



**Society of  
St. Vincent de Paul  
Scotland**

**Induction Manual  
for new  
SSVP Members**



# Mission Statement

“As members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, we seek to identify and combat all forms of poverty, by promoting social justice and actively working with those in need, acknowledging that,  
by freely giving of ourselves,  
we become more aware of the power of love in all our relationships”.

**AGM, September 1992**

The SSVP is a worldwide Catholic organisation founded in Paris in 1833, by a group of young Catholics and one older person who provided them with support and guidance. The vocation of the Society’s members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact.  
Vincentians serve in hope.

This document is intended to give new SSVP members in Scotland an overview of the ethos, vision, rules and procedures adhered to by all SSVP members. **It is by no means comprehensive and each member should also have a copy of the ‘Manual and Rule’ and over time, become familiar with it.**

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**SSVP members are called to respond to the needs of the poor and marginalised. This means that SSVP conferences respond in the most appropriate manner for the situation.**

No work of charity is foreign to the Society of St Vincent de Paul.  
We are involved in a diverse range of activities characterised by:

### **Any form of personal help**

This includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.

### **To anyone in need**

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

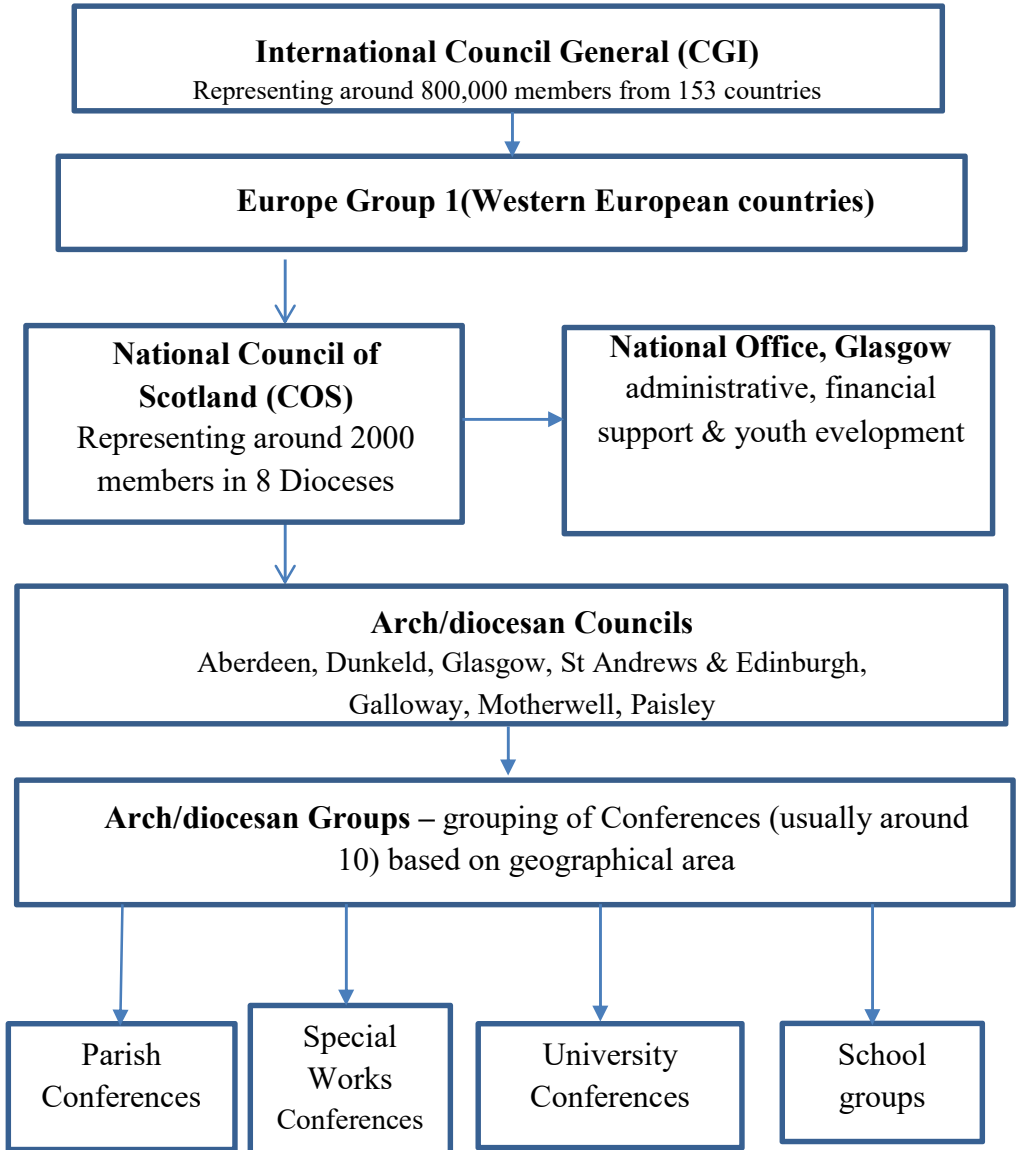
### **Seeking out the poor**

Vincentians (SSVP members) strive to seek out and find those in need and forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity.

### **Adapting to the changing world**

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to the changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.

# SSVP Organisational Chart



# Becoming a full member of the SSVP

## Checklist for becoming a member

1. Meet with existing Conference or members of new Conference (with guidance).
2. Complete a membership form.
3. Complete PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) procedure through your Parish.
4. Conference President will inform SSVP National Office of your membership.
5. Receive ID card from the National Office.

## Core Values

**Vincentians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:**

- **Simplicity** – frankness, integrity, genuineness.
- **Humility** – accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts talents and charisms, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.
- **Gentleness** – friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, tenderness and patience in our relationship with others.
- **Selflessness** – dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.
- **Zeal** - enthusiasm, energy and fervour.

**A vocation for every moment of our lives-** The Vincentian vocation affects all aspects of members' daily lives, making them more sensitive and caring in their family, work and leisure activities. Vincentians are available for work in the Conferences only after fulfilling their family and professional duties.

## **Members, Conferences, Councils – communities of faith & love**

The Society is open to all Catholics who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbour in need.

## **Equality**

The Society, in each of its Conferences (the primary basic unit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), makes no distinction regarding gender, wealth, occupation, social status or ethnic origin.

## **Meetings of the Vincentian members**

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 marginalised. Conferences meet regularly and consistently, usually weekly, but at least every fortnight.

## **Democracy**

All decisions are made by consensus after the necessary prayer, reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate, matters are put to a vote.

## **Presidents as servant leaders**

Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavour to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charisms (meaning any good gift that flows from God's love to man) of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.



## **Formation of members**

It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor and help them be aware of the benefits, resources and opportunities that are available for the poor. The Society also offers members training in order to better help to raise the cultural and social level of those who request this support.

## **Working with young people**

The Society of St Vincent de Paul was founded in 1833 by a group of students who were all in their early 20's. They did this with help from an older person, who provided them with guidance and support. It is vital that young people are an integral part of the SSVP. We must bear in mind that young people are at very different stages in their lives from most SSVP members, so they may have different needs and they may not always be perceived as being as reliable as older members. However, we must remember that young people's lives are often much more transient than older members as they may move for university or change jobs often, or they may have exams. This should not be a barrier to involving young people; we just need to be more mindful of their needs and their requirement for a bit more flexibility.

## **Relationship with civil society – work for social justice**

The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions. The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination.

In all its' charitable actions there should be a search for justice.

## **A vision of the civilisation of love**

Affirming the dignity of each human being as created in God's image, and Jesus' particular identification with those who are excluded by society, Vincentians envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted.

As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and the civilisation of love. In this way, the Society shares the Church's mission to evangelise the world through visible witness, in both actions and words. The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a nonviolent approach. It is good that some members follow and fully participate in their political vocation in such a way that they bring Christian values to political matters.

## **Working with communities**

The Society should work not only with individuals in need but also with families and communities. It can help an excluded or deprived local community to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity which leads it to improve its economic, social or environmental well-being, always retaining the personal contact of members with those who suffer.

## **Vision of the future**

The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

## The practical Vincentian approach to social justice

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those we visit who suffer from injustice.

### A voice for the voiceless

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.

### Striving to change attitudes

Vincentians oppose discrimination of all kinds and work to change the attitudes of those who view the weak or those who are different with prejudice, fear or scorn, attitudes which gravely wound the dignity of others.

The Society strives, with charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, so that all are able to understand, recognise and defend the right of each person to be responsible for his or her own life. The Society promotes understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.

**“In his twenty-fourth of forty-seven published lectures on commercial law given as a professor at Lyon, Ozanam developed his central thesis of the ‘salaire naturel’—the natural wage, a concept that became the precursor to the minimum wage and the living wage movements.”**

*[https://famvin.org/wiki/The\\_Social\\_Justice\\_Vision\\_of\\_Ozanam#The\\_Natural\\_Wage](https://famvin.org/wiki/The_Social_Justice_Vision_of_Ozanam#The_Natural_Wage)*

# What the SSVP expects from you

## Vincentian Promise

Do you agree to follow Christ through regular person-to-person service of people in need? **I do.**

Do you agree to seek out and find those in need? **I do.**

Do you agree to encourage new members to join the Society and to make them welcome? **I do.**

Do you agree to preserve our founder's spirit of youth through enthusiasm, adaptability and imagination? **I do.**

Do you agree to co-operate actively with Vincentians in neighbouring parishes, throughout Scotland and in other countries? **I do.**

Do you agree to share in prayer and action with people from other faiths who care for the needy in our society? **I do.**

**Devote** an average of three hours per week to Conference work. This involves attendance at Conference meetings as well as the time it takes to go on visit.

**Bring** the same compassion and commitment to bear on the problems you encounter among those you are helping, as you would to a member of your own family or good friend.

**Be a good listener** and at all times be respectful of the dignity of those you meet and deal with the issues that arise in a non-judgemental way.

**Respect** the confidential nature of the information you hear about families through your Conference work, this should not be discussed outside the Conference meeting. Although you can let others know of the type of work that you are doing, you should never discuss specifics such as names.

**Know** when and where to turn for professional assistance when this is necessary.

**Subscribe** to the general ethos of the SSVP. The Society of St Vincent de Paul is a Catholic organisation whose members seek to express their faith in their service of their neighbour in need.

**Develop** an awareness of the services of other organisations (government, community and voluntary) which complement the work of the SSVP in your area.

**Be willing** to adapt and change to meet new needs when they emerge through your Conference work.

**Comply** with the policies and procedures of the SSVP and play your part in upholding its good name. Members subscribe to the Rule of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Please ensure that you receive a copy.

**Vincentians should never forget that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money.**

Nevertheless, the Society uses money and property to help relieve the suffering of those in need. The Society's funds must be handled with the utmost care, prudence and generosity. Accurate records must be kept of all money received or spent. The Society may not allot funds to other organisations, except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family, save under exceptional circumstances.

## Communication

The vitality of the Society's network of charity depends on the regular and rapid exchange of news and information. Such communication broadens the members' horizon and enhances the interest of members in the experiences and challenges of their brothers and sisters throughout the world. The Vincentian response to communication is a willingness to learn and a desire to help.

### What to expect as a new member

Typically a Conference has between 8 and 10 members, and works within a particular parish (called a Parish Conference) or is focused on a specific activity (called a Special Works Conference).

Usually the Conference meets once a week, discusses cases and then members go on their visits in pairs. For most Conferences, the main source of funding is the box collection which is carried out after each Mass. Members take turns in carrying out this collection. Many Conferences also organise events to raise funds.

Like anything new, the first few months of membership can be challenging-visiting people in need, hearing their stories and not quite knowing what to do and how to help out. You may even question your decision to join the SSVP. Most new members experience this at some stage; it passes and there are lots of supports to get you through it.

# **Our personal encounters with the poor**

## **Prayer before personal encounters or visits**

Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for the peace and joy of Christ.

## **Reverence for the poor**

Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God's image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ. Members observe the utmost confidentiality (this should not be confused with secrecy, we can talk about our work, but not mention names) in any type of support.

## **Empathy**

Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, the heart of the Vincentian should beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve. Rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.

## **Promotion of self-sufficiency**

Vincentians endeavour to help the poor to help themselves wherever possible, and to be aware that they can forge their own destinies and that of the local community.

## **Concern for deeper needs and spirituality**

Vincentians are sincerely concerned with their deeper needs and the spiritual wellbeing of those that they help, always observing a profound respect for their conscience and the faith that they believe in, listening and understanding with their hearts, beyond both words and appearances.

## **Gratitude for those we visit**

Vincentians never forget the blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognise that the fruit of their labours springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the poor they serve.

# Protection of Vulnerable Groups

The Society of St Vincent de Paul fully embraces the need to protect the people that we are working with, whether they be children or vulnerable adults. We are also keenly aware of the need to protect our members. For example, it is imperative that members never visit alone, but always in pairs.

All members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul are expected to register as a member of the Protection of Vulnerable Group scheme. This is administered through the Church. On joining a Conference, your President should speak to the Parish Co-ordinator and they will take you through the process.

You will also be expected to attend an awareness session on the topic which will be arranged through the Diocese. It is vital that these two procedures are undertaken to ensure the protection of the vulnerable people that we work with and for our members.

*All components of the Catholic Church in Scotland, especially those in positions of leadership and responsibility, value the lives, wholeness, safety and well-being of each individual person within God's purpose for everyone. We seek to uphold the highest safeguarding standards in our relationships with people of all ages who are involved in whatever capacity with the Church and its organisations.*

*And therefore, as a Church community, we accept that it is the responsibility of all of us - ordained, professed, employed and voluntary members - to work together to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse or harm.*

**In God's Image: Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Scotland**

**2018**



## Your Conference

The Conference is the basic unit of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Most conferences are engaged in visiting people in their homes, but many also undertake special work such as visiting nursing homes, prisons, hospitals, holidays for young and old, social groups for people with disabilities and drop in centres for the poor and homeless.

Conferences are responsible for their own work but are linked to the rest of the SSVP through Group Councils (with around 10 conferences) and Diocesan Councils (which co-ordinate the Group Councils and Conferences). Conferences are led by a President, Secretary and Treasurer.

**The President** chairs meetings, motivates members, organises, develops and directs the work of the Conference. The Conference President should ensure that any correspondence is shared. A new President is elected for a max of 6 years. If a President steps down before their term is over, an election should be held as normal. Conference Presidents will also represent the Conference in the local group, which is usually made up of around 10 Conferences. They will elect a Group President, who will represent the group on Diocesan Councils. Diocesan Presidents in turn represent their Diocese on the Council of Scotland.

**The Secretary** keeps the minutes and other records. Usually the Secretary will be the main point of correspondence for Conferences.

**The Treasurer** is the Conference's 'purse - keeper.' They keep an accurate record of money coming in and going out, see that bills are properly checked and paid, ensure that Dues are paid to the Council of Scotland and provide full financial information to members in a spirit of transparency, openness and accountability. Dues are paid to the Council of Scotland and your own Diocesan Council on a quarterly basis. At a national level, these dues cover the cost of running the National Office and

its small staff team. National Office supports the National function of the Society and is available to offer guidance to Conferences. Diocesan Dues are used to fund Diocesan Council activities and to fund any events that may happen, such as Masses.

## **A role for everyone**

Many Conferences are also creating new roles that enable people to develop and build on their own areas of interest. For example, one member may have a special responsibility for liaising with schools, or for social justice. A member could also take responsibility for membership, recruiting, induction, training etc.

## **Being part of the community**

Our job is to make sure that all the people in the local area, those in need, other voluntary and statutory organisation and the general public, understand clearly what the SSVP is trying to do and know how to contact us. Through networking and promoting our works we can ensure that people in need know how to contact us and can access the help they need when it is needed

ARTICLE 14: At least twice each year, Conferences and Councils celebrate together liturgical ceremonies, particularly Vincentian ceremonies, throughout the year, endeavouring to maintain a spirit of profound moral and material friendship among the members.

**Manual & Rule SSVP Scotland Part 3: 6**

## Conference Meeting essentials

- a)** Opening and closing prayers, formal and spontaneous. (A prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and a prayer for those whose suffering they wish to share are obligatory). Society prayer cards are available from the National Office.
- b)** A spiritual reading or meditation, on which members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith and deepening their mutual understanding. This is a very important part of the meeting.
- c)** Reading and approval of the Minutes of the previous meeting, according to the notes taken by the Secretary on the matters discussed and agreed at each meeting.
- d)** Reading and approval of the financial report (guidance on how to keep control of your finances are available from National Office) are presented by the Treasurer, including the amounts of available funds and expenses.
- e)** Reports on the tasks completed or visits made by the members since the previous meeting to families and friends in need and also discussion of ways to improve the Conference's service.
- f)** Allocation of the visits and other tasks entrusted to each member for the following week by the President, after consultation with the Conference. Visits must be made in pairs.
- g)** A secret collection.
- h)** Review of any correspondence.
- i)** Whenever possible, the inclusion of training periods for members and communication of information about all levels of the Society.

# Vincentian Spirituality and Vocation

## The journey together toward holiness

- 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.
- Attending the meeting of the Conference or Council, where shared fraternal spirituality is a source of inspiration.
- Transforming their concern into action and their compassion into practical and effective love.

## Prayer in Union with Christ

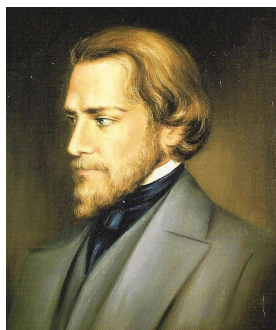
- In every Conference throughout the world and in their personal lives, Vincentians raise their prayers to God, united with the prayer of Christ, on behalf of one another and their masters the poor, whose suffering they wish to share.

## The Spirituality of our Founder Frederic Ozanam

### Frederic Ozanam;

- Sought to renew faith, among all people, in Christ and in the civilising effect of the teachings of the Church through all time.
- Envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world.
- Attained holiness as a layman through living the Gospel fully in all aspects of his life.
- Had a passion for truth, democracy and education.

***"Charity is concerned with giving others what belongs to me;  
Justice is concerned with giving others what belongs to them."***



## The Man behind the Society: Blessed Frederic Ozanam 1813 -1853

Frederic's family was an upper middle class Catholic family – his father was a doctor and his mother was an heiress. He was the fifth born of 14 children, but he was one of only four to survive early childhood, with 10 of his siblings dying from disease at a young age.

Frederic was a very intelligent young man and decided to study Law at Sorbonne University. People at Sorbonne were very anti-Christian, and there were not many other Catholic students. Many students – and even teachers – at the university attacked the religious beliefs of Frederic and his fellow Christians, claiming that the Church had become irrelevant and was not doing anything to help the many poor and suffering people of France. Frederic, who was seen as a natural leader of his fellow Catholic students, decided to take action, and he started a Conference of Charity with a few other students.

Guided by a middle-aged journalist named Emmanuel Bailly, the Conference members were driven by a deep desire to build their faith, and they decided to go out and become servants of the poor, just as Jesus Christ had done. The group followed the example of St Vincent – the French saint who had done so much work to help the poor 200 years earlier – and named their Conference 'the Society of St Vincent de Paul'. The group was also inspired by a young Daughter of Charity, Rosalie Rendu, and the young men worked closely with her to help the poor people of Paris. As well as becoming a lawyer, Frederic was also a teacher and a scholar. He wrote many essays and journal articles on a whole range of subjects, and was appointed Lecturer in Foreign Literature at the University of Lyon. Much of Frederic's work was based on his passion for social justice,

and he argued for better social conditions, higher moral standards and the restoration of the Catholic faith in France.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1841, Frederic married a woman named Amelie Soulacroix, who in 1845 gave birth to their daughter Marie. Frederic was a sick man his whole life, and was forced to resign from his job in 1852. He died in September 1853, at the age of 40.



## **Woman with Experience: Blessed Rosalie Rendu**

**1786 -1856**

Jeanne Marie Rendu (later called Sister Rosalie Rendu) was the oldest of four girls in her family. Her parents were simple-living but well respected people who lived in the mountains. When Jeanne was only three years old, the French Revolution broke out in France. At this time, many faithful priests were forced to flee because people wanted to hurt them, and the Rendu family home became a refuge for many of these priests.

Following the death of her father and baby sister, Jeanne helped her mother to look after the family. Jeanne's mother sent her to a boarding school so she could get a good education. During her two years there, Jeanne would walk around the town, and one day she discovered a hospital where the Daughters of Charity cared for the sick. Her mother gave her permission to spend some time at the hospital, and Jeanne soon felt called by God to become a Daughter of Charity.

When she was nearly 17 years old, Jeanne entered the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity and received the name Rosalie. She took vows to serve God and the poor, and spent over 50 years living out those vows. She opened a free clinic, a pharmacy, a school, an orphanage, a childcare centre, a home for the elderly and a youth club for young workers. She became known as the "good mother of all", and helped Frederic Ozanam and his friends to do good works, which is how the St Vincent de Paul Society started.

As well as assisting the poor in the streets and in their homes, Sister Rosalie showed great courage and leadership during the bloody uprisings that took place in France in 1830 and 1848. During the battles, Sister Rosalie would climb up on the barricades – risking her life – to help wounded soldiers, regardless of which side they were fighting on.

Although her health was always fragile, Sister Rosalie never rested; she preferred to keep serving the poor, and managed to overcome fatigue and illness. Eventually, however, her huge workload – combined with her age and increased frailty – broke her resistance, and she became progressively blind during the last two years of her life.



# The Beginnings of the Society

Frederic Ozanam was a devoted Catholic, but he was in the minority at Sorbonne University, where he studied law. Because of the strong anti-Christian sentiment within the University, many Catholic students would not openly admit to their faith. A professor named Jouffrey argued that Christianity was irrational, and that it was the enemy of scientific inquiry and human liberty. Frederic wrote two letters to the professor to disprove the professor's arguments. He wrote a third letter, which was signed by nine other students. Jouffrey was forced to read the letter in public and promise to never again attack the religious beliefs of students.

Following this incident, Frederic was seen as a natural leader of the Catholic students at the University. He was driven by a deep desire to find a way to help build the faith of his peers. One day, Frederic was challenged by a group of Socialist students who went by the name of Saint Simonians. The students argued that:

**“Christianity is now outworn and defunct. It may have been useful in the past, but what use is it today? Show us your works, and then we might believe!”**

These claims troubled Frederic greatly, and drove him to start a ‘Conference of Charity’ with a few friends.



The group consisted of:

Frederic Ozanam, aged 19; Joseph Emmanuel Bailly, 42;  
Francoise Lallier, 20; Paul Lemanche, 23; Felix Clave, 22;  
Auguste Le Tallandier, 22; Jules Devaux, 22.

Under the guidance of Bailly, who was the founder of an influential Catholic newspaper, the students met weekly – starting in May 1833 – and committed themselves to helping the poor people of Paris.

Inspired and assisted by Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, the students visited poor people in their homes, bringing food and other necessities. Frederic had a strong belief that this method of serving the poor was much better than what he called “ostentatious philanthropy” (the bold, flashy giving of money without paying much attention to the people who were actually in need of the help).

The Conference adopted the name “The Society of St Vincent de Paul” because they were inspired by Saint Vincent, who had devoted himself to helping the poor people of France about 200 years earlier. Sister Rosalie taught Frederic and his friends to see the face of God in the poor people who they visited. In this way, the Conference members recognised the importance of providing company and friendship as well as material assistance to people in need – those they visited were not just physically poor, but emotionally and spiritually poor as well.

Frederic came to realise that, in serving the poor, charity was not enough, and he began calling for social reform and justice for the working classes. The Society of St Vincent de Paul began to focus not just on helping people through their immediate poverty, but also on the changing laws and structures that continued to create poverty and disadvantage. Frederic said: ***“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 a long term improvement.”***

As the student members of the Conference completed their studies, they started up Conferences in other provinces of France. Within two years of the first Conference meeting, there were over 100 members of the Society. Soon, the Society spread beyond the borders of France, and there was a Conference in Rome, Italy, by 1842. The SSVP started in Scotland in 1845 in St Patrick's Church, Cowgate, Edinburgh.

By the time of Frederic's death in 1853, the Society was thriving in France and had spread throughout the world, fulfilling Frederic's desire to “embrace the whole world in a network of charity”. Today, the Society of St Vincent de Paul is present in 150 countries, with 49,500 Conferences and over 950,000 members.

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Registered Company Number SC347803    Registered Charity SC006326  
113 West Regent Street, Glasgow, G2 2RU  
Tel. No: 0141 226 8833    Email: [admin@ssvpScotland.com](mailto:admin@ssvpScotland.com)  
Web: [www.ssvpScotland.com](http://www.ssvpScotland.com)

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