



**THE
FREDERIC
OZANAM
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-Simonism¹, 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."²

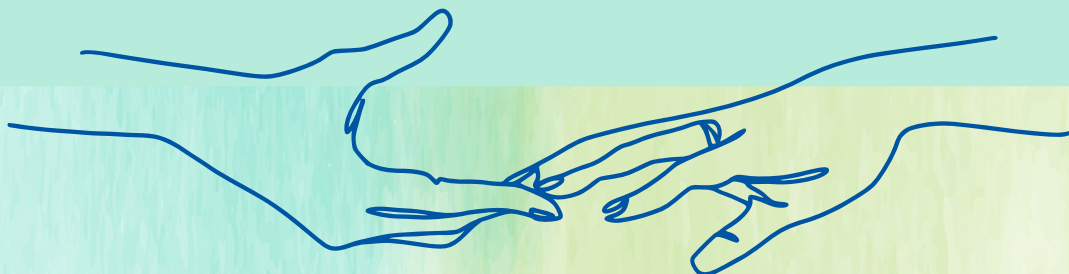
On the evening of the 23rd of April, Frederic's 20th birthday, six students, Augustine Le Taillandier, Francois Lallier, Felix Clave, Jules Devaux, Paul Lamanche, Frederic Ozanam, and their mentor, Emmanuel Bailly, met in the offices of the Catholic Tribune. They called this group the Conference of Charity 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.³

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.⁴



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. 5

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."⁶ 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.

