on the best way to serve those who are poor, we are called to make our choices and judgments through a Vincentian Discernment Process.

Discernment is a prayerful process through which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can come to discover the difference between what is our will and what is the will of God. For St. Vincent, it was important that every decision he made conformed to what he believed to be the will of God. Therefore, as we look at the process necessary for the prayerful discovery of the will of God in the spirit of Vincent we see that Vincentian Discernment is simple and radical, it demands faith and trust, and it is rooted in honesty and openness to the Spirit in prayer.

Discernment is not a democratic voting process- or a decision making process of the head. It demands that we take the journey from our head to our heart—to a listening heart that is rooted in prayer. Discernment is sometimes thought of as a method, a teaching, and it has the image of being in the head where we figure things out, while we remain subtly in control.

Discernment is not about negotiating a “good deal” with God. Discernment is essentially of the heart. It is about listening to what God is calling us to do. Essentially, discernment is not a “thinking head” but a “listening heart.”

St. Vincent knew that in discernment the Spirit can lead us from the contract of decision making, to the covenant of discernment. There is a radical difference between a contract, which is rooted in the head, and a covenant, which is rooted in the heart.

Discernment in the spirit of Vincent, calls us to listen to the cries of the most abandoned poor, the appeals of the Church, the signs of the times, and the vision and grace of our Rule. The process of Vincentian Discernment consist of four steps.

VINCENTIAN DISCERNMENT PROCESS**I. Imitation of Jesus Christ:**

Vincent was always driven in his discernment by the vision of Jesus as the Servant of the Poor; he never took his eyes off of Jesus.

The first question he would always ask is:

- **What would Jesus do in this situation?**
- **What would Jesus do in these circumstances?**

The authenticity of discernment then leads us to keep the service of the poor as the focal point:

- **How does this decision help us to better serve others?**
- **How does this decision affect our own self-aggrandizement?**
Are we seeking our own ego needs?

II. Unrestrictive Readiness:

“Unrestrictive readiness” means that our mind cannot be already made up so that we are trying to change God’s mind and everybody else’s. We must be willing to give up control, to step out of our preconceived plans. And so we are called to answer the following questions in simplicity and honesty:

- **Am I willing to let go of my prejudices?**
- **Am I willing to step outside my preconceived plan?**
- **Am I willing to give up control?**

III. Significance of Events:

Vincentian spirituality is especially characterized as a spirituality of the event, where we find that God manifests himself each day through our encounters with people and circumstances. To Vincent “events” were the revelations of the Will of God. So, we must also look at what is happening—the people, place, circumstances and situations. Therefore, we must face all of the circumstances, look at all the factors, and weigh all the evidence. It is important to pay attention to “feelings,” and to your “intuition.”

- **What are the subjective/objective facts?**
- **What are the events and circumstances?**
- **How is God speaking through events?**
- **How is God speaking through people?**
- **How is God speaking through authority—Civil, Community and Church?**

IV. The Decision

Vincent was always guided in a special way by legitimate authority, both Civil and Church. He also believed in asking advice from someone who had certain knowledge and who could be objective. Discernment leads to action flowing from God's wisdom and love. After prayerful discernment we will find that there is reasonable clarity and we can make a decision.

Sometimes the will of God is crystal clear, and sometimes there is only reasonable clarity where all we can say is "This is what the Will of God seems to be." And so, we now look at the **decision**, the action, in the following light:

- Is the decision reasonably clear?
- Is it rooted in peace?
- Is the decision just?
- Is the decision compassionate?

If these conditions are not met, and if there is no peace, then return and continue the discernment process. But, **if these conditions are met, ACT...and do not look back.**

Once the decision is reasonably clear, just, compassionate and rooted in a deep peace...it is then that you must act. No "if only" or "maybe we should"...if you have done the best you could to truly discern the will of God, you can be firm in going forward.

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

DISCUSSION:

How can we use the Vincentian Discernment process in our Conference and Council?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, grant us the wisdom and strength to persevere when disappointed or distressed. May we never claim that the fruitfulness of our apostolate springs from ourselves alone. United in prayer and action, may we become a visible sign of Christ and may we give witness to His boundless love, which reaches out to all and draws them to love one another in Him. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING

The National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul Minimum Requirements for Existing Traditional Conferences



The National Council of the United States Board of Directors recognizing the need for establishing minimum requirements for traditional Conferences throughout the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, created and approved RESOLUTION 71:

Minimum Requirements for Existing Traditional Conferences

Approved: Board of Directors—June 16, 2009
National Council—September 4, 2009

Existing Traditional Conferences must:

- **Adopt Bylaws within one year**, (National Council Approved Bylaws are available).
- **Review the following “Minimum Requirements for Existing Traditional Conferences” and develop a plan** to correct areas in which the Conference is not meeting the requirements of the Rule:
 1. **The Conference excludes no one from membership based on age, sex, race or ethnic background.** (*Rule, Part I, 3.2*)
 2. **The Conference meets regularly and frequently, and not less often than twice a month. Weekly meetings are desirable but not mandatory.** (*Rule, Part I, 3.3.1, Part III, Statute 5*)
 3. **The Conference has four or more active members and a full slate of officers: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.** (*Rule, Part III, Statute 12*)
 4. **Prayer, spiritual readings and reflection are a part of each meeting.** (*Rule, Part III, Statute 7*)
 5. **The Conference has an active, trained Spiritual Advisor who attends the full meeting regularly and accepts responsibility to promote the spiritual life of the Conference.** (*Rule, Part I, 3.13, Part III, Statute 15, U.S. Manual Pages 48-49*)

6. **The Conference is aggregated or has filed an application if it has been in existence for one year or more.** *(Rule, Part I, 3.8, Part III, Statute 6)*
7. **The Conference serves all those in need regardless of age, sex, race, ethnic background or life style.** *(Rule, Part I, 1.4 Part III, Statute 8)*
8. **All home visits and other interviews are made by two Vincentians.** *(Rule, Part II, Statute 8)*
9. **The Conference has person-to-person contacts with the needy, whenever possible.** *(Rule, Part I, 1.2, Mission Statement)*
10. **Home visits are the primary focus of work for traditional Conferences.** *(U.S. Manual Page 23)*
11. **The Conference maintains a bank account separate from the parish, under the control of the Conference Treasurer.** *(Rule, Part III, Statutes 12 and 24, U.S. Manual, Pages 26 and 30)*
12. **The Conference attends District meetings and takes part in programs and events sponsored by their District/Diocesan Councils.** *(Rule, Part I 3.6, Manual Page 36)*
13. **The Conference sends its members to formation and training sessions offered by the Society, particularly the Ozanam Orientation.** *(Rule, Part I, 3.6, 3.12, Part III, Statute 10)*
14. **The Conference submits Annual Reports to the District/Diocesan Council.** *(Rule, Part III, Statutes 22 and 23)*
15. **The Conference presents at least an Annual Report of its activities to the Pastor and people of its parish, preferably through the parish bulletin.** *(Rule, Part III, Statutes 22 and 23, U.S. Manual Page 30)*
16. **The Conference maintains a positive relationship with the clergy.** *(Rule, Part I, 5.1)*
17. **All donations go to the works of the Society to maintain Society structure, both nationally and internationally. No donations are used to fund other charities no matter how worthy.** *(Rule Part I, 3.14, Part III Statute 26)*
18. **The Conference provides required support for Councils/Region.** *(Rule Part III, Statute 25)*
19. **The Conference knows and follows the Rule of the Society.** *(U.S. Manual Page 14)*

MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference

SESSION 6.2:

Our Friendship

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session
you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate the Essential Element of Friendship in the Conference.
- ② Understand how the Conference is a Community of faith and love, of prayer and action.
- ③ Recognize the importance of Servant Leadership.
- ④ Identify ways to involve Youth and Young Adults.



SESSION 6.2: OUR FRIENDSHIP

Part II

Notes

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love. You will live in my love if you keep my commandments, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and live in his love. All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15: 9-17)

FRIENDSHIP

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

Rule, Part 1: 3.3 states:

"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."

Therefore, Friendship is our second Essential Element. In our Conferences we are called to create an environment where men and women can work and associate with others who share their Christian ideals and values. Together we grow in spirituality and friendship, and that is why **Rule, Part I: 3.3.1** directs that "The Conferences meet regularly and consistently, usually weekly but at least twice a month."

OBJECTIVES OF A CONFERENCE

- To bring together men and women of good will and assist them, by mutual example and true friendship, to draw nearer to their Divine Model, Jesus Christ.
- To share faith and prayer by using the **Vincentian Reflections** and doing the **Serving in Hope** Formation Program together.
- To help create a bonding process among members, drawing them closer together, in the Spirit of Christ, to perform their duties, share their experiences, and grow in their love and spiritual maturity.

- To ensure that meetings and events are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.
- To encourage the spirit of friendliness during meetings and events. Friendliness is the outward effect of charity in the heart.
- To ensure that meetings provide time for consideration, in common, of the experiences of each member and the problems encountered in the pursuit of better service and in efforts to grow in holiness.
- To build and strengthen the spirit of friendship (fellowship) in our Vincentian family by encouraging participation at Conference, District, and Diocesan meetings and events.

ACTIVITIES

- Hold occasional meetings in conjunction with some other activity (e.g., after attending early morning Mass together on a weekday, or Benediction & the Rosary on Sunday evening).
- Continue fellowship after a meeting by serving coffee, cold drinks, snacks, etc.
- Send the meeting agenda to all members in advance to encourage attendance.
- Prepare minutes of each meeting and mail to all members (careful to observe confidentiality).
- Celebrate members' birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions. Some Conferences have a "corresponding secretary" who sends out greeting cards on these dates, get-well cards to those who are ill, and sympathy cards when parishioners die.

COMMITTEES

- **Keep your members busy.**
More members drop out because they don't think they're needed than because they're overworked. Keep them busy. Get them involved in the whole picture. Let them know what's going on, locally, at the District and Diocesan level, Nationally and Internationally. Get someone to handle the "telephone tree" or email list and make sure everyone is contacted when help is needed. Even if someone says "sorry" again and again, keep contacting them.
- **Form committees** and ask everyone to serve on at least one and, hopefully, two. Good ones are:

- *Information and Resources:* Keeping the material in your Information & Resources Manual complete and up-to-date.
- *Food Procurement:* Track what food is available; how and when your monthly food supplies will be picked up, unloaded, and shelved. Arrange for vouchers for milk, bread, fresh fruits and produce; repackaging laundry detergent, and odd items the Conference receives in bulk. Keep the pantry clean and the shelves stocked.
- *Social event:* Arrange pot luck dinners, outings, parties, etc., for all members spaced throughout the year.
- *Spirituality:* Make a calendar for the year with plans for the religious days related to our Society. Coordinate activities with neighboring Conferences and with your District Council.
- *Communications:* Ensure that the parish bulletin has an item about SVdP every week, or the bulletin board has a display, or the newsletter is properly prepared for bulk-rate mailing.
- *Correspondence:* Handle the correspondence of the Conference, communicating with other parish groups, sending get well and condolence cards, thank you notes, etc.

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

DISCUSSION:

How do we live our Essential Element of Friendship in our Conference? What committees do we have and should we create more?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

SESSION 6.2: OUR FRIENDSHIP

Part II

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus looked to heaven and prayed: "O Father most holy, protect them with your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ... They are not of the world, any more than I am of the world. Consecrate them by means of the truth—'Your word is truth.' As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world; I consecrate myself for their sakes now, that they may be consecrated in truth." (John 17: 11-19)

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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

Rule, Part 1: 3.11 states:

"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."

Vincent, a servant leader, was always concerned about the growth of those he served. He would strike a fire in their hearts to see Jesus in the face of the Poor. Vincent recruited ordinary people and asked of them extraordinary service. He looked for willingness and open hearts, and he always believed in them. Vincent gathered others to help with his projects. He did not look for stars but grew them and encouraged them! Vincent knew the goodness in people's hearts and called it forth. This is why the followers of Vincent de Paul are rooted in the desire to grow in spirituality, respect and friendship with others, and in person-to-person service.

St. Vincent came to be a servant leader through prayer and scripture. He was inspired by Jesus who said "Earthly kings lord it over their people. Those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. Yet it cannot be that way with you. Let the greater among you be as the junior, the leader as servant." (Luke 22:25-26)

To be a servant leader, following in the steps of Vincent, means to be always searching, listening, expecting that a better solution is possible. Indeed, Vincentians must always be seeking new and better ways to serve the poor which are consistent with our Rule and heritage.

KNOW THE MISSION AND VISION

The very essence of leadership, going out ahead to show the way, demands an openness to inspiration. But, it is true, that the leader needs more than inspiration. The leader must initiate, provide ideas and structure, and take the risk of failure along with the chance of success. Therefore, leaders must know the Mission and the Vision in order to dream the dream and show the way. Vincent and Frederic planted their Mission and Vision firmly in the minds of their followers and never wavered from it. Their Mission and Vision now lives on in us.

Rule, Part 1: 2.4 tells us that:

“Frederic envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and justice encircling the world.”

Indeed, Frederic’s Mission and Vision for the Society were strong and clear. He derived his inspiration from prayer, reflection, his friends and the poor. He knew that everything depended on the Providence of God. He initiated a few things, listened to others and then on fire with grace and an overwhelming love for the poor, he organized for practical action. Also, Frederic, a servant leader, honed his listening skills and became a listener-leader. Listening in respect and compassion gives the servant leader empathy and humility.

Leaders need to have “a sense for the unknowable and they need to foresee the unforeseeable.” Vincent did this by letting others come up with the initial idea; he trusted in Providence and then he organized like mad. Leaders act on hunches, but calculated ones. Vincent was practical in all he did. He learned by doing and he was results oriented. He consulted widely and reflected in prayer with great discernment, but his solutions were always practical, never theoretical.

YOUTH

Rule, Part I: 3.7 tells us that:

“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.”

There are many different approaches to getting young people involved but the most important step is to try. Parish Conferences can be connected to youth and young adults in elementary, high schools, colleges and universities.

The Conference might start to engage the young people by educating them about the mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the works performed by the parish Conference. The members of the Conference may invite the young people to assist in various projects that they sponsor and work alongside active Vincentians. This may provide an opportunity to spark an interest in the Society and an invitation to return. Another way to attract the young people is a willingness to try something new or to be flexible on how something is done and when it has to be completed. The youth or young adults are ready to share their talents and take on some responsibility.

AGGREGATION AND INSTITUTION

Rule, Part I: 3.8 states:

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

Just as individual members of the Society are formally incorporated into the Conference, so too must the Conference be joined, or *aggregated*, with the International Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Aggregation provides official recognition of the Conference's status as part of the Society and links it and its members with the Society's visible symbol of unity: the International Council General. The function of the International Council is to preserve among all Conferences the unity of membership and practices that characterizes the organization begun by Blessed Frederic Ozanam in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul.

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

DISCUSSION:

How does our Conference reflect the principles of Servant Leadership? How can we involve Youth and Young Adults? Are we aggregated?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

ENRICHMENT READING

RETAINING NEW MEMBERS

You retain people by helping them do things that warm their hearts and enrich their souls:

- **Assign them a mentor.**

Assign them someone who will work with them for a while, at least four to six months, preferably an experienced Vincentian of the same sex.

- **Assign them something to do.**

Even if it appears trivial, like mopping the pantry floor twice a week, give them some thing to do right away. You can explain how it is important to the work of the Conference (you must meet the health code or risk the loss of your pantry) and that you will be moving them to other, more important work soon.

- **Assign them a *meaningful* responsibility quickly.**

Give them something important to do, preferably home visits with an experienced Vincentian.

- **Provide them with training.**

As soon as possible, give them training for specialized positions (answering the phone, packing food boxes, picking up bread). Team them up with an experienced Vincentian for home visits or food delivery. People learn best from observing others.

- **Get them into Ozanam Orientation.**

If possible, schedule new members for an Ozanam Orientation within 6 months. Never send them alone; send them with someone they know or the President may take them. Anxiety and confusion runs high among new members; having a friend along helps clear away those bottlenecks to participation and development.

- **Help them feel they are members of a big family.**

Invite, but don't force, them to District/Diocesan Council meetings or days of reflection. Offer to pick them up and drive them to the first couple of functions; encourage the creation of car pools to take groups of members to functions. Mix new members with old-timers whenever possible. It gives confidence to the newcomers and new vitality to older Vincentians.

- **Don't exclude non-Catholics.**

We are an organization which is "*Catholic in character*". A real measure of your effectiveness is when non-Catholics join, perceiving that SVdP is not only an effective organization serving the poor, but a means of living out the tenets of their Christian faith. Non-Catholics participate in all the activities of the Conference, but cannot serve as officers or Spiritual Advisors. Recent Popes have all stressed our obligation to practice ecumenism.

PROVIDE RECOGNITION

- Conduct a prayer service to celebrate a member's anniversary (at 10, 15, 20, 25 year), and for all retiring members. Prayer services are found in **Vincentian Celebrations**.
- Recognize your pastor, priests, deacons and religious who provide help and support for your programs and/or your Conference.
- Conduct a "graduation ceremony" when a member completes the Ozanam Orientation. Present them their certificate in front of the entire Conference.
- Use a star or other special character on your Conference membership list to indicate members who have completed the **Ozanam Orientation** and **Serving in Hope Modules**.
- Prepare and publish a list of Conference officers over past years.
- Put up a plaque in your pantry with the names of Vincentians who have died.
- Conduct a Wake/Funeral prayer service for deceased members. (Resource: **Vincentian Celebrations**)

PRESERVING THE SPIRIT

Rule, Part I: 3.5 states:

"Members of all ages strive to preserve the spirit of youth, which is characterized 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."

Everyone in your Conference will get tired of the "same old thing," so keep trying new projects and changing (improving) old programs. The attitude, *"but we've always done it that way"* will only insure that your Conference will remain a handful of older men and women who eventually burn out, while new and younger members are discouraged from joining. A perception that an organization is dying is the number one reason why people leave or fail to join an organization.

Some possible "new" activities for Conferences:

- Run a back-to-school K-8 Clothing drive (a fun way to spend time together!)
- Conduct a Fall food drive
- Sponsor a Christmas Party for shut-ins at an area rest home
- Occasionally schedule a joint meeting with a neighboring Conference. The exchange of ideas results in the betterment of all. Misunderstandings may also be resolved.

THE NEED FOR RECOVERY AND RECUPERATION

Occasionally a member may become dissatisfied or bored with their present assignment. Others may get tired (especially your oldest members), and a few may experience burn-out. Recognize these folks and thank them for the work they have accomplished, and show them how their involvement has helped the people the Conference served and our Society. Ask them for input on the manner in which you conduct your meetings and make assignments. They may have a different perspective, and help you to improve Conference operations.

MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference

SESSION 6.3:

Our Service

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session
you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand the Essential Element of Service in the Conference.
- ② Appreciate that “No work of charity is foreign to the Society”.
- ③ Identify how to be a “Voice of the Poor”.
- ④ Recognize the need for Systemic Change.



SESSION 6.3: OUR SERVICE

Part I

Notes

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

After Jesus had washed their feet... He said to them: "Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet—I who am Teacher and Lord—then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do."
(John 13:12-15)

SERVICE TO THE POOR

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

Rule, Part I:1.2 states:

"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."

The Essential Element of Service roots us in our Vincentian Vocation by calling us to person-to-person service, which encompasses every form of aid that alleviates suffering and promotes the dignity and self-respect of our fellow men and women. The Society strives not only to alleviate need but also to discover and redress the situations which cause it.

Rule, Part I: 1.3 tells us that:

"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."

ACTION ORIENTATION ...

Vincentians regard the plight of distressed people as a cause for sensitive and informed boldness, rather than timidity. An alert Conference will come to realize they have the right, and sometimes the duty, to provide leadership in attacking the social problems of our society. Perhaps this will mean direct responsibility for coping with unmet needs. If the task is beyond its own capacity, the Conference may serve as catalyst within the parish or work within their Council to develop needed special works.

Session 6.3

Rule, Part I: 1.4 mandates:

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

...TEMPERED WITH REALISM

Conferences must be realistic in what can be accomplished. If they attempt too much, they will exhaust themselves in contacts of a superficial sort and will be able to share little of themselves with those who often desperately need human warmth and caring. If Conferences attempt too little, they will become bored with themselves, and become institutional obstacles in the way of what otherwise might become dedicated and generous parish concern for the poor.

VINCENTIAN SERVICE

Rule, Part I: 1.8 states:

“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.”

PERSON-TO-PERSON

Many possibilities for person-to-person service exists. Whatever program of charitable action is eventually adopted, Vincentian involvement should possess these characteristics:

- a witnessing of Christ’s love for all men and women;
- a personal sharing of time and interest on the part of the Vincentian with those in material and spiritual need;
- promoting the dignity of the human person; and
- the furthering of individual self-help efforts.

Some of the most common types of person-to-person services provided today would be the following:

- Food or limited financial assistance to meet the needs of a short-term crisis.
- Direct aid, combined with a referral to the appropriate public agency(ies), in situations where eligibility for government assistance is possible.
- Referral to an appropriate counseling agency when recurrent financial problems on the part of the individual or family point to a need for professional guidance.
- Regular sharing of manpower and material resources between a more affluent parish Conference with one less well-endowed financially.

- Development of inexpensive recreational programs through arranging for the use, at a nominal fee, of local facilities by marginal income families and special groups like senior citizens.
- Securing professional and household services at nominal cost for low income families. This type of neighborhood service could encompass a considerable range of specialists: nurses, carpenters, doctors, lawyers, electricians, plumbers, appliance repairmen, etc.
- Sharing of expertise in such areas as budgeting, nutrition, house keeping, applying for employment, child care, home maintenance, legal and medical counsel, and the like.
- Organizing, within the parish or Council, programs or classes for groups interested in acquiring home management, budgeting or family living skills.

CHARITY AND JUSTICE

The profound words of Frederic Ozanam speak to our hearts:

“For if the question which disturbs the world around us today is not a political question, but a social question; if it is the struggle between those who have nothing with those who have too much; if it is the violent shock of opulence and of poverty which shakes the earth under it, then our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between these irreconcilable enemies, and to make the ones divest themselves so that the other may receive as a benefit; so that equality may operate as much as it is possible among men; and to make charity accomplish what justice alone cannot do.” (Frederic Ozanam November 5, 1836)

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

DISCUSSION:

How does our Conference live the Essential Element of Service?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

SESSION 6.3: OUR SERVICE

Part II

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison? The king will answer them: ‘I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers or sisters, you did it for me.’”

(Matthew 25: 31-40)

THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

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

Rule, Part I: 7.1 states:

“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.”

The *Voice of the Poor* is a relatively recent yet rapidly growing program of the Society. Its purpose is to increase public awareness of the causes of poverty, obstacles that hamper the poor in their struggle to improve their lot, and injustices which call out for redress. The role of the Conference in this area is to communicate these conditions in such a way as to gain the attention, sympathy and action of legislators and others who have the power to fix these conditions.

Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, taught us that: “Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. **It is Justice’s role to prevent the attacks.**” Vincentians through direct service to the poor have long been in a position to identify the causes that often result in poverty. Through their experiences in Home Visits, unique to the Society, Vincentians are qualified to advocate for justice in addition to offering charity to those in need.

Rule, Part I: 7.5 tells us that:

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

Therefore, **Voice of the Poor** are advocacy committees operating at all levels of the Society: the Conference, District, Arch/diocesan, and National Council.

WHY MUST WE GET INVOLVED?

Rule, Part I: 1.5 states:

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

While charity provides temporary alleviation of pain and suffering, it is not enough. We strive for the identification and elimination of the cause of the need in the first place. We call for both charity and justice. We speak for the preferential protection of the Poor and vulnerable particularly for those who are afraid to speak or cannot speak for themselves.

Calls to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul seeking emergency assistance come in continuously. In home visits Vincentians hear the cries for help first hand – food, assistance with rent, utilities, health care, car repairs, bus fare,the cries continue unabated. Resources to meet growing needs are limited. We cannot be satisfied with the little given when the solution is only temporary. Members are called to be a voice for the voiceless and for advocacy and justice.

Rule, Part I:7.6 states:

“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.”

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Our Mission states: “Organized locally, Vincentians witness God’s love by embracing all works of charity and justice. The Society collaborates with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes, making no distinction in those served because, in them, Vincentians see the face of Christ.”

Rule, Part I: 1.10 challenges:

“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.”

Therefore, Vincentians make a commitment to walk with the poor not only for the short term-but especially for the long haul...to empower them to become self-sufficient.

In works among those who are poor, *Systemic Change* aims beyond providing food, clothing and shelter to alleviate the immediate needs of the poor by:

- Focusing on assisting the poor to develop strategies by which they can emerge from poverty.
- Aiming at transforming a complete series of interacting elements, rather than just an individual element.
- Changing attitudes that have caused the problems which a group hopes to solve....and begin to see the world anew.

Systemic Change helps us to grapple with the question: "What can Vincentians do to create opportunities for the poor, through collaboration with people who are poor, to break the cycle of poverty." We must come to the understanding that poverty is not the inevitable result of circumstances but it is the product of unjust situations that can be changed. (Reference: Seeds of Hope available from the National Council)

Rule, Part I: 1.6 tell us:

"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.

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

DISCUSSION:

How does our Conference promote social justice and systemic change?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

ENRICHMENT READING

SERVICE TO FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Incarcerated:

- Friendly visitors to men and women who are in prison.
- Assistance to the families of inmates.
- Support those on probation or parole to get back on their feet and find meaningful employment.

The Institutionalized and Home-Bound:

- Visits to those who are patients in hospitals, live in nursing homes and who lack family and friends
- Friendship calls on home-bound elderly persons
- Home Care Services enabling people to remain living at home can consist of one or a combination of the following:
 - Volunteers to assist the home-bound in handling homemaker responsibilities;
 - Preparation and delivery of hot meals by volunteers;
 - Providing occasional leisure time opportunities for family members who normally take care of an aging relative;
 - Telecare services by daily telephoning the elderly to check on them, their needs and for purposes of social exchange;
 - Home maintenance services by providing chore services, minor home repairs, etc.
 - Transportation Services to stores, doctors' offices and church;
 - Recreational Services by activity and companionship in the home or at Centers for the Aged;
 - Special Personal Services of volunteer barbers, beauticians etc.

The Handicapped:

- Offer help and companionship to handicapped persons (the blind, deaf, physically disabled, mentally challenged) and services similar to those provided needy older persons.

Those in Crisis:

- Temporary Homemaker Service.
- Transportation in an emergency.
- Baby sitting in an urgent situation.

The Lonely and Forgotten

- Alleviating the suffering that accompanies the breakdown of families (in most years, over two million divorces will be granted in this country).
- Ministering to those who are in the dying process without the comfort of others who care.
- Comforting those bereaved and left alone in their grief.
- Visiting those effectively abandoned in State and County mental hospitals.
- Helping the victims of serious crime.

INFORMATION AND REFERRALS

- Providing information about services related to poverty, medical and emotional needs, family and personal problems, youth counseling and youth activity programs, senior citizens programs and facilities.
- Referrals to self-help programs which can limit the practice of recurrent hand-outs. Such “entitlements” may be destructive of human dignity and degenerate into a subtle form of government enslavement. Self-help systems are such operations as food co-ops, housing rehabilitation, credit unions, repair co-ops, adult education, home services for the aged and shut-in, legal services, and the like.
- Advocacy on behalf of those who are encountering delays and obstacles in the providing of services to which they have apparent right.
- Conducting informational programs regarding community welfare and counseling programs, i.e. Social Security, counseling services, budgeting, household management, etc.

A PLANNED APPROACH

Rule Part I: 7.4 tells us that:

“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.”

The Conference must take a sensible step toward helping the people of the parish, the neighborhood, and the community in both a realistic and a Christian way. To avoid the excesses of either too much or too little, each parish Conference must approach its task with head as well as with heart. A vital Conference employs the following techniques:

- listening to the poor in order to understand their actual needs;
- fact-finding about community socio-economic needs;
- becoming familiar with existing social service programs;
- analysis of the Conference in terms of its competencies, available person power, and financial capacity;
- determination of appropriate priorities with respect to meeting people’s needs;
- the organization of work so that the Conference can effectively carry out an agreed upon mission;
- continuing evaluation of Conference activities.
- participation in the Council “Voice of the Poor” Committee

MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference

SESSION 6.4:

Our Home Visits

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session
you will have greater insight to:

- ① Appreciate how the Home Visit is rooted in our heritage.
- ② Identify the attitudes of a Vincentian heart.
- ③ Recognize the Rules and Guidelines for Home Visits.
- ④ Understand the importance of Home Visit Teams.



SESSION 6.4: OUR HOME VISITS

Part I

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Zacchaeus first ran out in front, and climbed a sycamore tree which was along Jesus' route, in order to see him. When Jesus came to the spot he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down. I mean to stay at your house today." (Luke 19: 2-3)

OUR DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER:

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

Rule, Part I, 1.9 tells us that:

"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."

In observing both the Rule and the Spirit of the Society, the home visit is the closest thing the Society has to a fundamental activity, practiced universally. "The visiting of the poor in their dismal homes is the distinctive character of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul." (Emmanuel Bailly, 1841)

And so from the beginning of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the central and most fundamental activity of the Conferences has been the visitation of the needy in their home. This action is the clearest symbol of the Vincentian charism which dictates the highest respect for the dignity of the poor: the visitor becomes the guest and the person being helped is the master. It is in the home environment that needy persons feel most free to entrust their stories of struggle. It is there, in the family setting, that Vincentians are asked to listen, offer humble advice, and render assistance.

HOME VISITS

Frederic Ozanam told us: "The science of charity reform is not transmitted through books and at assemblies' tribunes as much as by climbing stairs to visit the home of the poor, kneeling at his bed, suffering

from the same cold as he does, and discovering the secret of a grief-stricken heart in the course of a friendly conversation.”

The following “Rules for Home Visits” essentially deal with attitude. Attitude is what you bring to the visit. It affects the way you think and the way you act. It truly is your contribution to the encounter. It is not so much the material things that we give that are important as what we bring from our hearts.

RULES FOR HOME VISITS

1. One of our purposes as members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to bring the love of God to those who are in need.

Our role as helper obliges us to keep as open a mind as possible. Give those we serve the benefit of the doubt—at least until you have heard their story and can make a reasonable judgment as to the validity of the need. And remember it is the need we are judging—not the person.

2. Vincentians must be good listeners.

Vincentians must listen carefully to the poor. They should visit those in need with the spirit of servants asking their masters, “What is it that we can do for you?” Our Lord has called out to us. It is He whom we are serving in the person of the poor.

3. Vincentians represent Christ to those we serve.

We must be pleasant, loving, and caring when we encounter those in need. Our Lord asked us to love one another as He loves us. That’s a tall order and we need to represent Him well. What this means is that if you are having a bad day, you can’t show it. As Vincentians, we represent Christ to those we serve.

4. Vincentians show those who are in need that God cares about them, and gives them some hope.

Christ’s love was unconditional. You may walk away from a visit feeling like you have made a real difference or you may feel like you were not able to change anything. The impact of what you do today may not show up for months or years.

5. Vincentians are asked to make a decision, a choice, and a judgment.

We are asked to make good judgments about whether to help or not. We are not to be judgmental about lifestyle choices. It is not easy. We have to deal with mind and heart issues as well as all our life experiences. Don't deny someone your help because you disagree with how they choose to live. Remember that our Lord told us that whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters we do to him.

6. Judgment not Judgmental.

We are asked to make a judgment about the need that is presented to us. We must not be judgmental about the actions of the people requesting assistance. Remember: "The measure with which you measure will be used to measure you." (Matthew 7:2)

7. The Conference Regulations.

It is the Conference that has the resources. It is the Conference that does the works of charity. It is the Conference that decides what will and what will not be done. If the Conference as a group decides not to give any further assistance to a specific family (regardless of reason), it would be wrong for an individual member or visiting team to assist the family in spite of the Conference's decision.

8. Vincentians bolster, encourage, and assist each other.

The visiting team members are the only ones present to hear the story, to ask the questions, to understand the circumstances and to formulate a resolution to the problem. Their decision, at that time, is the right one.

Rule, Part I: 1.11 tells us that:

"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."

Frederic tells us that: "Help then becomes honorable, because it may become mutual, because every man who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation today, may tomorrow stand himself in need of a kind word, a good advice, or a consolation; because the hand that you clasp clasps yours in return; because that indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves towards you when the old man, the mother, the little children shall have prayed for you."

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

DISCUSSION:

How does our Conference ensure that the help we give is "Help that becomes honorable"? Which of the Home Visit Rules challenges you the most?

CLOSING PRAYER: *(Together)*

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

SESSION 6.4: OUR HOME VISITS

Part II

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Pardon, and you shall be pardoned. Give, and it shall be given to you. ...For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:36-38)

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

Rule, Part I: 1.7 states:

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

HOME VISIT GUIDELINES

1. If you are on a witch-hunt, stay home.

- If you believe that the people you are going to visit are going to give you a phony story; and/or
- If you believe before you actually meet with the people that they are only going to sell the food to get money for cigarettes or alcohol or drugs, then you have prejudged them and shouldn't be there.

Stay home to pray and reflect on your Vincentian Vocation.

2. If you are an expert on life, stay home.

Some Vincentians have a tendency to feel that they know the answers, they've heard it all before, and they know what they are going to do to resolve the request before the visit occurs. The problem with being an expert is that experts:

- are ready with what needs to be done while the words of the request are still being formed in the mind of the one asking.
- do not listen.

Stay home to pray and reflect on your Vincentian Vocation.

3. If you cannot smile and be pleasant, stay home.

We are called to show them that God cares, but:

- Grumpy people never provide those they encounter with feelings of love and renewed hope.
- Burn out can cause ill-mannered and discourteous behavior. If you see this in yourself or your partner, don't go.

Stay home to pray and reflect on your Vincentian Vocation.

4. We are responsible for our effort, not for success.

It would be great to point to every home visit that we make and be able to say, "This is one of our finest success stories." But, we know, in fact, that very few of the families we visit for the first time ever even take the good advice we give them. That's part of human nature and we should not expect much more. Our role in serving those in need is twofold:

- First, it is to show those who are in need that God cares for them;
- Second, our role is to make life a little bit better for those who are suffering and to bring them some hope. If we can do more... that's great. If not, that's okay, too.

We are responsible for making the effort to help. We are responsible for our attitudes, for the amount of love we put into the visit, for the amount of love we put into the advice we give. We are not responsible for making it all work. We cannot place conditions on the help we give.

5. Judgment—not judgmental!

We are asked to judge the validity of the need and the level of resources that are available to us. We are asked to listen to what is presented, observe the surroundings, analyze the circumstances, and evaluate what we have to work with:

- It is the need that is important. Is this real?
- Do they really need the groceries?
- Do they really need the rent help? Do we have enough money to pay a portion of the bill?

We are asked to make a judgment—period.

Don't make your decision based on any one of the many lifestyle choices that people make:

- Are they living together instead of being married?
- Is the house filthy and the kids as well? Is he/she just lounging on the sofa?

These and a thousand other questions are based on lifestyle choices—and **cause us to be judgmental. But, we are asked only to make a judgment about how and what help we can offer.**

6. Who owns the groceries? Let go!

Oftentimes we are judgmental about the people we serve based on how they deal with the things we give them. But, Jesus told us to love one another as He loves us. And, He loves us unconditionally. The same should be applied as Vincentians give their gifts to those in need. Our gifts are unconditional.

Notes

Session 6.4

- When we give a person or family a box of groceries, who owns the groceries? **They do.**
- When we give a person or a family some clothing or some furniture, who owns the merchandise? **They do.**
- How they handle it, how they dispose of it is their business. **They have ownership.**

7. *Work within the procedures of the Conference.*

All Conferences are run democratically. The group makes all decisions. No individual member has the right to override what the Conference decides. Every Conference establishes a set of procedures upon which the members may operate as Vincentians, and they must be followed whether they agree with them or not.

8. *Your decision is the right one.*

Always remember: unless you are doing something contrary to your Conference's prior decisions or contrary to the Society, your decision is the right one. No one within the Conference has a right to criticize the team for the decision they made. Other members may make recommendations as to other questions that may be asked in similar circumstances next time, other resources that may be referred, other paths that may be suggested. **But criticism is out.**

Rule, Part I: 1.12 states:

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

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

DISCUSSION:

Which of the Guidelines for Home Visits challenges you the most?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

ENRICHMENT READING

FREDERIC'S WORDS

“Help is humiliating when it appeals to men from below, taking heed of their material wants only, paying no attention to those of the flesh, to the cry of hunger and cold, to what excites pity, to what one succors even in the beasts. It humiliates when there is no reciprocity, when you give the poor man nothing but bread, or clothes, or a bundle of straw — when, in fact, there is no likelihood of his ever giving you in return. . . .

But it honors when it appeals to him from above, when it occupies itself with his soul, his religious, moral, and political education, with all that emancipates him from his passions and from a portion of his wants, with those things that make him free, and may make him great. Help honors when to the bread that nourishes it adds the visit that consoles, the advice that enlightens, the friendly shake of the hand that lifts up the sinking courage; when it treats the poor man with respect, not only as an equal but as a superior, since he is suffering what perhaps we are incapable of suffering; since he is the messenger of God to us, sent to prove our justice and our charity, and to save us by our works.

Help then becomes honorable, because it may become mutual, because every man who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation today, may tomorrow stand himself in need of a kind word, an advice, or a consolation; because the hand that you clasp clasps yours in return; because the indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves towards you when the old man, the mother, the little children shall have prayed for you.” (21 October 1848, Frederic Ozanam)

SPIRITUALITY ON HOME VISITS

Teams should always pray before and after making a home visit. If our primary goal is to bring the love and charity of Christ to those we visit, what better way of doing so than to say a prayer with the people we are visiting. God’s love is meant to be given away along with the food, rent or utility check. This is what makes us different; this is what makes us Vincentian. Guidelines for praying with those you visit:

- Be aware of what has been discussed during the interview and pray for that intention (health, employment, strength to overcome an addiction, etc.).
- Ask them: “How about a prayer?” If they agree, ask if they would want to “lead us in prayer”. If they decline to lead and you are not comfortable with a spontaneous prayer, pray the “Our Father” together.

HOME VISIT TEAMS

1. Always visit in pairs:

You make contact with your guests only as a member of a two-person team. Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs. This is the Vincentian Way. It also has several other benefits:

- Provides two sets of eyes to observe, two pairs of ears to listen.
- Protects team members from unfounded charges.

2. Pair new with experienced:

If a new Vincentian is learning this function, the team should have one experienced member. Example is the best teacher. For new Conferences, Vincentians from neighboring parish Conferences should be asked to provide this 'experience' during the first few weeks.

3. Two-gender teams have an advantage:

While any team meets the home visit standard, experience has shown there is great value in having teams with one man and one woman. Men and women notice different things on a home visit. It is not advisable for two men to visit a woman when she is alone.

4. The need for strength:

Your Conference will deliver a great deal of food. Older Vincentians are great on a team as they have ears and eyes that know what to listen and look for, but many Vincentians struggle to carry the heavy food boxes that their Conference provides. Pair your older members with younger, stronger members. You do both members a great service.

5. Security procedures:

Do not give out your last name or cell/home telephone number. Lock your car, even when you feel you will only be away for "a few minutes." You hope those who you are helping are honest, but there is no assurance about their neighbors. Although daytime visits are not always possible, team members (and their families) will feel more secure if they can be done during the day. But it is reasonable to be cautious in all areas day or night.

SCHEDULING

1. How often:

In the ideal, the Conference will have home visit teams available every day of the week to serve the poor who call in for help that day. In reality, few Conferences have enough members. If you can only cover a couple of days, try to space them out.

2. When:

Home visits are made when teams are available. Hopefully a home visit team will perform its duties at about the same time each week so that the person answering the Conference's phone can tell them approximately when to expect the home visit. Situations of pending eviction, imminent utility shut offs and empty food shelves

increase the anxiety and fear experienced by the people whom we serve. Therefore, it is important to remember that we try to serve, not at our convenience, but at their convenience.

4. Record-keeping:

“The job’s not through until the paperwork’s done.” Always discuss the case with your co-worker before making any decisions. Then document who you visited, when, where, what you observed, the basics of the case, and what help was given and/or promised. The Conference needs these records to appropriately handle future requests from this individual or family. The IRS also requires you to keep records of where your funds were spent.

MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference

SESSION 6.5:

Our Parish

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session
you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand the relationship between the Conference and the Parish
- ② Appreciate the importance of the role of the Pastor
- ③ Identify ways to develop a beneficial relationship with your Pastor.
- ④ Recognize that communication is essential.



SESSION 6.5: OUR PARISH

Part I

Notes

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus replied, "I solemnly assure you, the one who has faith in me will do the works I do, and greater far than these. Why? Because I go to the Father and whatever you ask in my name I will do, so as to glorify the Father in the Son. Anything you ask me in my name I will do." (John 14: 12-14)

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH HIERARCHY

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

Rule, Part I: 5.1 states:

"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."

The relationship between the Conference and the Pastor requires continuing communication between the two.

- The Pastor needs to know what Conference activities are being planned and what is being accomplished within his parish. Conversely, the Conference needs to know what the parish is planning that might impact its ability to serve those in need.
- The best way to nourish a healthy relationship is to have the Pastor or his appointed staff member attend the Conference meetings. If this is not possible, the President should meet regularly with the Pastor, monthly if possible, or at least quarterly, to keep him updated as to Conference activities. It is best to have a regular set date so that the communication will be ongoing.

We sometimes hear stories of "problems with the Pastor." When investigated, these are usually the result of simple personality conflicts, or a failure to communicate, and only rarely serious authority disagreements.

Notes

Session 6.5

Personality Conflicts.

Perhaps the Pastor has difficulty communicating with the Conference President and/or some members. Try minimizing the number of Vincentians who try to meet with him by designating a Council Officer as the sole contact with the Pastor. On the other hand, *perhaps the Conference is the problem*. Are we aggressive when we deal with our Pastor, rather than supportive? Do we hate change, and are we critical of his new ideas? Are we inflexible in our plans?

The issues surrounding personality conflicts can be many and difficult to overcome. They require a concerted effort by all the individuals involved in order to work out a solution. *We are responsible for working out a personality conflict with our Pastor, not vice versa.* Remember that the Society exists and operates in the parish only with the permission of the Pastor. Keep in mind that it is not the Pastor or the SVdP Conference that will be impacted by a failed relationship. It is those in need who will suffer.

Authority Disagreements.

Since we use church facilities and regularly collect money during church functions, SVdP can easily be perceived as not only part of the parish church, but under the immediate control of the church's Pastor. However, the Society is governed by its own rules of operation. The Conference makes the decisions it feels are best to assist people in need, not those the parish staff feels should be made.

Should the same, rigid rule be applied to our Pastor? Both logic and reverence say, "no." No one would deny the Pastor the right to assist someone at his door at a late hour or holiday when a Conference member is unavailable, and to be reimbursed for any costs he expends.

There are serious conflicts which could arise over the issue of authority and, if not resolved, could seriously impact the Conference or be a major violation of the Rule of the Society. The Conference leader is expected to give ground when trying to resolve a personality conflict with the Pastor, to honor as best s/he can the Pastor's wishes regarding helping individuals and families, *but is expected to hold her/his ground on serious matters involving the Mission, Rule, Bylaws and the following points:*

1. SVdP funds must not be co-mingled with parish funds. However, a collection taken up by the parish for the Conference may be counted by the parish, and the amount issued promptly to the Conference by parish check.
2. The Conference must have its own bank account, separate from the parish's account(s).
3. Members of the ordained clergy (priests or deacons) cannot be Officers of a Conference, although they can serve as Spiritual Advisor. Members of the clergy must not be authorized signers on the SVdP checking account.
4. The Conference does not need the approval of the Pastor, or of the parish staff before helping an individual or family. Parish staff should not verbally or otherwise commit the Conference to assist certain people.
6. The Conference honors their Pastor by paying bills he has incurred or reimbursing him for expenses taking care of the hungry, homeless or those otherwise in need.
7. Finally, some Conferences provide parish office staff with food bags, bus tickets, gasoline vouchers and referral forms for the homeless and desperate who walk in off the street when SVdP teams are not available. We work together to serve God's poor.

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

DISCUSSION:

How well does our Conference maintain a close relationship with the Pastor?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

SESSION 6.5: OUR PARISH

Part II

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Again I tell you, if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted to you by my Father in heaven. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." (Mt 18: 20)

OUR PASTOR

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

Developing a good relationship with your Pastor:

1. Help him:

Do more than help him take care of the poor. Be there promptly when he calls a meeting. Be reliable when he asks you to do something. Meet his deadlines. Agree to speak when he requests.

2. Get his permission:

Ask before you pass out anything in or around the church. Give the Pastor a final version of what you would like to insert in the parish bulletin or pass out at the church doors. Ask his approval. Give him at least two weeks to review it.

3. Don't make more work for him:

Remember, the Pastor may give permission, but *you* do the work. Don't ask him to write letters or articles, you write them and submit them to him for approval. If the Conference wants to do something, get the Pastor's permission, but then the Conference should do the work. This includes everything from stuffing fliers into the church bulletin, to setting up tables, and cleaning up after Conference meetings and activities.

4. Whenever possible, tie Conference activities to the natural rhythms of parish liturgical life:

Be in contact with your Liturgical associate to find out how the Conference might be a part. Offer to run Bread and Soup suppers on the Fridays during Lent. Be a part of the Parish Festival. You are a part of your parish. Be a visible part!

5. Seek out the Pastor's suggestions and listen to his ideas:

A good Pastor is often also a good manager, a wise fund-raiser, a shrewd judge of people, and the most knowledgeable person about what is going on in the parish and neighborhood. Tap into that knowledge! People are supportive of things they helped create; get Father on board early, and he'll be an enthusiastic supporter of your activities! A good relationship with your Pastor can bring untold benefits to the SVdP conference, including his permission:

- for several second collections a year (perhaps monthly collection);
- to distribute brochures and pamphlets which bring in new members and contributors;
- to permit Vincentians to address all the weekend Masses during the "Invitation To Serve" membership campaign;
- to place SVdP envelopes in the pews or at the back of the church (or even in the parish's regular envelope package);
- to stage events and activities involving parish facilities;
- to give SVdP the donations from the Poor Boxes (or to let SVdP install poor boxes in the church);
- to provide space for a generous pantry, perhaps an office and phone; and even printing access.

6. Use understanding, cooperation and prayer to solve conflicts:

Issues of conflict should be approached in a humble, prayerful manner. If a resolution cannot be reached between the Pastor and the Conference, there may be a need to raise the issue to a higher level. Contact your District Council President to begin the process of involving others to mediate the disagreement.

Never, ever call the Bishop or outsiders such as the news media! Once the issues have been satisfactorily defined for both parties, it is assumed that the Conference will continue its efforts to serve the poor and will be able to work cooperatively with the Pastor.

OUR PARISH

There are lots of people in need in our Parish:

Every community has individuals and families who are unemployed, under-employed, ill, poor, shut-in, afraid or abused. Even “wealthy” communities have the emotionally poor in spirit, the lonely, bereaved or anxious. The Pastor and members of the parish can help the Conference find these people.

The Conference is doing lots of good things:

Most people in the parish have no idea how your Conference helps those who are poor and suffering. When informed, they approve and are supportive. You must not be afraid to talk about the many and varied good works of the Society and your Conference, while respecting the confidentiality of those we serve.

The Conference can use more help:

People want to be needed. Their time is valuable and they do not want it wasted. Invite the parish to become more involved in serving the poor and marginalized.

Maintain autonomy:

Rule, Part I: 5.2 tells us that:

“The Society is legally autonomous as to its existence, constitution, organization, 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.”

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

DISCUSSION:

In what ways can our Conference improve our relationship our Pastor and our Parish?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

ENRICHMENT READING

COMMUNICATION

Successful recruiting of new members is easier when an organization has a positive image from using good communications. Successful fund-raising results when good communication techniques are applied in telling the story of needs existing and then met by the organization. So let's dedicate ourselves to having good communications.

A. WITH THE PARISH

- **Church Bulletins.** First, ask your Pastor to include the Society of St. Vincent de Paul among the list of parish functions and ministries printed on the cover of the church bulletin. This increases the visibility of the Conference with parishioners, with the poor whom you want to serve, and with potential contributors.
- **A Weekly News Article.** In the bulletin of a busy parish, you may have to settle for occasional news items, but try for at least one item every three weeks. Use the SVdP logo whenever possible. Learn the deadlines and length rules, and faithfully observe them. The National Office offers **Bulletin Announcements** based on the scripture readings of the Sunday on www.svdpusa.org (under Spiritual Resources).
- **Leaflets/Fliers.** A leaflet/flyer inserted into the church bulletin is an excellent communications tool. When you ask your Pastor for permission to include a flier in the church bulletin, assure him that Vincentians will stuff it. Then honor that commitment.
- **Reports To The Parish.** Provide your parish with a summary of the information on your Quarterly and Annual reports. This is actually a requirement of the Society. Present the statistics of the number of people/families served, hours spent in service to those in need, amount of money received from donations and amount spent. A flier may be more appropriate for Annual Report. The best time for your annual report is a couple of weeks before your annual collection (if you are permitted one), or between Thanksgiving and Christmas when parishioners feel particularly generous. Some Conferences use the time during Lent, as close to Easter as is possible. Thank parishioners for their support. The more parishioners who know about the work the Conference does, the more they will support those efforts with their time and money. Experience has shown that Conferences that issue bulletin announcements notice a marked increase in both new members and financial contributions. It is also good a stewardship process.
- **Brochures.** Place brochures and pamphlets around the church explaining what the Society is, what your Conference does, and what kind of help you need. Resources can be obtained from the National Council.

- **Bulletin boards.** Posters and notices about upcoming events should be placed on church bulletin board(s). Keep the information current and change the material constantly. Ask if you can put up a full display on the bulletin board(s) a couple times a year. Include photos of Vincentians at work: packing food boxes, conducting the annual food drive, attending a day of reflection, volunteering at the food reclamation center or a thrift store. Laminate an index card with the SVdP logo and phone number and staple it permanently on the bulletin board.
- **Thank you's.** Send these out at every possible opportunity to anyone who helps the Conference. You can never say "*thank you*" too often. At the end of each year, one big "thank you" to the entire parish is important.
- **Newsletters.** Combine communications with fund-raising! Simple computer software programs are available to help put together a newsletter. Start with an issue quarterly then work to six issues a year. Mail to your full, associate and contributing members plus community and parish leaders, clergy, etc. If you include a pre-addressed envelope with it, your contributions and membership will increase, and the newsletter will pay for itself many times over.
- **Parish Ministry Fairs.** Print simple sign-up forms so that you are able to get new folks to sign up and come to a meeting, worry about getting detailed personal data later. Also print a short list of the work your Conference does and where it needs help.
- **Recruit, recruit, recruit!** The strength of a Conference is in its members, so it must constantly be recruiting new members. Recruitment can usually be accomplished in four ways:
 - 1) *An Invitation to Serve:* This is a successful program available from the National Office.
 - 2) *Word of mouth:* friend asking friend.
 - 3) *Written material:* passing out brochures, mailing newsletters.
 - 4) *Presentations:* to groups of non-members.
- **Address the Congregation.** Many Conference Presidents have been addressing the congregation at the end of all Masses once a year with their Pastor's permission.
- **Sign-up tables.** Use sign-up tables on special Sundays, placed outside the church doors. Have literature, photographs, newsletters, sign-up forms, and a card preprinted with the day, time and place of your next two meetings.

B. WITH YOUTH

- **Youth and Young Adults.** The Society has no future if you do not bring in young people. Problem Conferences are usually those which have made no effort to bring in new members. Old members resist change. They don't trust the judgment of newcomers, claiming they have no experience. Yet without a continuing flow of new blood, a Conference will become stagnant and die (or become ineffective). Expand your efforts through contacts with:
 - Teachers at your parish grammar school and regional Catholic high school. Ask to visit the classroom to give a 15-minute talk about St. Vincent or Blessed Frederic. Get the kids to take on a project, designing posters and flyers in their own graphics. When the project is over, write thank you letters to the kids (not the teacher) in their own language.
 - Teen, college, young adult, and RCIA groups in the parish, Boy and Girl Scouts and similar youth organizations. Talk to the heads of these parish ministries. Talk to the groups separately, adjusting your talk to the interests, resources and age of each group. Devise activities where young people can be involved and make a contribution.

MODULE VI

Our Vincentian Conference

SESSION 6.6:

Our Church

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session
you will have greater insight to:

- ① Understand our relationship with the Church.
- ② Appreciate our obligations to the Pastor.
- ③ Recognize the importance of understanding other cultures.
- ④ Identify the lay character of the Society.



SESSION 6.6: OUR CHURCH

Part I

Notes

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus replied, "Blest are you, Simon son of John! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. I for my part declare to you, you are 'Rock,' and on this rock I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 16: 19-20)

LOVE IN UNION WITH CHRIST

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

Rule, Part I: 7.2 states:

"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 evangelize the world through visible witness, in both actions and words."

The Society is an independent, voluntary association of lay persons, fully approved by a succession of Roman Pontiffs (Popes). Conferences have always been closely identified with their parish communities. Fulfilling those responsibilities requires goodwill, respect and devotion by Conference members and their leaders.

The Conference and its members must enter into the life of the Church fully, generously and enthusiastically! This implies active involvement in parish life beyond the works of the Conference. We are not a 'stand alone' organization within our parish community.

ACCEPTANCE

Vincentian work can be viewed as a celebration of the diversity and solidarity of the human family. God's love accepts us without reserve. Many people come to us feeling unloved and rejected. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conferences or special works offer acceptance.

What is acceptance? Acceptance means you are valuable just as you are. Acceptance personifies love. The basic charism of the Society

remains acceptance—respect for the dignity of the human person, meeting their hunger for friendship, and caring enough to provide help (often in the form of information) which the person needs—all in a person-to-person encounter.

SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE

One of the essentials of any faith-based ministry is making people with faith-based values accessible to others within your Conference, church or community. What greater gift could we bring to those who are suffering than help in recovering their faith?

Ideally, there is someone at your parish church (priest, deacon, or pastoral associate) who would be willing to provide this assistance. In such cases, your home visit teams simply serve as the conduit for communicating the need from the guest to the clergy or pastoral associate. But, there are Vincentians who live exemplary Christian lives and who are looked to as people worth emulating. They are usually willing to assist someone your Conference serves and who is referred to them by a home visit team. The team should determine and then ask the person if they are also willing to make an effort to discuss immediate and past problems or concerns with someone who is knowledgeable and who may be able to help them regain their faith.

YOU ARE THE CHURCH

Remember that you will visit hundreds of people who would never call a Catholic priest or even step foot in a Catholic Church. Yet they invite you into their homes. A basic rule of communication is: PERCEPTION IS REALITY. And you are perceived to be the Catholic Church. How you act and talk and pray is how they will believe our Church acts and talks and prays.

Many Catholics have fallen away from their faith because of past clashes with a particular priest or other church official. Just as one person can drive someone away, one person can help bring them back. The Church has an active “*Come Home*” campaign, and every parish has someone who is comfortable talking with a fallen-away Catholic who wants to come back but doesn’t know how to begin the reconciliation.

One common objective in visiting the poor is to help get the person back in touch with God. Usually that means encouraging them to go to Church. This is done for more than spiritual reasons. One’s family and Church have always been the two fundamental support structures in peoples’ lives. Family and Church provide a source of help, advice, assistance, encouragement, vision and hope for the future. Church can be an essential anchor in an otherwise turbulent world.

CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Rule, Part I: 6.3 states:

“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.”

UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

The Society of St Vincent De Paul was founded on the concept of helping people who are in need. Our assistance is given no matter someone's color, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, race or legal status. We offer assistance to everyone, just as Christ offered love to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike.

Serving immigrants from other countries is not easy and requires a major effort by all Conference members. But the language of love and the culture of caring for others is universal and can be understood by all people:

- Remember that, to the people we are serving, we may be the first friendly contact that they have with our culture in this country.
- Relieve their anxiety by extending a hand of friendship and love, and a willingness to assist them with their needs.
- Carry information written in their language that may be available from other organizations.
- Help them to maintain ties to some of their old traditions (Churches, ethnic and cultural organizations, etc.).

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

DISCUSSION:

In what ways does our Conference participate in the life of the Church?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

SESSION 6.6: OUR CHURCH

Part II

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

Jesus addressed the disciples, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world." (Matt. 28: 16-20)

PRESERVING THE CATHOLIC CREDO

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

Rule, Part I: 6.5 states:

"The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The President, Vice-President and Spiritual Advisor 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." (In the United States, all officers of the Society must be Catholic.)

Frederic Ozanam was rooted in the faith of the Roman Catholic Church. Reassured in faith, after a time of doubt, Frederic promised God that he would devote his life to the service of truth. The Society, therefore, was founded in the faith and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

Vincentians uphold the doctrine and social teachings of the Church and maintain the highest level of cooperation with and respect for the Pastor, the parish staff and other ministries. The relationship we have with our Pastor is critical for the success of the Conference and its Mission. The Pastor is not obligated to support the Conference financially. We earn his support as we help him minister to the needs of those within his parish boundaries. An active, positive working relationship is to be sought, one that is mutually-beneficial. It is **our** responsibility to make this work.

STRATEGIES

- **Understand the Pastor's role and responsibilities.**

The Pastor is responsible for both the spiritual and material welfare of all the people living within his parish boundaries. This is an enormous responsibility, and he is therefore, dependent on a wide variety of people and organizations to fulfill this responsibility.

- **Understand our role in the Ecclesiastical Plan.**

- The SVdP Conference is an independent, voluntary apostolate organized by lay people who want to serve God by serving His poor, but the Society can not start a Conference without the Pastor's permission.
- When a Conference is created, it is asking that it be given the primary responsibility for taking care of those who are in need locally. For over 175 years, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has helped the most vulnerable in an efficacious way; therefore Pastors usually are glad to accept our offer.
- It is an act of great faith when a Pastor gives a part of his ecclesiastical responsibilities to a group of lay people who organize themselves and elect their own officers. The Conference must maintain their Pastor's confidence.

- **Be realistic about the level of understanding everyone has.**

We have an obligation to our Pastors and their staffs to help them understand the Society and how it works in the parish environment to serve the parish and the poor, so that knowledge replaces misunderstanding. Relationships work both ways.

- **Understand how our actions today can have long-term consequences**

Nothing is more destructive of the relationship between Pastor and Conference than the failure of a Conference to do its job. This forces the Pastor to reassume responsibility for the poor. It increases his workload, his financial burden and his stress level. He loses confidence in more than the Conference; he loses confidence in the Society.

Notes

Session 6.6

A Pastor who has been misled or left out of the loop will often be cynical about the Society and even unsupportive of the Conference. We must show ourselves both capable at the moment, and also committed over the long haul to being there.

- **Understand the potential conflict inherent in our situation**

The Society, as a Catholic association, is a lay movement, founded by lay people, led and managed by lay people. It is an ecclesial spiritual fraternity, established by the Church and officially recognized as an instrument of the lay apostolate, through the witness of charity.

The Conference needs the parish for its meeting rooms, office and pantry space, as its primary source of new members and for much, if not all, of its income. The Church, of course, is the principal source of its sacramental spirituality and sense of faith community.

It is sometimes difficult to understand the “*dynamic tension*” that flows from this duality. We have the formality of our independence from direct ecclesiastical jurisdiction coexisting with the reality of our near-total dependence on our Pastor and parish community. The Conference should work to become an intrinsic part of the parish community.

Rule, Part I: 5.3 states:

“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.”

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

DISCUSSION:

What strategy is the greatest challenge for our Conference?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

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

ENRICHMENT READING

THE LAY CHARACTER OF THE SOCIETY

by Amin A. de Tarrazi, former President-General
of the International Council of the Society.

The Council General is often questioned about the lay character of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a matter which had been debated in their own time by Frederic Ozanam and his companions. Considering this aspect constituted one of the original fundamental features of their newly created institution, our pioneers stood firmly for the recognition of this particular status within the Church.

This reflection may help to better understand the genuine significance of our organization. Living testimony of the Church's charity, it is in its (the Church's) very heart that the Society draws its inspiration, its justification and its aim. Founded in Paris, in 1833, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society is not a clerical organization subject to any religious hierarchy. Instead, it is an ecclesial spiritual fraternity, encouraged by the Church and officially recognized as an instrument of the lay apostolate, through the witness of charity.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, as a Catholic association, is a lay movement, founded by lay people, led and managed by lay people. Since its origin, it has been recognized as such by Papal authority. Successive Popes have issued Briefs confirming these original and specific characteristics. During a general audience held in the Vatican on Feb. 7, 1968, Paul VI made such a declaration, which was significant in the particular character which it attributed to the Society. He placed it somewhere between an "individual apostolate" and an "organized apostolate", calling the Society an: "*apostolate through friendship*."

Vatican II resolutely laid claim to this approach about laity, clearly expressed through various Council and post-Council texts. At the international level, through the intermediary of its Council General, the St. Vincent de Paul Society has continually maintained close, faithful, confident, respectful and regular relations with the Vatican: Secretariat of State, Pontifical Councils (notably with "*Cor Unum*," "*Justitia et Pax*," "*Pro Laicis*").

The same applies, in various countries, at national and diocesan levels. Reciprocal ties of friendship and esteem unite our leaders with Bishops' conferences, of which their Pastoral recommendations receive our full support. In the *Code of Canon Law*, there is no arrangement, relative to the "Private Associations of the Faithful" (Book H, Section V, Chapters 1-4), for their leaders to be appointed by Bishops' Conferences. In Council texts concerning the laity, it is the spirit, rather than the letter, which recognizes lay responsibilities and initiatives in a truly "adult" Church.

Work, undertaken by the Synod of Bishops in 1987, on the "*Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World, Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council*," con-

firmed this tendency. Pope John Paul II's post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*," strongly emphasizes the present-day role of lay Christians.

Fr. Jean Passicos, President of the International Society of Canon Law & Comparative Religious Legislation, and Dean of Canon Law at the Catholic Institute in Paris stated that leaders of "*Private Associations of the Faithful*," such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, are chosen in accordance with the statutory arrangements which have been freely agreed within each association.

But, over and above compulsory arrangements of a legal nature, the essential factors remain the kinds of motivation which inspire us. Indeed, after more than 175 years of existence, our Society is most intimately attached to the Church, not so much by conventions, protocols or regulations, as by love, fidelity and affection.

We live, thanks be to God, in a Church which has been renewed, rejuvenated and freed from conventionalism and which is open to dialogue. At the heart of the Church, the hierarchy, inspired by the Council, wishes to promote a laity full of life, active and dynamic, with a sense of responsibility and fully aware of its ecclesial mission. The strongest bond uniting clerics and lay people, within the fraternal ecclesial community, is far more Charity and mutual confidence, than Law and legal arrangements.

THE CODE OF CANON LAW

Canon 216 — All the Christian faithful, since they participate in the mission of the Church, have the right to promote or to sustain apostolic action by their own undertakings in accord with each one's state and condition; however, no undertaking shall assume the name Catholic unless the consent of competent ecclesiastical authority is given.

Apostolic activity is discussed in detail in *Apostolicam actuositatem*. Three major forms of the apostolate are indicated therein. The first is that individual apostolic activity is an obligation to which each Christian is called. Working together in communities, whether parochial or otherwise, is a second form of apostolic activity. A third type is an association in which apostolic activity is directly and purposefully carried out.

These initiatives are not dependent on the approval or authorization of the hierarchy, whether it be local clergy or the bishop. It is a right that arises from Christ's action in baptism and frequently is reinforced by the reception of charisms which themselves give rise to rights and duties in the Church and in the world. (AA-3)

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE CONFERENCES

Effective Conferences are *reachable*. Parish-based Conferences must provide a clear means for being contacted. Some use the parish office address and phone number and check in regularly to retrieve messages and correspondence.

Effective Conferences *meet regularly*. The Rule requires weekly or biweekly meetings. At these meetings, all members offer their thoughts and support for providing Christian care to the needy.

Effective Conferences are committed to *grow in spirituality*. Members become friends, care for one another and earnestly follow the Society's religious practices. Like Christ, they identify with the poor, whom they visit attentively. Conferences must have an active Spiritual Advisor.

Effective Conferences show *initiative*. Routine, tradition, and habit do not dictate current thought and action. Can the Conference do more? Alert officers and members continually and deliberately ask, answer, and act on such questions.

Effective Conferences have members committed to *formation*. They read, study, attend lectures and courses, and participate in training sessions organized by their District Council in order to learn more about helping people and solving problems.

Effective Conferences *recruit continuously*. One reason Conferences give for not tackling new problems is lack of personnel. But dramatic vistas are unveiled when members invite new Vincentians to join in the service of the poor.

Effective Conferences have *servant leaders*. The officers of the Conference handle their specific duties with whatever competence they have naturally or can cultivate. They work hard, but share with members the responsibility for decision-making and action.

Effective Conferences maintain *ties to the community*. Helping people today often requires knowledge of and referrals to other public and private agencies. The Conference deliberately makes itself known to these groups and cultivates relationships of mutual respect to facilitate referrals to and from such agencies.

Effective Conferences *participate in their Council activities*. The President or his/her proxy represents the Conference at District Council meetings. Conference members take part in general meetings and religious observances, and provide support and personnel for the special works of the District Council.

Effective Conferences *understand the national and international dimensions of the Society*. Members show practical concern for the work of the Society in less developed or disaster-stricken areas by generously sharing their resources. If possible, they "twin" with needy Conferences domestically or internationally. They fill out the Annual Report accurately and send it in on time.

Effective Conferences are *both wealthy and poor*. Their members generously support the work of the Conference and elicit similar generosity from friends of the Society. But the Conferences always seem poor, because they share, thoughtfully and intelligently, whatever they have. They do not save for a rainy day, knowing that many are in need here and now.



Serving in Hope

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