



St Vincent de Paul Society

CANBERRA/GOULBURN

good works

MODULE

1

The Vincentian Call

Called to Love and Serve

A Formation Programme for Vincentians

A FORMATION PROGRAMME FOR VINCENTIANS

BACKGROUND and INSTRUCTIONS for *Called to Love and Serve*

The Modules in *Called to Love and Serve* have been developed from “Serving in Hope” the spiritual formation programme developed by Sr Keiran Kneaves and the St Vincent de Paul Society in the USA. The *Called to Love and Serve* programme is being developed so as to fit our Australian culture and experiences. It is designed for use by conference members, staff and volunteers to deepen our experience and understanding of our Vincentian heritage. The programme consists of six modules:

Module 1: Our Vincentian Call

Module 2: Our Vincentian Spirituality

Module 3: Our Vincentian Heritage

Module 4: Our Vincentian Mission

Module 5: Our Vincentian Rule

Module 6: Our Vincentian Conference

When we are reading the writings of St Vincent, Blessed Frederic and other Vincentians we need to remember that they were people of their time. As we read their writings we need to make a “horizon shift” which enables us to translate what we read into our times and to let go of the things which are time bound. This is a similar process to that used when we read scripture.

The programme has readings to share at meetings and questions for reflection. It would be good to set up a prayerful environment, perhaps with a candle, in order to facilitate reflection. You may also like to start each session with the song Will You Come and Follow Me, which is provided. The readings are meant to be shared reflectively and it could be helpful to share the reading among the Conference members a paragraph at a time. A good process to use in meetings is to listen to the reading and then share a word or phrase which struck you. After each person has shared then discuss the questions. Conference members may also find it helpful to reflect on the session before the meeting so that they are more ready to contribute in the meeting.

The further reading is there for your personal reflection and provides an opportunity to explore the topics more deeply.

We hope you find this programme both informative and enjoyable.

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WILL YOU COME AND FOLLOW ME – The Summons

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known?
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoner free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name?
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show
Thus I'll live and move and grow in you and you in me.



John L Bell and Graham Maule God Never Sleeps CD
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THE VINCENTIAN CALL



We are familiar with many stories in scripture of people who received a call from God. Moses heard God from the burning bush, Samuel heard God calling him and responded with “Speak Lord, your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:10). There are several stories of Jesus calling his disciples, such as the following:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake – for they were fishermen. 19And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.

Matt 4:18-21

Although we may not have recognised it at the time, becoming a Vincentian was a call too. As Vincentians we are called to put our faith into action and serve people who are living in poverty.

The Vincentian vocation is based on seeing Christ in the person in need. St Vincent told us to turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people.

This means that when we meet a person living in poverty we are meeting Christ. It also means seeing Christ in each other. Blessed Frederic Ozanam had a vision that a Conference would be an intimate and cheerful circle, radiating healthy youthfulness, where those who had left home would find new life and the means by which they could both help one another and exercise a form of charity within their Conference.

Our Conference should be a community of faith, a group of Vincentians inspired by the same vocation. Our mission is to live out the gospel message and to create a community with our brothers and sisters in the Conference.

What is the story of your call to become a Vincentian?

How has your understanding of this call changed over the time that you have been involved?

What does Blessed Frederic’s vision of a Conference mean to you?

FURTHER READING

Frederic Ozanam's Vocation Story

Frederic was born in Milan, Italy, which was at the time under French rule, on the 23rd of April 1813. He was one of 14 children, 11 of whom died in infancy and youth. Frederic's parents taught him the Catholic faith and modelled for him care of people who were poor and in need.

At the age of 16, Frederic started studying philosophy and this caused him to have doubts about his faith. This crisis of faith lasted for about a year. He was eventually able to overcome these doubts with the help of Fr. Joseph Noiroi, his friend and mentor.

In 1831, Frederic, who was then 18, went to Paris to study law at University. Frederic met many of the prominent figures of nineteenth century Catholicism such as Ampere, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Lacordaire and Montalembert. He also encountered many who were anti-Catholic. These revolutionaries told him that Catholicism was useless and irrelevant. Frederic gathered around him likeminded people who wanted to challenge these revolutionaries and the Conference of History was born.

At a particular meeting of the Conference in 1833, Frederic and his companions were challenged by Jean Broet, a proponent of Saint-Simonism, to put their faith into action. Frederic knew in his heart that his challenger was right and that they needed to do more than talk about their faith. Frederic said "Yes, one thing is wanting that our apostolate may be blessed by God – works of charity. The blessing of the poor is the blessing of God."

On the evening of the 23rd of April, Frederic's 20th birthday, six students, Augustine Le Taillandier, Francois Lallier, Felix Clave, Jules Devaux, Paul Lamanche, Frederic Ozanam, and their mentor, Emmanuel Bailly, met in the offices of the Catholic Tribune. They called this group the Conference of Charity and from here the St Vincent de Paul Society was born.

Emmanuel Bailly sent the young students to Sr Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, who was working with people living in poverty in the Mouffetard region of Paris. Sr Rosalie

"Apostle of the Mouffetard district," who would accompany them on their first steps in visiting those who were poor in their homes, which they had chosen as the goal of the Conference of Charity.

Rosalie taught them how to care for each poor person they would encounter with love and respect. She also encouraged them to reflect on their experiences with the people they served and how they could see God in these experiences. She said to them,

Because you see Christ in His poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility, as His servant. Always remember, messieurs, that if we had lived through the hardships they have had to meet – if our childhood had been one of constant want – perhaps we, too, would have given way to envy and hatred as, I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter. Be kind, messieurs, and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else that you can give them.



Frederic chose St Vincent de Paul as the patron of the Society saying,

Let's remember, then, that we're choosing a patron for his example and not simply to use some name in a haphazard way. We should regard him as the kind of saint we can try to follow, to imitate.

In what ways do you see yourself imitating, following our Patron St Vincent?

Frederic was named a professor at the Sorbonne when he was only 27 years old. He was the youngest to be named to this post. He continued to face the anti-religious atmosphere of the university and of society at the time.

After many years discerning his vocation, and having considered the priesthood, Frederic realised that marriage was his vocation. On the 23rd of June, 1841, at the age of 28 he married Amelie Soulacroix, who was 20. On the 7th of July 1845, they had a daughter named Marie. Frederic had a deep conviction that marriage was indeed a sacrament and a vocation. The sacrament of marriage was a help for Frederic and Amelie on the road to holiness, as it is for many Vincentians. Frederic suffered with poor health much of his life, and his suffering helped him to have greater compassion for others. Amelie's love and strength supported Frederic during his years of ill-health.

The Rule of the Society evolved out the lives and faith of Frederic and his companions. Authentic Vincentian service assists the impoverished and the troubled but it is done in love and with love. As did Vincent, Frederic knew that this is what our Lord asks of his followers, namely, that they seek and find Jesus in people living in poverty. The Vincentian way is to put our faith into action; it is reaching out in friendship and with helping hands to people living in poverty or who are suffering. This is done by a personal gift of the heart, with love and respect.

Frederic knew that service must promote human dignity and integrity, and that "No work of Charity is foreign to the Society."

The Society has to be concerned not only with relieving the need but also with redressing the situations that cause it, and so he advocated the concepts of Christian social justice, the rights and dignity of every individual and the need for equality of opportunity in education and employment.

Frederic taught that Vincentians must seek through prayer, meditation on the scripture and in their relationship with those in need, to always bear witness to the love of God. Frederic also knew, as Vincent did, that we need a Christian community where members encourage one another in loving God and neighbour.

How important is prayer in your life as a Vincentian?

VOCATION OF THE LAITY



“This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” Jesus said to them, “They need not go away: you give them something to eat.’ They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven and blest and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled.

Matt 14:14-20

But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world; that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others.

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

Lay people participate in the saving mission of the Church.

The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Lay people participate in the mission of the Church in the world, in their families, communities and workplaces. “Through charity towards one’s neighbour, the lay faithful exercise and manifest their participation in the kingship of Christ, that is, in the power of the Son of man who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45).

The Rule tells us that “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.”

What part has being a Vincentian played in your path to wholeness?

FURTHER READING

Divine Providence and the Vincentian Vocation

St Vincent de Paul

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



Insight by Sieger Kóder

Blessed Frederic Ozanam

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

Gerald Ward

In 1854 Gerald Ward started the first Conference in Australia, in Melbourne.

Charles Gordon O’Neil

In 1881 Charles Gordon O’Neil assisted with the establishment of the first Conferences in Sydney. In our area, Braidwood was the first Conference, beginning in 1885.

Today

Divine Providence continues to call ordinary men and women to extraordinary mission as the St Vincent de Paul Society continues to offer love, respect, justice hope and joy to people living in poverty and disadvantage in our world. Our Vocation as Vincentians plants us firmly in the Church, as we answer the call of the Second Vatican Council:

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

Our Vincentian Vocation

Fr Maloney in **Turn Everything to Love a Rule of Life for Lay Members of the Vincentian Family** tells us that a rule aims to create a space in our hearts. He reminds us that there are three important spaces:

1. **Given to God** in Baptism which is a space that is a space to be loved by God.
2. In the **Service of Others**, especially people living in poverty.
3. **Community**, a place where we listen to others and gain support in fellowship and prayer.

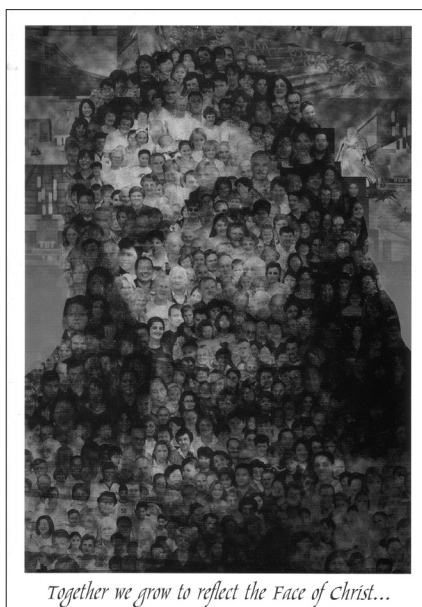
How do these three spaces come together in your life?

Margaret Silf writes:

Our Gospel journey is likewise going to make demands on us. Demands of truth and integrity, and of courage to face our own darkness. It too requires a basic level of 'fitness', but this kind of fitness isn't something that we can train ourselves into or do anything to achieve, and in ourselves we would never be fit enough to begin. It is simply the acceptance that there is a fragment of God embedded in our hearts. We might call it our personal "cell", the core of our being, or our deepest self. All that is being asked of us is that we trust that God himself is becoming incarnate in our personal life story and that he is continually loving us into life, whether we think that we deserve it or not, it is the simplest thing to ask. To embrace the truth of it is perhaps the hardest things we will ever do.

How does God love you into life?

How does this influence the way that you live your life?



THE VOCATION OF ST VINCENT AND BLESSED FREDERIC

St Vincent de Paul



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

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

Vincent went through a dark night of the soul that lasted for three to four years. Once he began visiting the Charity Hospital founded by Queen Marie de Medici, the dark night lifted. Vincent was 36 years old, and seventeen years a priest before he found his true vocation. Once he found his true mission to the poor he was faithful to it until his death.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam



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

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

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

Frederic had the grace of serving the poor while maintaining a commitment to marriage and family.

What is your vocation story? Is there any similarity to the stories of Blessed Frederic or St Vincent? What are the differences? Can you recall any other Vincentian stories?

FURTHER READING

St Vincent de Paul's Vocation Story

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

Priesthood

His parents even sold a pair of oxen in order to be able to finance his education, which was a considerable sacrifice for a poor farming family. So Vincent went off to school and was ordained at the age of 19. Vincent was a very ambitious young priest, he was determined to be successful and to get an office in the Church from which he could get enough money to take care of himself and to return to help his mother and family.

Paris

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

Vincent was now about 33 years old and moving along quite well in his career. But, just as Vincent thought he was secure in his position and influence at the court, someone accused him of theft. Vincent was innocent as was later proved, but the accusation was devastating because judgements were formed immediately. Vincent began to see his world collapse and all that he had built up: his reputation, his influence, his power, everything he had built his hopes on – that he had thought so important – seemed to crumble. The astounding thing is that Vincent remained silent and did not try to defend himself.

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

Conversion

In 1617, at the request of Madame de Gondi, Vincent went to Folleville to minister to the peasants that worked on the de Gondi estates. It was here that Vincent heard the confession of a dying man. He became struck with the reality that had he, Vincent, not been sent to

Folleville, the dying man would have died in despair not knowing there was a God who loved him and forgave him. In fact, he would have died without knowing the mercy of God.

Vincent pondered all of this, saw that, in order to find God, the poor needed good priests. Slowly, Vincent was being led to the poor, and believing that it was God leading him he surrendered. In the surrender to be God's servant of the poor, all of his doubts vanished.

Vincent then went to a town named Chatillon-les-Dombes, and he tells us the story

...When I was living near Lyons, in a small town to which Providence had called me to act as parish priest, on a certain Sunday, just as I was vesting to say Mass, a person came to tell me that, in an isolated house a quarter of a league away, the whole family lay ill, so that not a single one of them could come to the assistance of the others, and they were in such dire straits as cannot be expressed. It moved me to the depths of my heart. I did not fail to speak feelingly about them during the sermon, and God, touching the hearts of those who were listening, caused them all to be moved to compassion for the poor afflicted people.

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

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

Apostle of Charity

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

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

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

What have been our conversion times?

What was the experience like?

Fr Robert Maloney tells us that

A spirituality is a governing vision, a driving force. It is on the one hand, the specific way in which a person is rooted in God. It is, on the other hand, the specific way in which he or she relates to the created world.

St Vincent had a particular vision of Jesus Christ as evangelizer of the poor, which can be summed up in the lines from Luke's gospel

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Lk 4:18-19)

This vision of Jesus is one who announces good news to all but particularly to people who are poor, lowly or outcast.

It is an essential element of the Society that a Conference is a community of faith in which members help each other on the journey of faith. Conference members pray together for each other and for the people in need that they encounter.

COMMITMENT THROUGH ACTION

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 conference members' journey to holiness is 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.

The Society encourages person to person service by members. The Conference is the core of the Society in which members themselves serve people who suffer. This service includes many different forms of assistance including material assistance, listening and showing compassion, and providing emotional support.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters,* if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

James 2: 14-18

This extract from Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* reminds us that love of God and love of neighbour are intimately connected and that we cannot have one without the other.

Love of Neighbour is shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern. This I can offer them not only through the organizations intended for such purposes, accepting it perhaps as a political necessity. Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love that they crave. Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbour which the First Letter of John speaks of with such insistence. If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing him in the image of God... Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. ...Love grows through love. Love is "divine" because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is "all in all."

UNITY

The Rule tells us that

3.3 Meetings of the Vincentian members

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

3.4 Fraternity and simplicity

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

In Session One we referred to this description of a Conference:

an intimate and cheerful circle, radiating healthy youthfulness, where those who had left home would find new life and the means by which they could both help one another and exercise a form of charity within their Conference.

This reminds us that our Conference should be a community in which we support each other in our Vincentian vocation and in our service of people in need.

The following quote is from a conference given to Daughters of Charity about Cordial Respect:

I thought, Monsieur, that if we practice cordial respect toward one another, God, who is charity, will be happy because of it and our neighbour will be edified by union among ourselves. The means of leading us to this cordial respect when there are two of us together is great support for one another and a unity that makes it obvious that we have only one will and the same sentiments and that neither of the two thinks herself superior to the other.

This reminds us that we need to be united with one another and that this unity is based on our respect for each other in our differences as well as what we hold in common.

UNIVERSALITY

1.3 Any form of personal help...

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

1.4 ... to anyone in need

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

This section of The Rule reminds us that our service as Vincentians covers every form of need and to any person in need.

MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

5.1 A close relationship

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

The above quote from The Rule reminds us that the Society is part of the Church.

Fr Maloney reminds us in Turn Everything to Love that we need

to create a third sacred space, a place in your life for listening to others, for gathering with them around the Eucharistic table, for supporting them in daily prayer, and for walking with them through life. It calls you within the context of the worldwide church, to create a “domestic church,” a household of faith where family members love one another deeply, where they talk, pray, and plan together, and where they channel their common energies in creative, practical service to others.

How are these essential elements integrated into the life of your Conference?

What commitment can you make in order to improve the life of your Conference?

CORE VALUES OF THE SOCIETY

(You may find it helpful to split this session into two parts)

The Mission Statement of the Society outlines our core values



LOVE – Treating every person we meet with compassion and empathy.

We are all familiar with the actions of Jesus on the night before he died when he wrapped a towel around his waist and washed the feet of his disciples. We re-enact this action every Holy Thursday and as such it may have lost some of its impact. However, if we put ourselves in the place of the disciples on that night then perhaps we can recall the impact of a leader stooping down to wash his disciples’ feet. Jesus action was a parable in action which showed his disciples and us how to serve others.

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants* are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, “The one who ate my bread* has lifted his heel against me.” I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.’

Jn 13:12-20

Frederic told us that it was only by really knowing the situation of the poor that we could hope to be able to help.

The knowledge of social well-being and of reform is to be learnt, not from books, nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs to the poor man's garret, sitting by his bed-side, feeling the same cold that pierces him, sharing the secret of his lonely heart and troubled mind. When the conditions of the poor have been examined ... it is then and then only, that we know the elements of that formidable problem, that we begin to grasp it and may hope to solve it.

St Vincent told the Daughters of Charity

Remember that when you leave meditation and Holy Mass to serve poor persons, you lose nothing, Sisters, because to serve those who are poor is to go to God, and you should see God in them. So then; be very careful to attend to all their needs, and be particularly alert to the assistance you can give them.

God loves the poor; consequently, He loves those who love the poor, for, when we truly love someone, we have an affection for his friends and his servants.

Jesus calls us to “wash the feet of others”, to be their servants and to put their needs ahead of our own.

How do you wash the feet of others?

RESPECT – Recognising our own value and the value of all people.

The Greek word agape is often used in the Gospels and we see it translated as love, but, Thomas Moore translates it as “respecting those not in our circle”. As a Vincentian we are called to show this respect to those we serve.

Ozanam tells us “Yours must be a work of love, of kindness, you must give your time, your talents, yourselves. The poor person is a unique person of God's fashioning with an inalienable right to respect.”

St Vincent told the Daughters of Charity ‘Among all the other virtues, respect and gentleness were recommended to us by Our Lord when He tells us, “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.”’

How do you show respect to the people you serve?

JUSTICE – Acting justly in all our dealings and speaking out about situations of injustice.

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yok?

Is 58:6

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

Luke 4:16-21

In a sense this passage from Luke tells us what Jesus’ mission statement was. It tells us that Jesus had come on earth to “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” to all people but especially to those who were poor or suffering.

How do you proclaim the “good news” to all those you serve as a Vincentian?

HOPE – We believe that things can change, that we can make a difference in our world.

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Rom 8:24-25

St Vincent told the Daughters of Charity in a conference that

They will have great confidence in Divine Providence, abandoning themselves completely to it as an infant does to its wet nurse. They will be convinced that, provided they strive on their part to be faithful to their vocation and the observance of their Rules, God will always keep them under His protection and assist them with everything they need both for body and soul, at the very time they think that all is going to be lost.

So, Sisters, this is about trust in the Providence of God. To explain this to you, let me tell you, dear Sisters, that there are two kinds of it: confidence and hope. Hope, Sisters, engenders confidence; it's a theological virtue by which we trust that God will give us the graces necessary to attain eternal life. And this virtue of hope, you see, must be faith-filled; we have to believe unhesitatingly that God will grant us the grace to reach heaven, provided we use the means He gives us. We're obliged to believe this and that God wants to give us all the graces necessary for our salvation. So much so that a person who doesn't believe this – that God wills to save us by the ways His Providence knows are appropriate for us – offends God. Not to have a firm enough hope and to think that God takes no thought of our salvation is a lack of trust that's displeasing to Him. Hope, then, is to trust that God, in His goodness, will fulfil the promises He has made us.

Vincent reminds us that hope is a virtue that we receive from God. Hope allows us to trust in God and then to do the best we can in our service of people in need.

Louise was a woman who seemed to have many forces against her. She experienced much loss and suffering in her life, and yet through her trust in God and her use of her talents in co-operation with God's grace, she was able to achieve wonderful things. Louise's life was a testament to the words "God working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20). Louise is a sign of hope to all who face suffering and difficulties in their lives.

How do you express hope in your life?

JOY – is not simply happiness; it is having a positive attitude.

It is the satisfaction that comes from serving others.

With all my heart I wish you the joy and interior consolation of a soul that is lovingly submissive to the most holy will of God, as I believe you are in the depth of your being. I admire the guidance of Divine Providence in your life, my dear Sister, and because of it, I believe that God, in His divine love, desires you to love Him uniquely, entirely and unselfishly and to have no other concern or even satisfaction except those which pertain to Him and to your neighbour.

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

Jn 15:11

St Vincent told his confreres:

Another effect of charity is to rejoice with those who rejoice. It causes us to enter into their joy. Our Lord intended by his teachings to unite us in one mind and in joy as well as in sorrow. Saint John's Gospel relates that the blessed Precursor said, speaking of himself and of Jesus Christ, that the Bridegroom's friend is very happy to hear his voice. "My joy," he said, "is complete; he must increase and I must decrease." (Jn 3:29-30) In the same way let us rejoice when we hear the voice of our neighbour who rejoices, for he represents Our Lord to us; let's rejoice at his successes, happy that he surpasses us in the honour and esteem of this world, in talent, in grace, in virtue. That's how we should share his feelings of joy.

These words remind us that joy is a gift that we receive from God. We find this joy through prayer and being united with God. We are then called upon to share this joy with others.

How do you share your joy with the people that you serve?



THE MISSION OF THE SOCIETY



We must do what is agreeable to God. Therefore, we must do what our Lord Jesus Christ did when preaching the Gospel. Let us go to the poor!

Frederic Ozanam (23rd April, 1833)

OUR MISSION

The Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

OUR VISION

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering “a hand up” to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

Catholic and lay: The Society is a Catholic lay organization based on Catholic beliefs and principles. Vincentians are called to live out their lay vocation in the Society.

Gospel message: The Gospel message is summed up as

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’

Matt 22:37-39

A more just and compassionate society: Members of the Society aim to show the compassion of God to people in need and in doing so contribute to a more compassionate Australia. Members of the Society also speak out on issues of justice and work to influence policy-makers and governments to act more justly and compassionately.

Offering a hand up: The Society aims to help people not by just giving them hand outs but by working with them to help them to help themselves and improve their situation.

Do you reflect on the Mission Statement?

As you read it today, what challenges does it provide for you?

FURTHER READING

FIVE FACES OF FREDERIC OZANAM

Robert Maloney CM

The saints know how to love. They love profoundly and, in the Vincentian tradition, they love practically. St Vincent taught the lesson very clearly. He said to all his followers; “Let us love God, let us love God. But let it be in the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms”. Filled with this same spirit, Frederic Ozanam yearned to “embrace the whole world in a Network of Charity.”

Ozanam’s life was brief, rich, and varied. In this chapter, let me examine with you five faces of this extraordinary man.



FOUNDER

Frederic Ozanam learnt the art of practical love very well. He learnt it very young too. Ozanam was born in Milan in 1813. When he was 20 years old he joined with Emmanuel Bailly and five other young men who wanted to love God in the school of St Vincent de Paul. They found a Daughter of Charity, Rosalie Rendu, who taught them how to love and serve the poor in practice. Do you think that this group of seven men had any idea that one day the Society that they were founding would have more than 560,000 members and that it would exist in more than 140 countries? I am sure that they did not have the slightest inkling that they were fulfilling the gospel parable that the tiniest of seeds, the mustard seed, when planted into the ground would grow into an enormous tree.

The Rule of the Society that Ozanam and his friends founded was very simple. It emphasized love of God and love of neighbour. It stated the aims of the Conferences in these terms:

Firstly to maintain its members, by mutual example and advice, in the practice of a Christian life: secondly, to visit the poor in their dwellings, to bring them succour in kind, to afford them, also, religious consolation.

It is interesting to note that Ozanam was also the founder of a newspaper, called *The New Era*, which started in 1848. It was meant to speak the truth impartially, without adherence to any particular political party, and to promote social justice for the poor and the working class. Unlike the Conferences, however, the newspaper was short-lived, lasting only about a year.

What does this first face of Frederic Ozanam say to us? It says: Do not be afraid of new beginnings. Be creative. Be inventive. Organize new works of love in the service of the poor. Encourage young people. Urge them: You, young people who have energy, who have enthusiasm, who want to do something of value for the future: launch out, do not wait. As St Vincent said: “Love is creative even to infinity”.

HUSBAND AND FATHER

Ozanam was madly in love with his wife, Amelie, whom he married in June, 1841. He was 28 years old and she 21. Their only child, Marie, was born four years later in 1845.

Frederic has much to say to those who are married. Marriage is the vocation to which the Lord calls the vast majority of the members of the Church. The New Testament asks husbands and wives to love one another the way Christ loved the Church. It tells them to seek holiness as a couple, to encourage one another, to strengthen one another, to support one another in growing in faith and love. Frederic Ozanam is a wonderful model of married love. I encourage the reader someday to examine Ozanam's love letters to his wife Amelie. They are filled with tenderness and practical concern. You will also see in them the couple's deep affection for their child Marie. Let me cite just two little samples:

Come, then, my well-beloved, my dove, my angel, come into my arms, against my heart, come bringing me yours so pure and generous: come and God bless you that after two years we love each other a thousand times more than on the first day!

On July 20, 1842, he wrote to Amelie:

How painful it was for me to be separated from you, Amelie. With what deep bonds God unites our hearts! When I saw the carriage that bore you away disappear, I ran to St Germain l'Auxerrois, to pour out my feelings. I remained for 20 minutes drowned in sorrow and I shed many tears...My sweet little companion, I never lose sight of you, I feel like a leaf on your bosom and on your lips. I feel the caresses of your fingers so often kissed!

He loved his daughter Marie deeply too. He travelled with her and Amelie to Rome in 1846 and met there the newly elected Pius IX. He died when Marie was only nine.

So when you think of Ozanam's holiness, it is important for us to think of him not just as the founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, but also as a married man who built a genuine community of faith and love with his wife and child. By his witness, he encourages all those who are married to do the same.

TEACHER

Ozanam was exceptionally bright. From his family background he was bilingual in French and Italian. At school he learnt Latin and Greek. He was later tutored in German and studied English and Hebrew on his own. He wrote a book at the age of 18, and by the time he was 20, five or six journals were seeking articles from him. But he was also an extraordinarily gifted teacher, deeply loved by his students. This very practical man was an intellectual too. He had two degrees, one in law and one in literature. He pursued law mainly to satisfy his father. His real passion was literature. His specialty was Dante.

But what most strikes me about his teaching is this: he must have known how to love very well as a professor. This is clear, because his students came to love him. Ozanam lectured in Paris from 1841 on. During the time of the turbulent revolution of 1848, he stayed in the capital in order to be with his students. They deeply appreciated that. And even as he approached death he went to the classroom faithfully because he wanted to share with his students the gifts that God had given him.

One of his former students who later became a professor of philosophy wrote this:

I never knew a master so beloved. Young men were inevitably attracted to him, and the sympathy was mutual and loyal. Once they

had come to know him, they never left him.

This third face of Ozanam says something very important. Are not all Christians called to teach in some way? Parents teach their children in the home. Professors teach their students in the classroom. Politicians teach social and moral values in the public arena. Priests and sisters teach in catechizing and preaching. St Vincent says that everyone who walks into the room of a sick or poor person is teaching about Christ, whether he does so with words or simply by the witness of his life. So, this third face says to us: teach with passion, as did Ozanam. He loved the Lord, he loved his students, he loved literature. He was able to communicate to his students both his passion for God and his passion for the beauty he found in Dante. Can we learn how to communicate to the young the deepest values that reside within our hearts? Frederic Ozanam urges us today: let your heart sing out as it teaches.

ADVOCATE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Ozanam was deeply involved in the turbulent socio-political struggles of his time. But it is also important to note that he was neither a sociologist nor an economist. His single venture into politics – he ran as a candidate for the National Assembly in 1848 – was a failure. His concern for the poor was not based on profound philosophical, sociological or economic analyses. Rather, it was deeply evangelical and in, the Vincentian spirit, deeply practical.

His views were progressive, but not revolutionary. He dreamed of a democratic Catholicism. He was what we might call today a “liberal Catholic.” Such views became more and more suspect during the long papacy of Pius IX. But Ozanam, though gradually disillusioned by Pius IX, and though an elegant writer on social questions, maintained a strong emphasis on practical charity throughout his life.

Many have pointed out that the insights of progressive thinkers like Ozanam were gradually eclipsed during the long pontificate of Pius IX. His social thought, like that of a number of his friends, foreshadowed *Rerum Novarum*, but that document only emerged into the light 40 years later.

With time, Ozanam grew wary of politics and ideology. He wrote:

The question which divides the people of today is no longer one about political structure, but a social question. It is to find out which will win, the spirit of egoism or the spirit of sacrifice. Is society to be just a huge exploitation for the profit of the strongest, or a dedication of each person to the benefit of all, and especially to the protection of the weak? There are many people who have too much, and who want still more. There are very many more who do not have sufficient, who have nothing and who want to take if people won't give. A struggle is starting between these two types of people. This struggle threatens to be a terrible one. On one side is the power of gold, on the other the power of despair. We must jump in between these opposing armies, if not to prevent at least to soften the encounter. And the fact that we are young middle-class people makes it easier for us to fulfill the role of mediator, to which our title of Christian obliges us. That is why our Society of St Vincent de Paul is useful.

But, engaged as he was in practical charity, Ozanam realized that this was not enough. He wrote on April 31, 1848: "Charity is not sufficient. It treats wounds, but it does not stop the blows that cause them ... There is an immense poor class which does not want alms, but institutions."

Similarly, he wrote on November 13, 1836: "Societal order rests on two virtues: justice and charity. But justice already presupposes much love, because one must deeply love the human person in order to respect his rights, which limit our rights and his liberty, which impinges on our liberty. Still, justice has his limits, while charity knows none."

Ozanam stood at the side of Paris' working poor in the Revolution of 1848. Unlike Fr Etienne, who saw revolution as a lack of "respect for authority, Ozanam accepted the New Republic "not as an evil of the times that we have to resign ourselves to, but as progress which we must defend".

MAN OF GOD

In beatifying Frederic Ozanam, the Church holds him up as a model for Christians. She says learn from this wonderful man. Learn to be creative in loving practically, right from your youth. To those who are married she says, learn from him the practical ways of loving and building a community of faith with your family. And to all of us who are teachers, Ozanam says: learn to communicate to others your deep passion for God and your deep passion for genuine human values.

In reflecting on Ozanam's spirituality, it is important to note first of all how lay it was. He became holy as a husband, father, teacher and writer.

Secondly, his spirituality is distinctively Vincentian. He contemplated Christ in the face of the poor person. He wrote to a friend:

We see the poor with eyes of the flesh. They are there, and we can put finger and hands in their wounds and the scars of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads. And at this point, incredulity no longer has place and we should fall at their feet and say with the apostle, Tu est Dominus et Deus meus. You are our masters and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love Him otherwise, shall we not love Him in you?

Thirdly, like so many other members of the Vincentian family, he had a deep love of providence. Shortly after Marie was born, the family went to the country for a holiday. Frederic wrote:

The quiet of the country affords me a leisure which I have not known for a long time ...the garden is large, the air is pure, the weather is lovely. My wife is picking up her strength rapidly, and my child is opening out like a little flower. It is one of those moments of bliss which are not often granted to us in life, and which make us feel more keenly the goodness of providence.

He suffered nobly for two years, trusting in God's presence. As death approached he wrote:

I come, if you call me, and I have no right to complain. You have given 40 years of life to a creature who entered this world sickly, fragile, destined to die ten times, if ten times he had not been rescued by the tenderness and intelligence of a father and mother ... Five years ago you brought me back from almost death and was not this delay granted me to do penance and become better?... When I consider the graces that have enriched (these years), I look back upon them, Lord, with gratitude to you. If you should chain me to this sickbed for the days that I have yet to live, they would be too short to thank you for the days that I have lived. Ah! If these pages be the last that I ever write, may they be a hymn to your goodness!

There is a wonderful simplicity about the central message of Jesus. He says: "Love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. And love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 22:37, 39 and Lk 10:27). Ozanam learned to make his love practical, effective, concrete. That is the great challenge for all members of the Vincentian Family.

His brief life came to an end on September 8, 1853, when he was just 40 years of age.

OTHER RESOURCES

St Vincent de Paul Correspondence, Conferences, Documents (CCD) Volumes 1 – 13 available at http://via.library.depaul.edu/coste_en/

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