

# ST VINCENT DE PAUL AND MONEY

St Vincent de Paul lived and operated in the world and was therefore someone who dealt with money. He established a number of groups and was responsible to ensure that they were financially viable. When he began the Confraternities of Charity he said that they should operate from free will donations, however, he knew that this was inherently unreliable.



At times

*... the Charities often found themselves in difficulties. Some failed through lack of support or even mismanagement of resources. Expenses could be high, since many Confraternities had to support chapels for their use, and had to house the sick and the poor, particularly transients, in small hospitals. To redress their deficits, some Charities kept small flocks of sheep or goats to provide wool, milk and meat for the indigent. The regulations Father Vincent designed for the Charities demanded good financial management, through regular reporting and checks and balances.<sup>1</sup>*

When he founded the Congregation of Mission he did not want his confreres to work for money, therefore he needed to ensure that they had other sources of income. He said "we, who do not take anything from the poor, need revenue..."<sup>2</sup> Land and its income were the main sources of income for the Congregation.

*Vincent remarked, probably as a result of meditation on the economic facts of his life, that the missionaries lived "on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, on the sweat of the poor." Income from poor farm laborers flowed in not only to Saint-Lazare but also to his other foundations. A second source was income from real estate, whether buildings or farm properties, that he owned, managed and leased to others.<sup>3</sup>*

This background gives us some idea of how Vincent ensured that his works were able to continue. In managing his money "his overarching principle was that his resources existed to serve the poor, and that money was not a thing in itself to be hoarded".<sup>4</sup> Money was important to ensure that the poor could continue to be served and that the servants of the poor were not dependent on others to support them.

Vincent was someone who relied on the wisdom of others in all his endeavours. He said:  
*Far from being a bad thing to seek advice, you must, on the contrary, do so when the matter is of any importance, or when we cannot come to a dear decision on our own. For temporal affairs, we consult a lawyer or some lay persons who are knowledgeable about them; for internal affairs, we discuss matters with the consultors and other members of the Company when we think it appropriate. I often consult even the Brothers and ask their advice on questions involving their duties.<sup>5</sup>*

While this does not list financial advisers, he would no doubt have had such advice and recognised that he did not have all the necessary expertise in managing money.

Just as our efforts in raising funds are not always successful, neither were Vincent's. He wrote:  
*Today after I had preached very well to a lady, I thought she would give me a large contribution. Do you know what I got? Four white crowns! Now what use is that?<sup>6</sup>*

Vincent worked on his relationships with the rich and influential of his time in order to encourage them to help him to help people in need.

Vincent de Paul faced similar challenges in ensuring the sustainability of the mission and works that he started as do we in our time. We can learn principles from him that we can use in our own fundraising and money management. These principles include respect for all involved, collaboration with those who wish to help, advocacy for people in need, quality in everything, planning and prudence in carrying it out, and creativity in finding new ways of doing things.

## What can we take from Vincent's experience for today?