



Louise de Marillac: *Decent and Stable Work for All*

By Benito Martínez, C.M.

“Since one of the greatest assets of this project is the work which it provides, it is necessary to assign tasks which are useful and productive. An acceptable one would be that of clothmaker. Apart from being productive —the cloth could be used in the House and in other places— it employs many persons and requires little equipment. Bootmakers and shoemakers would also be most useful. Any buttonmakers and muslin workers who are skilled in their trade can put the finishing touches on the products before they are put into use. Other useful workers are: lacemakers, glovemakers who know how to trim, seamstresses who can take in work from the dressmakers of the city and of other places, and pinmakers.

Having quite enough workers to get the project underway and to keep it going, there is no need to consider the expense that will be incurred for tools and building supplies, nor is there need to be concerned about the difficulty of the skills involved or the problem of securing a location cheaply and easily. Divine Providence provides for all, and skills will be discovered through experience. Rest assured that there will be very little progress during the first year.”

Louise de Marillac, Notes on the organization of the Hospice of the Saint-Nom-de-Jésus (A 99)

Reflection:

1. A gentleman gave St. Vincent de Paul 11,000 pounds to do a work for the poor. St. Vincent thought that he could not use them to give to the poor, for it would be bread for today and hunger for tomorrow. They had to be put in production, and he bought two houses to house 40 poor people, who worked in them as in a workshop: 20 women and 20 men. And he commissioned Louise de Marillac to organize them. The surplus was invested to produce interests with which to feed them. Saint Louise sat down and, as good organizer as she was, she wrote the expenses, the price of the material, the salaries of the workers, the income from the sale of the products, and how the institution would remain. The result was a resounding success, so the Charity Volunteers (today AIC) thought to do a similar work, but for hundreds and hundreds of poor people, and to ask Louise de Marillac to organize it.
2. In Spain there are about five million unemployed and more than four million workers with precarious jobs, that worry governments and political parties but only in theory: they are really looking for power. For our part, we citizens care about giving, but not doing. It is more comfortable to give money to charity so that someone else would do the task. However, that is not Vincentian. What would Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Frederic Ozanam, and colleagues, all of them, say today on being committed to the poor?

Questions for dialogue:

1. As individual Christians, are we committed to doing something for the poor or are we content to “giving”? Does the branch of the Vincentian Family to which you belong give alms, or do and have works that give work to the poor?
2. What does your Vincentian branch to claim for decent works and fair salaries?
3. Do you engage in struggles for the dignity of women workers in private homes and also in small businesses, such as shops?