



St Vincent de Paul Society

CANBERRA/GOULBURN

*good works*

MODULE

3

*Our Vincentian Heritage*

**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.

# CONTENTS

SESSION 1: Charity and Justice..... X

SESSION 2: Vincentian Social Justice ..... X

SESSION 3: Systemic Change ..... X

SESSION 4: Life and Dignity ..... X

SESSION 5: Family and Community ..... X

SESSION 6: Option for the Poor..... X

## 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  
*Used with permission Word of Life International Licence no.2262.*

## Charity and Justice



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 yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear-guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

*Isa 58:6-9*

The Mission Statement of the Society says that we work to “shape a more just and compassionate society”. Our Vision also says that we “offer ‘a hand up’ to people in need”. The mission of St Vincent and Blessed Frederic was based in the principles of charity and justice. St Vincent said “The obligations of justice have priority over those of charity.”<sup>1</sup>

Blessed Frederic said:

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. You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis. You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long term improvement.<sup>2</sup>

These quotes are indications that for both men, and those who worked with them, working for justice was an important part of the service that they offered to people living in poverty.

At the beatification of Frederic Ozanam Pope John Paul II said of Frederic that:

He observed the real situation of the poor and sought to be more and more effective in helping them in their human development. He understood that charity must lead to efforts to remedy injustice. Charity and justice go together. He had the clear-sighted courage to seek a front-line social and political commitment in a troubled time in the life of his country, for no society can accept indigence as if it were a simple fatality without damaging its honour. So it is that we can see in him a precursor of the social doctrine of the Church which Pope Leo XXIII would develop some years later in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents(CCD)* Volume 7, 633

<sup>2</sup> Frederic Ozanam

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/homilies/1997/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19970822\\_paris-ozanam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19970822_paris-ozanam_en.html)

So we see that the Pope reminds us that Blessed Frederic was someone who worked for justice as an important part of the charity that he offered to the poor. In 1836 he wrote:

The problem that divides men in our day is no longer a problem of political structure; it is a social problem; it has to do with what is preferred, the spirit of self-interest or the spirit of self-sacrifice, whether a society will only be a great exploitation to the profit of the strongest or a consecration to each individual for the good of all and especially for the protection of the weak. There are a great many men who have too much and who wish to have more; there are many others who do not have enough, who have nothing, and who are willing to take if someone gives to them. Between these two classes of men, a confrontation is coming, and this menacing confrontation will be terrible: on the one side, the power of gold, on the other the power of despair. We must cast ourselves between these two enemy armies, if not to prevent, at least to deaden the shock. And our youth and our mediocrity does not make our role of mediators easier than our title of Christian makes us responsible. There is the possible usefulness of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.<sup>4</sup>

We can read this statement and wonder what has changed in the nearly 200 years that have passed. We are still called upon to speak for those who have no voice and to call for changes to unjust structures. Blessed Frederic also famously said:

Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is justice's role to prevent the attacks.<sup>5</sup>

**In what ways do you and your Conference participate in working for justice? What are the stumbling blocks which might prevent this work?**

## MY REFLECTIONS

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Louis Janmot 13th November 1836, *Frederic Ozanam a life in letters*, 96-96.

<sup>5</sup> Commercial Law Lecture.

## FURTHER READING



### AN EXTRACT FROM APOSTOLIC REFLECTION BY HUGH O'DONNELL CM<sup>6</sup>

What is the foundation of apostolic reflection for Vincent? It is the absolute conviction "God is here!" I have been mentored on the road to this understanding by a confrere, Father Andre Dodin, and a Trinitarian priest, Father Dennis Dwyer. They led me to understand the profound influence of Benet of Canfield, the English Capuchin, on Vincent and the more distant but real influence of Jan Ruusbroec, the Flemish mystic. The very important lesson Vincent learned from them is "God is here" -- within me, in front of me, behind me, in this person, this sister, this child, these circumstances, these events. Much careful study remains to be done. I will present what I know and trust you to receive it to the degree it resonates with the love in your hearts and your lived experience of Vincent and Louise.

...Canfield maintained that the whole of the spiritual journey could be boiled down to one thing: the will of God. God's will mediates everything else. Canfield's influence on Vincent is found, for example, in Vincent's words, "Do not tread on the heels of Providence." He took these words from Canfield and they characterize Vincent's whole spiritual journey.

...I think this is the deepest sense of Vincent's and Louise's life. If we try to get to their heart and soul, what would we say? We would say that in their hearts and in their bones, they know "God is here!"

...The heart and soul of apostolic reflection, then, is to be found in the radical conviction that God is here. When you come together in apostolic reflection, then, what is the ground for your coming together? God is here in me, in my Sister, in each other and in the community. God is here in our coming together.

Now what is the contribution of Vincent and Louise? They treated each person as sacred and unique. Personalism is very powerful with them. Vincent and Louise treated one another as sacred and unique. Then they treated each and every person as sacred and unique.

...The person is very much at the center for Vincent and Louise. So, you can see that the key in apostolic reflection is the sacredness of every person in the group, then, the sacredness of the coming together of different people on this given evening. Another thing that is very strong in Louise and in Vincent is the idea that every person is a member of the Body of Christ, and, consequently, is a gift. There is deep affection for each sister. It is each person as person and each person as member in communion with the others that evokes not only respect but affection and deep attention to each one's silence, presence, being and words.

<sup>6</sup> *Vincetian Heritage* Volume 16, Issue 2 1995, 137-147.

## **The Apostolic Reflection Process**

1. We share an experience of serving people living in poverty (NB this can be done by one person sharing or by all people sharing an experience)
2. What did we hear ourselves saying? (take a few moments for people to share what they have heard)
3. Is there some scripture or a quote from our Vincentian heritage that comes to mind?
4. Is there anything that we need to do as a result of our reflections?

**Use this process of reflection to help your conference reflect on your visits.**

## Vincentian Social Justice



### The Vincentian Social Justice Tradition

The Church has a long history of social teaching which most people trace back to the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII; however, the tradition in reality goes back further than that. Both St Vincent and Blessed Frederic were people who spoke and acted for justice as well as providing charity to people in need.

St Vincent is famous for providing care for the poor and for organising others to provide ongoing support to people in need. Vincent and his followers reached out to people experiencing many different kinds of poverty: the sick, the elderly, the mentally-ill, prisoners, orphans, the homeless and those experiencing financial disadvantage. Luigi Mezzadri writes;

The span of his interest was broad and varied. He did not have to tire himself out going looking for the poor. He saw them, he sensed them. Every time he went out into the city his glance met that of a people abandoned by everyone. Or almost everyone; Vincent was always on their side. He made a choice for life and he wanted to stay on the side of the poor, not misty-eyed with compassion but with the spirit of someone who wanted to give back dignity and hope to these people.<sup>7</sup>

Vincent wrote to one of his confreres;

God will grant you the grace, Monsieur, of softening our hearts toward the wretched creatures and of realizing that in helping them we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy.<sup>8</sup>

Vincent saw that those in a position to help the poor were obliged to do so because they had a right to the basic necessities of life. Vincent also knew that he needed to speak out on behalf of the poor and that “There is no act of charity that is not accompanied by justice”<sup>9</sup>

Frederic Ozanam’s vision of justice “was rooted in his classical liberal, social Catholicism, which was grounded in St. Thomas Aquinas’s philosophy of the common good.”<sup>10</sup> He believed in the values of liberty, fraternity and equality which were proclaimed by the many revolutions of France and believed that these should be values on which society should be based. While he was involved in providing charity to people in need through the Society, he also believed in working for the rights of those people. In his Commercial law lecture he developed the idea of a natural wage, which meant a wage that was equitable to the work carried out.<sup>11</sup> He also wrote about the right of workers to form unions.

<sup>7</sup> Luigi Mezzadri, *A Short Life of St Vincent de Paul*, 59.

<sup>8</sup> CCD Vol VII, 115.

<sup>9</sup> CCD Vol II, 68.

<sup>10</sup> David L Gregory, *Antoine Frederic Ozanam: Building the Good Society*, 14. Available at <http://ir.stthomas.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1072&context=ustlj&sei-redir=1&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fscholar.google.com.au%2Fscholar%3Fhl%3Den%26q%3Dbuilding%2Bthe%2Bgood%2Bsoc>

<sup>11</sup> David L Gregory, *Antoine Frederic Ozanam: Building the Good Society*, 15.





### 3. The Principle of Association.

“Our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society– in economics and politics, in law and policy– directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.”

The centrepiece of society is the family; family stability must always be protected and never undermined. By association with others- in families and in other social institutions that foster growth, protect dignity and promote the common good - human persons achieve their fulfilment.

### 4. The Principle of Participation.

“We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.”

Without participation, the benefits available to an individual through any social institution cannot be realized. The human person has a right not to be shut out from participating in those institutions that are necessary for human fulfilment.

### 5. The Principle of Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable.

We believe that we touch Christ when we touch the needy. The story of the last judgment plays a very important role in the Catholic Faith tradition. From its earliest days, the Church has taught that we will be judged by what we choose to do or not to do in regard to the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the homeless, the prisoner. Today the Church expresses this teaching in terms of “the preferential option for the poor.”

### 6. The Principle of Solidarity.

“Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family.... Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that ‘loving our neighbour’ has global dimensions in an interdependent world.”

The principle of solidarity leads to choices that will promote and protect the common good.

### 7. The Principle of Stewardship.

“The Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation.”

The steward is a manager, not an owner. In an era of rising consciousness about our physical environment, our tradition is calling us to a sense of

moral responsibility for the protection of the environment -croplands, grasslands, woodlands, air, water, minerals and other natural deposits. Stewardship responsibilities also look toward our use of our personal talents, our attention to personal health and our use of personal property.

### **8. The Principle of Subsidiarity.**

This Principle deals chiefly with “the responsibilities and limits of government, and the essential roles of voluntary associations.”

The principle of subsidiarity puts a proper limit on government by insisting that no higher level of organization should perform any function that can be handled efficiently and effectively at a lower level of organization by persons or groups that are closer to the problems and closer to the ground. Oppressive governments are always in violation of the principle of subsidiarity; overactive governments also sometimes violate this principle.

### **9. The Principle of Human Equality.**

“Equality of all persons comes from their essential dignity.... While differences in talents are a part of God’s plan, social and cultural discrimination in fundamental rights... are not compatible with God’s design.”

Treating equals equally is one way of defining justice, also understood classically as rendering to each person his or her due. Underlying the notion of equality is the simple principle of fairness; one of the earliest ethical stirrings felt in the developing human person is a sense of what is “fair” and what is not.

### **10. The Principle of the Common Good.**

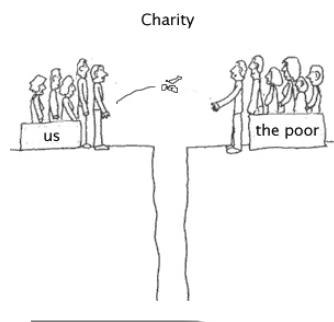
“The common good is understood as the social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential and to realize their human dignity.”

The social conditions the Church has in mind presuppose “respect for the person,” “the social well-being and development of the group” and the public authority’s maintenance of “peace and security.” Today, in an age of global interdependence, the principle of the common good points to the need for international structures that can promote the just development of persons and families across regional and national lines.

**How are these principles reflected in the way that your Conference works with people?. How can we give a human face to the principles of social justice?**



## SYSTEMIC CHANGE



Justice (Systemic Change)



ourselves and the poor on the side of solidarity for change

In the prologue of the book **Seeds of Hope Stories of Systemic Change**, Robert Maloney CM explains what systemic change means. He describes how science understands that many systems have parts that interact with each other. For example, the universe is a system in which, if a star explodes the whole universe feels the effect. A system is a made of parts which function together and create a whole which is greater than the sum of the individual parts. Fr Maloney describes an example in the body

If I break my ankle, I experience pain, which affects my overall happiness and my mood. That, in turn, affects how I relate with others. The broken ankle also distorts how I walk. As a result, my hip or my back may begin to bother me too.

With a throbbing ankle and an aching back, I may also experience a headache or grouchiness. All this affects how I work or how I study.<sup>15</sup>

He goes on to explain how many systems there are in the world and how the word system comes from two Greek words syn = together and histani = cause to stand.

Systemic change looks at the context in which a poor person lives and what are the reasons that might be causing this poverty. It looks at the whole picture of what might be causing the poverty and attempts to change the whole system of interacting elements.

Each of us lives within a socioeconomic system whose parts interact with each other. If the system is working well, it favours personal growth. If not, it thwarts growth, and accelerates decline. If, for example, I don't have a job, I don't earn money. If I don't earn money, I can't buy food for my family. If my son doesn't have sufficient food, he suffers malnutrition. If he suffers malnutrition, he can't study well. If he can't study well, he won't graduate from school. If he doesn't graduate from school, he may not get a job. If he doesn't have a job, he doesn't earn money. So the circle begins again.<sup>16</sup>

Each element in a system influences each other element and if one aspect is not working then this can lead to the person deeper into poverty.

Systemic change is a contemporary concept which was unknown in St Vincent's time, however, St Vincent did address similar ideas. When he founded the first Confraternity of Charity in 1617, he wrote about the

<sup>15</sup> Robert Maloney, *Seeds of Hope*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Maloney, *Seeds of Hope*, 4.

need to help the people in the town who suffered “more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons.”<sup>17</sup> Vincent encouraged those who worked with him to look at the needs of the poor and to address what their most urgent needs were. Vincent told the Daughters of Charity that their love of the poor must be both affective, or from the heart, and effective, because it involves practical help for persons in need.<sup>18</sup> He also told the sisters too, that they were to serve the poor both “spiritually and corporally”<sup>19</sup>, meaning that service needed to address both their physical needs and their spiritual ones.

The characteristics<sup>20</sup> of a systemic change project are:

1. **Long-range social impact.** This is the most basic characteristic of systemic change: that is, that the project helps change the overall life-situation of those who benefit from it.
2. **Sustainability.** The project helps create the social structures that are needed for a permanent change in the lives of the poor, like employment, education, housing, the availability of clean water and sufficient food, ongoing local leadership, etc.
3. **Replicability.** The project can be adapted to solve similar problems in other places. The philosophy or spirituality that grounds the project, the strategies it employs and the techniques that it uses can be applied in a variety of circumstances.
4. **Scope.** Concretely, this means that the project actually has been spread beyond its initial context and has been used successfully in other settings in the country where it began, or internationally either by those who initiated it, or by others who have adapted elements of it.
5. **Innovation.** The project has brought about significant social change by transforming traditional practice. Transformation has been achieved through the development of a pattern-changing idea and its successful implementation.

**How do you think this approach could be used in your work?**

### Prayer for Systemic Change

We praise and thank you, O God, Creator of the Universe. You have made all things good and have given us the earth to cultivate. Grant that we may always use created things gratefully, and share them generously with those in need. Give us creativity in helping the poor meet their basic human needs. Open our minds and hearts so that we might stand at their side and assist them to change whatever unjust structures keep them poor. Enable us to be brothers and sisters to them, friends who walk with them in their struggle for fundamental human rights. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

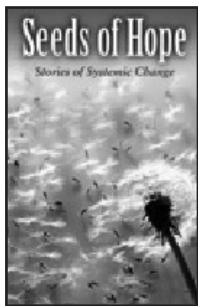
<sup>17</sup> CCD Vol XIII, 8.

<sup>18</sup> CCD Vol IX, 466.

<sup>19</sup> CCD Vol IX, 467.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Maloney, *Seeds of Hope*, 9.

## FURTHER READING



### An extract from “The Perfect Storm”: Achieving Systemic Change in San Jose de Oca. *By Rev. Mr Gene Smith*<sup>21</sup>

A “perfect storm” is the concept of a series of extraordinarily destructive elements that, taken singly, would pose little danger; however when they come together create catastrophic results. What if a perfect storm could produce positive results? What if a “storm” was what was needed? Such a “perfect storm” infused life giving change into the Dominican Republic’s San Jose de Oca. A community of people generated it. Powerful positive elements intersected, creating a unified vibrant community.

### Poorest of the Poor

A few years ago, the Ocoa River community was plagued by thousands of infant deaths, chronic hunger, a shortage of clean water, and practically non-existent sanitation facilities. People scarcely existed day to day. With no assurance of food or survival the women walked for miles each day just to obtain water from often polluted streams. Families tried to help each other exist, yet they struggled on their own. This sight filled Jack Eshamn’s eyes when he arrived at San Jose de Ocoa.

This was Jack’s first visit to a developing country. As an active member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Jack was experienced in assisting families in crisis – those in need of food and clothing and basic necessities. He and his fellow Vincentians in Long Island, New York, visited people who had lost jobs or experienced havoc creating illnesses. Jack thought he had seen the many faces of poverty. ...

Jack arrived believing he was prepared for the sight of the Ocoa River area village communities, instead he felt stunned and overwhelmed by it. ...He saw the filth and degradation of poverty – and it pained him to his core. This was Jack’s introduction to the poorest of the poor.

Jack knew he and his fellow Vincentians must help. He learned that the greatest basic need was clean water. He daily saw the women of the village, like women all over the world, walk for miles with buckets on their heads and children on their backs in search of life giving water. Distant streams were the only sources of such water. The area supported no farming or even the raising of the smallest chickens with which families might sustain themselves. Jack realized, “We in the United States must respond. We have so much and they have so little.” He didn’t have the answers: all he thought about was finding solutions.

<sup>21</sup> Gene Smith, “The Perfect Storm”: *Achieving Systemic Change in San Jose de Oco*. In *Seeds of Hope*, 49-56.

## Intersecting Positive Element's

A vision emerged – a project developed. The lives of thousands in the Ocoa River area were forever changed. Jack, Father Louis Quinn (Father Lou) and the people of San Jose de Ocoa achieved a life sustaining change. One would have to ask, “How did they do it?”

Jim Claffey, another Vincentian from Long Island, with much animation shared his excitement: “It was incredible what happened! A “perfect” storm. First, you have the visionary Father Lou, the pastor of the Ocoa River parish (over a hundred impoverished villages). Second, Jack and the Society of St Vincent de Paul resources and the last most needed element, the people of the Ocoa River.

Father Lou was the first “perfect” storm element. He arrived in the Dominican Republic years before as a young Canadian Scarborough missionary to evangelize the poor. He soon realized, as St Vincent de Paul did, that you cannot expect people to embrace the Gospel message if they and their children are without the basics of life. Father Lou had the vision of what could be, if there was a constant source of clean water.

The second element was Jack. Father Lou believed in Jack’s stewardship and compassion. He took him to one impoverished village after another, and witnessed Jack’s response. He realized in Jack a person with connections to resources, the drive to bring them together and the will to create change. Even though there were over 300 villages without water Father Lou suggested taking six villages as a starting point. He cautioned Jack, “Remember, do nothing for them – do it with them.” Father Lou knew and Jack agreed on the importance of involving the indigenous population and starting small and growing one step at a time.

Jack’s first step was to bring in a water technical specialist from the organization Hermidad. The specialist took them high up in the surrounding mountains where, they located with God’s guidance, several springs with clean, nourishing water. The Hermidad professional engineers the laid out a plan for a system of aqueducts and pipes to transport the water from the mountains to the villages.

What was needed now was money and labor. Jack decided the St Vincent de Paul Conference in San Jose de Ocoa was pivotal to establishing a “twinning’ arrangement. ... Jack returned to the United States and convinced 20 conferences to contribute \$75 a month. Soon the amount was raised to \$100. More and more conferences joined in, as did the Council of Rockville Center, New York.

...Jack’s efforts bore fruit. ... Donations of up to \$50,000 were received to buy equipment, pipe and materials to construct aqueducts.

The last most significant storm element was to establish a collaborative relationship with the local area's people. Father Lou passionately encouraged the community's leaders to act. These leaders enthusiastically embraced the project and took ownership. They formed work brigades and these volunteer brigades accomplished the bulk of the physical work. People from different communities collaborating in this massive effort, created bonds where relations had been strained. Solidarity was established in one community after another as the villagers sacrificed days of pay to accomplish the work for the community. They toiled to build aqueducts and connecting systems of pipes, bringing life to Hermidad's plan. Hundreds and hundreds of people worked together. It was an incredible example of the poor helping the poor – serving as the heart of the entire project.

The “perfect” storm's power was unleashed. Water flowed. Jack returned to Ocoa two years later and was astounded. The land was flourishing and the water system served 19 villages and that number grew by a factor of five. Bringing water to villages, improved nutrition and health, created new opportunities for work, and encouraged area communities to share resources and grow closer. Jack saw a holistic change – villages aiding other villages so they too could survive through irrigation and land management. This synergy led to new visions and new projects:

- Irrigation for crops
- Water purification plants
- Private/shared potable water
- Thatched roofs replaced with zinc roofs, and dirt floors with cement
- Nutritious home gardens
- Farming cooperatives
- Latrines for sanitation
- Home building

...This collaborative Ocoa River project is an exemplary example of what can be accomplished when a group has: (1) a visionary; (2) the necessary resources and (3) a community of people willing to work and take ownership of a project's planning, implementation, evaluation and revisions.

Systemic change is justice. We of the Vincentian family are challenged to be leaders for social justice and achieve positive systemic changes.



## LIFE AND DIGNITY



Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

*Matt 11:4-5*

The Church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself. This image finds, and must always find anew, an ever deeper and fuller unfolding of itself in the mystery of Christ, the Perfect Image of God, the One who reveals God to man and man to himself. It is to these men and women, who have received an incomparable and inalienable dignity from God himself, that the Church speaks, rendering to them the highest and most singular service, constantly reminding them of their lofty vocation so that they may always be mindful of it and worthy of it. Christ, the Son of God, "by his incarnation has united himself in some fashion with every person"; for this reason the Church recognizes as her fundamental duty the task of seeing that this union is continuously brought about and renewed. In Christ the Lord, the Church indicates and strives to be the first to embark upon the path of the human person, and she invites all people to recognize in everyone — near and far, known and unknown, and above all in the poor and the suffering — a brother or sister "for whom Christ died" (1 Cor 8:11; Rom 14:15).<sup>22</sup>

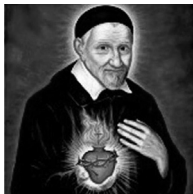
The Church teaches that each person has been made in the image of God and it is from this that each person receives their dignity. This dignity is inalienable and is not diminished by anything that the person may do. This dignity exists regardless of race colour or creed. Society should be based on this principle of the innate dignity in each person. As Vincentians we are called to treat every person that comes to us with respect because of this dignity. Our Mission Statement calls upon us to serve people with respect and justice. At times this will be a challenge but we are called to "turn the medal" as Vincent said, and see the dignity of the person before us, even if they do not see it for themselves.

**What helps you to see the dignity in the people you serve? If there have been times when this was a challenge, what has helped you see the dignity in the person in front of you?**

22 *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 105, available at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#I](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#I). SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND THE PERSONALIST PRINCIPLE



## FURTHER READING



### AFFECTIVE & EFFECTIVE LOVE & DEUS CARITAS EST

Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* was about Christian love. This theme is an important theme for all Christians, but particularly for those who follow in the footsteps of St Vincent and Blessed Frederic. Benedict tells us that love is "a single reality"<sup>23</sup> that has dimensions. Love of God and love of neighbour are inextricably linked.<sup>24</sup> This love of our neighbour is based on their inherent dignity which comes from the fact that they are made in the image and likeness of God.

There is much in St Vincent's writings about the love of our neighbour in particular the person who is most in need. He wrote to his confreres in 1659 that:

Openness to God's will must necessarily be akin to the nature of perfect love, for its an activity of love, inclining the heart to all that's better and destroying everything that keeps it from this, like fire... When they stop loving other things, they will necessarily be filled with God's love.<sup>25</sup>

St Vincent wrote about the obligation we have to extend our love to our neighbours:

This charity is obligatory; it's a divine precept, which embraces several others. Each of us knows that the Law and the Prophets are included in the love of God and neighbor. Everything refers back to that; everything is directed to it; and this love has such strength and is so privileged that anyone who possesses it fulfills the laws of God because they all relate to this love, and this love helps us do whatever God asks of us<sup>26</sup>

St Paul wrote in the letter to the Roman's "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." (Rom 13:8 NRSV) Vincent talked about love needing to be affective, meaning from the heart and involving our emotions, but also effective or practical and concrete, shown by our actions.<sup>27</sup>

Benedict XVI cites St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac as models of the love of God and neighbour<sup>28</sup> and while he does not mention Blessed Frederic we could add him to the list. Ozanam wrote about the love of God and neighbour:

It is all in order to love God, or at least one believes that he loves Him more than before because one feels a lively gratitude for Him, for him who on exile here on earth, in this capital of corruption, has reserved for us so large a share of happiness and life. It also makes one love more than ever a religion that makes all of its children equals

<sup>23</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, No.8.

<sup>24</sup> Cf 1 Jn 4:20, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 16.

<sup>25</sup> *CCD* Vol XII, 188.

<sup>26</sup> *CCD* Vol XII, 213.

<sup>27</sup> *CCD* Vol IX, 373.

<sup>28</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 41.

and gathers together the great and the small who, despite the proud disciples of egoism hating and quarrelling among themselves, inspire you with so much love for humanity.<sup>29</sup>

These reflections from St Vincent and Blessed Frederic remind us that all people have a dignity based in their creation in the image and likeness of God and that this calls us to show God's love to them.

**How does love of God inspire you to love the people you serve?**

---

<sup>29</sup> Letter 55. March 19th 1833 p 36 *Frederic Ozanam a life in Letters*, Translated by Joseph Dirvin, 1986.

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup>ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

*Rom 12:6-6*

### **The Church recognises that the family is the basic unit of society.**

The importance and centrality of the family with regard to the person and society is repeatedly underlined by Sacred Scripture. “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). From the texts that narrate the creation of man (cf. Gen 1:26-28, 2:7-24) there emerges how — in God’s plan — the couple constitutes “the first form of communion between persons”. Eve is created like Adam as the one who, in her otherness, completes him (cf. Gen 2:18) in order to form with him “one flesh” (Gen 2:24; cf. Mt 19:5-6). At the same time, both are involved in the work of procreation, which makes them co-workers with the Creator: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). The family is presented, in the Creator’s plan, as “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society” and the “cradle of life and love”.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Church also recognises the importance of community.**

It is therefore necessary to stress that community life is a natural characteristic that distinguishes man from the rest of earthly creatures. Social activity carries in itself a particular sign of man and of humanity that of a person at work within a community of persons: this is the sign that determines man’s interior traits and in a sense constitutes his very nature. This relational characteristic takes on, in the light of faith, a more profound and enduring meaning. Made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26), and made visible in the universe in order to live in society (cf. Gen 2:20,23) and exercise dominion over the earth (cf. Gen 1:26,28- 30), the human person is for this reason called from the very beginning to life in society: “God did not create man as a ‘solitary being’ but wished him to be a ‘social being’. Social life therefore is not exterior to man: he can only grow and realize his vocation in relation with others”.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no 259.

<sup>31</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no.149.



## FURTHER READING



### RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Beginning our discussion on the rights of the human person, we see that everyone has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and finally the necessary social services. Therefore, a human being also has the right to security in the case of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which one is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of one's own.<sup>34</sup>

I am asking that we look after the people who have too many needs and not enough rights, who demand with reason a fuller share in public affairs, security in work and safeguards against poverty.<sup>35</sup>

In our society today there is a great deal of focus on rights, much of which is good but it can lead to a sense of entitlement. It can be more of a challenge to think of the rights of another person if this causes me some inconvenience. Quite often our society makes judgements about people who are poor and blames them for their own situation. The common perception is if only they worked a bit harder or got their act together then they wouldn't be poor. It can be easy to make a judgement about whether they are deserving or not. Bishop Ken Untener once wrote

The undeserving poor are the ones who make it hard to help the poor. They are the ones who have made the bad choices, or failed to make any choice at all. They are the ones who have been helped before and it didn't help. They are the ones who seem to expect us to bail them out, and who hardly say "thank you" when we do. They are the ones who seem to take advantage of the system, or other people.

Help them anyway. If you start to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor, you are finished, at least as far as the gospel is concerned. Who is really to decide if they are undeserving?

I do not mean that we shouldn't try to help them help themselves. As the saying goes, "Give me a fish and you feed me for a day. Teach me to fish and you feed me for life."

We should always try to help the poor help themselves. But be careful about metering out your help too carefully. Jesus was never overly careful about metering out his

<sup>34</sup> John XII, *Pacem in Terris*, No. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Frederic Ozanam February 22, 1842



## OPTION FOR THE POOR



### Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

At the very heart of Christianity is a need to love the poor; those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, ill; those who are strangers or in prison. This is the key element in our relationship with God. “If the good of all, the common good, is to prevail, preferential protection must move towards those affected adversely by the absence of power and the presence of privation.”<sup>37</sup> When we care for the poor we are caring for God.

Pope John Paul II wrote:

Yet, as the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us, there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them. This option is a testimony to the nature of God’s love, to his providence and mercy; and in some way history is still filled with the seeds of the Kingdom of God which Jesus himself sowed during his earthly life whenever he responded to those who came to him with their spiritual and material needs.<sup>38</sup>

St Vincent told the Daughters of Charity that “to serve those who are poor is to go to God, and you should see God in them”<sup>39</sup>. St Vincent also told them that if they were called away from prayer to serve the poor that they were “leaving God for God”<sup>40</sup>. This says that a Vincentian’s relationship with God is intimately connected to service of people in need. Our prayer should nourish our service and vice versa.

Blessed Rosalie enlisted the help of the rich in her service of people who were poor. It is written on her headstone “To our mother Sr Rosalie, the friend of the poor and the rich”.<sup>41</sup> Blessed Frederic wrote about the poor:

You are the sacred image of the God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love him otherwise, shall we not love Him in your persons?<sup>42</sup>

**How does your service to people living in poverty reflect this value?**

<sup>37</sup> William Byron, *Ten Building Blocks of Catholic Social Teaching*, America Oct 31, 1998, 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> CCD Vol IX, 5.

<sup>40</sup> CCD Vol X, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Louise Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie Rendu*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Frederic Ozanam a Life in Letters*, 96.

## FURTHER READING

### PARTICIPATION

Alas! We see each day the schism started in society become deeper: there are no longer political conditions dividing men, they are less opinions than interests, here the camp of the rich, there the camp of the poor. ...One only means of salvation remains, that is, in the name of charity Christians interpose themselves between the two camps, that they fly over them going from one side to the other doing good, obtaining many alms from the rich and much resignation from the poor, bringing presents to the poor and words of gratitude to the rich, getting them used to looking on one another as brothers, infusing them with a bit of mutual charity...lessening the antipathies day by day, the two camps will rise up and destroy the barriers of their prejudices, throw away their angry weapons, and march to meet each other, not to battle, but to mingle, embrace and become one sheepfold under one shepherd...<sup>43</sup>

Every basic human right draws its authoritative force from the natural law, which confers it and attaches to it its respective duty. Hence, to claim one's rights and ignore one's duties, or only half fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other.<sup>44</sup>

We know that people living in poverty are often excluded from full participation in society and are marginalised and rendered powerless. It is our responsibility as Vincentians to stand with people living on the margins and to encourage them to speak up for themselves.

It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied, and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish. It is also necessary to help these needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources. Even prior to the logic of a fair exchange of goods and the forms of justice appropriate to it, there exists something which is due to man because he is man, by reason of his lofty dignity. Inseparable from that required "something" is the possibility to survive and, at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good of humanity.<sup>45</sup>



<sup>43</sup> Frederic Ozanam a life in Letters, Letter 142. 106.

<sup>44</sup> Pacem in Terris, no.30.

<sup>45</sup> Centimus Annus, 34.

Blessed Frederic reminded us also that when we help the poor we should not consider ourselves superior to the person we are helping.

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.<sup>46</sup>

**Reflect on how the people you serve are treated by society.  
How do you honour these people?**

---

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen O'Meara, *Frederic Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne: His Life and Works*, 177.



## DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF WORKERS

Blessed Frederic worked for justice for workers, pioneering the concept of a natural wage. The natural wage he talked about was not just a minimum which must be provided in order for people to live, but a wage that must be proportionate to the profits that the industry or company makes.<sup>47</sup> Gregory tells us “it is certainly fair to say that Ozanam developed some of the key precepts of fair wages and labor unions that were more fully elucidated in *Rerum Novarum*.”<sup>48</sup>

In *Laborem Exercens* Pope John Paul II writes about work as being a fundamental part of human existence and that “the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person.”<sup>49</sup> He also writes in the encyclical about the importance of just remuneration for work done, as an issue of justice.<sup>50</sup> Workers also have the right to form unions for support and to ensure that they are treated fairly by employers. In *Centesimus Annus*, he wrote about the fall of communist empires and listed the violations of the rights of workers as being one factor which led to this downfall.<sup>51</sup>

Blessed Rosalie Rendu gave the following advice to the founding members of the Society:

There are many ways of providing charity. The assistance of money or assistance in-kind that we give to the poor will to last long. We must aspire to a more complete and longer lasting benefit: study their abilities, their level of education and try to get them work to help them out of their difficulties.

**What issues have you witnessed that prevent the dignity of work for those you serve?**

<sup>47</sup> David L Gregory, *Ozanam Building a Good Society*, St. Thomas L. J. 21 (2005-2006), 21.

<sup>48</sup> David L Gregory, *Ozanam Building a Good Society*, 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, no.6.

<sup>50</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, No.19.

<sup>51</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, no.23.

## SOLIDARITY



Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

*Rom 12:9-18*

Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity. Never before has there been such a widespread awareness of the bond of interdependence between individuals and peoples, which is found at every level. The very rapid expansion in ways and means of communication “in real time”, such as those offered by information technology, the extraordinary advances in computer technology, the increased volume of commerce and information exchange all bear witness to the fact that, for the first time since the beginning of human history, it is now possible — at least technically — to establish relationships between people who are separated by great distances and are unknown to each other.<sup>52</sup>

For Christians, the call to solidarity with one another comes from the words of Jesus himself, when he said

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” Matt 22:37-40

In telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus showed us that the person who cares for another and acts in solidarity with them, regardless of their race colour or creed, is the one who behaves as a neighbour. This story is a foundational one for all Vincentians. Ozanam wrote about the need for Vincentians to intervene between rich people and poor people “to mingle to embrace, and become one sheepfold under one shepherd.”<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 192.

<sup>53</sup> *Frederic Ozanam a life in Letters*, Letter 142 9th March 1837,106.

## **The Church further writes**

The message of the Church's social doctrine regarding solidarity clearly shows that there exists an intimate bond between solidarity and the common good, between solidarity and the universal destination of goods, between solidarity and equality among men and peoples, between solidarity and peace in the world. The term "solidarity", widely used by the Magisterium, expresses in summary fashion the need to recognize in the composite ties that unite men and social groups among themselves, the space given to human freedom for common growth in which all share and in which they participate. The commitment to this goal is translated into the positive contribution of seeing that nothing is lacking in the common cause and also of seeking points of possible agreement where attitudes of separation and fragmentation prevail. It translates into the willingness to give oneself for the good of one's neighbour, beyond any individual or particular interest.<sup>54</sup>

**How is the principle of solidarity reflected in your conference?**

<sup>54</sup> *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no.194.



