

Induction Manual

For New SSVP members



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

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.**

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”

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.

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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

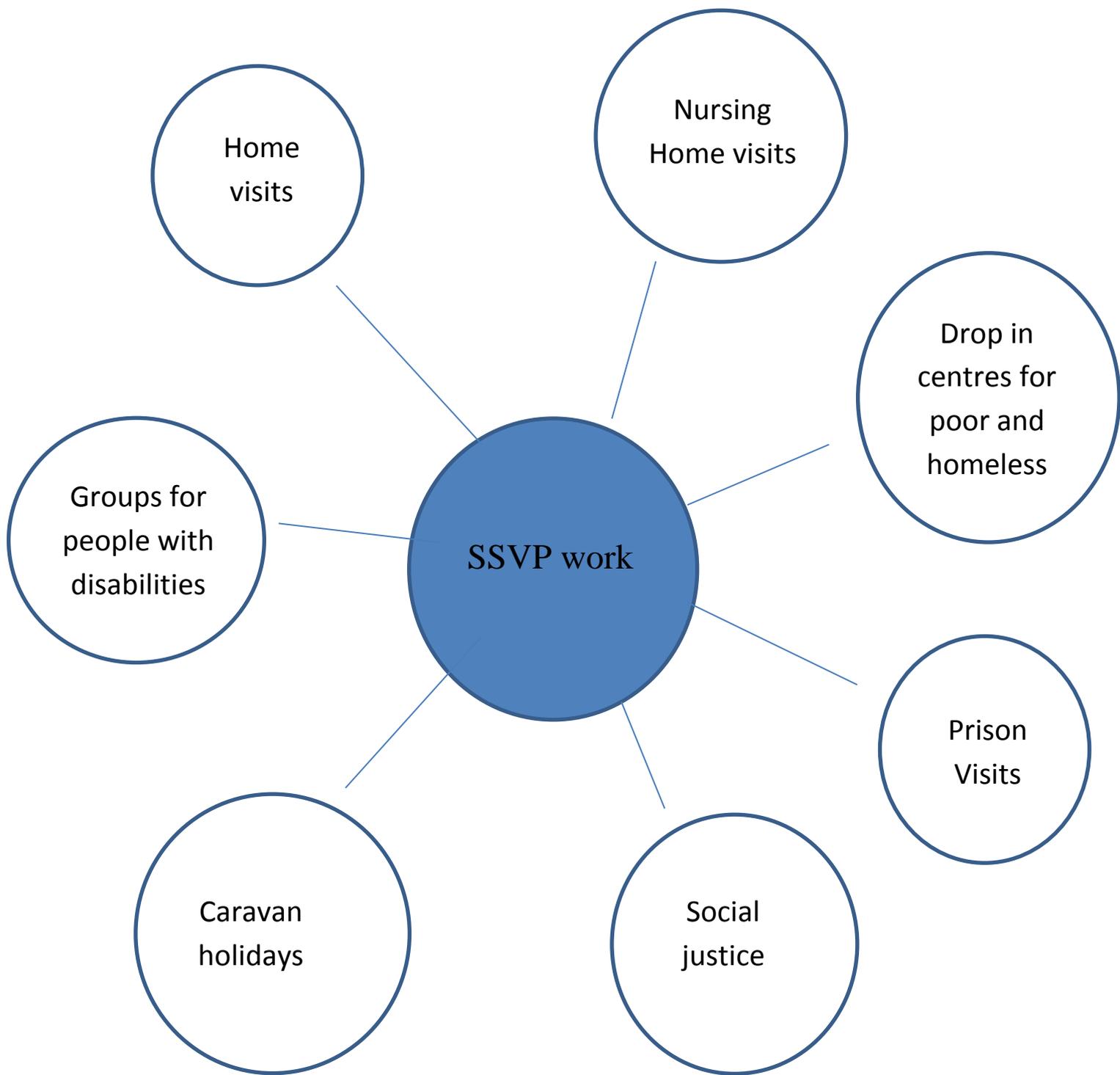
The SSVP serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender or political opinions.

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 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

SSVP Organisational Chart

International Council General (CGI)

Representing around 750,000 members from 145 countries

Europe Group 1 (Western European countries)

National Council of Scotland (COS)

Representing 2000 members in 7 Dioceses

National Office, Glasgow (mainly administrative/financial, but also youth development)

Arch/diocesan Councils (Aberdeen, Dunkeld, Glasgow, St Andrew's & Edinburgh, Galloway, Motherwell, Paisley)

Groups- grouping of Conferences (usually around 10) based on geographical area

Parish Conferences

Special works Conferences

University Conferences

School groups

Becoming a

full member

of the Society of St Vincent de Paul

Checklist for becoming a member

1. Meet with existing conference or members of new conference(with guidance)
2. Complete an application form
3. Complete Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults procedure(through your Parish)
4. Inform SSVP National Office of your membership(usually Conference president)
5. Get 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 marginalized. 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 higher 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;

- In its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.
- A vision of the civilization 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 civilization 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

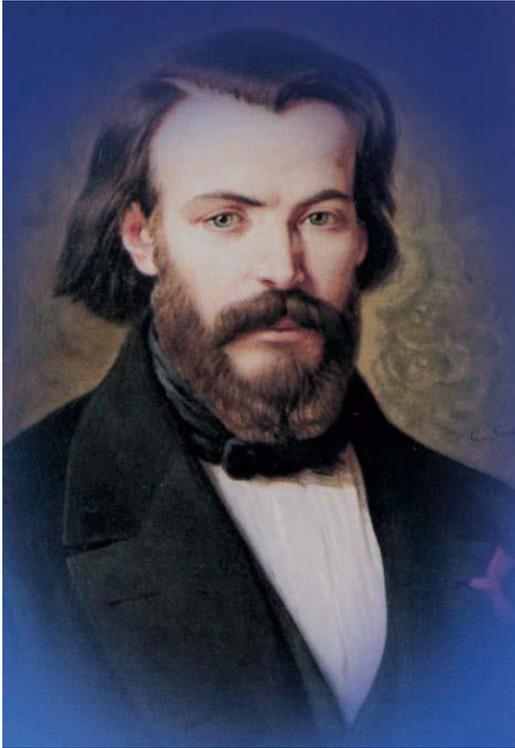
The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations. The practical Vincentian approach to social justice. The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them 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 question which is agitating the world today is a social one. It is a struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much. It is a violent clash of opulence and poverty, which is shaking the ground under our feet. Our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between these two camps in order to accomplish, by love, what justice alone cannot do.”

Frederic Ozanam, 1840

**What the Society of St Vincent
de Paul expects from you**



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. All members of the SSVP 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. The spirit of poverty and encouragement. Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer.

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 or is focused on a specific activity (this is usually termed 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 their provision of material and any other 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 forget 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 Children and Vulnerable Adults

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 Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults 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.

"The Catholic Church in Scotland is concerned with the lives, safety, wholeness and well-being of each individual person within God's purpose for everyone. It seeks to safeguard the welfare of people of all ages who are involved in whatever capacity with the Church and its organisations. As a Church community, we accept that it is the responsibility of all of us, ordained, professed, paid and voluntary members, to work together to prevent the physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect of children, young people and vulnerable adults."

'Awareness and Safety in our Catholic Communities 2007'

For further information, visit <http://www.scottishcatholicsafeguarding.org.uk>

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 every 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 many Conferences.

The Treasurer is the Conference's 'purse- keeper.' They keep an accurate record of money coming in and going out, sees that bills are properly checked and paid, ensures that Dues* are paid to the Council of Scotland and provides 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 group. National Office is there to provide administrative support to the SSVP and to assist Conferences. Diocesan Dues are used to fund Diocesan Council activities and to fund any events, such as Masses that may happen

A role for everyone

Many Conferences are also creating new roles that enable people to develop and build on their own areas of interested. 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.

Full role descriptors for roles in the SSVP can be obtained from www.ssvpscotland.com or through National Office.

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 out services we can ensure that people in need know how to contact us and can access the help they need when it is needed

Conference Meeting essentials

A Conference meeting always includes the following:

- 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 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 in 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

- 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

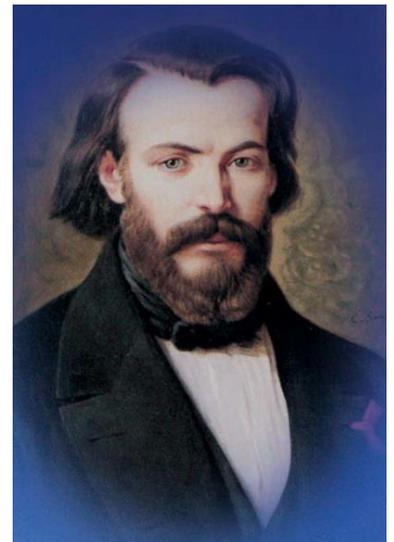
"Charity is concerned with giving others what belongs to me; Justice is concerned with giving others what belongs to them."

Blessed Frederic Ozanam, 1813 - 1853

Antoine Frederic Ozanam was born on 23 April 1813, in Milan where his parents, originally from the Lyons region of France, were temporarily established because of the Napoleonic Wars. His family was profoundly Christian and from his earliest years Frederic was taught the love of God and that Christ was to be found in the persons of all those carrying the heavy burden of suffering and social injustice.

After his studies at the Royal College of Lyons, he set out, at the wish of his parents rather than his own, to Paris to study Law, and was at once projected into the troubled society of that age. Scepticism was rife in the Sorbonne University, and Frederic found himself isolated and discouraged and writing to a friend in 1831 he says: "The false thought and corruption like a huge dead body, pervades Paris."

Through his friends, Frederic overcame much of the aversion he felt towards Paris in his early days at the Sorbonne, and he began to have great hopes for the future. He sought great consolation in his two loves, science and Catholicism: an unflinching certainty dominated his life - Christianity was the only cure for the ills of contemporary society.



Not content to work fifteen hours each day at his studies, to study foreign languages, to discover the secrets of other religions, he sought allies to share his views and these often spoke out boldly in the Sorbonne when false doctrine was propagated. He was always a living witness to the truth and realised the deep need for himself and his contemporaries to deepen their own faith through study and prayer.

With his companions he founded a Conference of History, a meeting open to everyone, even the unbelieving, for free discussion and for the defence of the Catholic faith. The history of the Church and the scientific and social implications of the Gospel were the basis of many of these lively discussions.

Often the young Catholics were jibed at: "What is the practical outcome of your doctrine? **Show us your Christian works!**" This led the seven young men to the ardent desire to put their faith into action-to evangelise not only by word, but by the constant practice of charity.

And so it came about that, one winter's day when they were discussing precisely this point, Ozanam, who had kept unusually silent during the discussion, suddenly cried out: "The blessing of the poor is the blessing of God. Let us go to the poor!" And immediately he set out to give away all the remaining fuel for his fire to an old down-and-out neighbour.

The work for the poor continued in a modest way, for the students were not themselves the richest of men. They asked Sister Rosalie, a Daughter of Charity working in Paris, for the names and addresses of needy people, and to these they brought a little bread and much religion.

All Ozanam's efforts for social justice, which rank him amongst the nineteenth century's greatest social champions, were done with the full approbation of the then Archbishop of Paris, Mgr. Affre, who was to die on the barricades of the Revolution of 1848.

A thinking man, Ozanam was also a man of action.

He wished for the establishment of true democracy through justice and charity, and he counted on the growing Society of St Vincent de Paul, founded from his Conference of History in 1833, to further his aim in every way possible. He gave himself most generously in his work for the University and for the Society, even though he was in poor health. At the end of 1852 he was advised to go to Italy for a complete rest. No cure resulted, however, and his strength continued to ebb away. This was a sadness to him, but in a short time he began to feel himself attracted towards Eternity-on his fortieth birthday he announced his fiat and abandoned himself completely to God's will.

Frederic Ozanam is buried in the Carmelite Crypt of the Institut Catholique de Paris-among the young students to whom he had given the very best of himself. **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”

The Spirituality of St. Vincent

Having been placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul by the founding members, members of the Society are inspired by his spirituality, manifest in his attitudes, his thoughts, his example and his words.



For Vincentians, the key aspects of St. Vincent's spirituality are:

- To love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms;
- To see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ;
- To share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ the Evangeliser and Servant of the poor;
- To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

St Vincent De Paul, 1581 - 1660

Vincent was born in Pouy, in the Landes of France in a little village now called Berceau de St Vincent (St Vincent's Cradle). He was the third of the six children of hardworking parents, and spent his younger years on the family farm tending the sheep. It was here that he acquired his love of quiet and recollection.

His intelligence won the admiration of the parish priest and caused his father to send him off to college, where he was an ardent student and soon conceived the idea of becoming a priest. He then set off to Toulouse for his studies for the priesthood: he was ordained in 1600, when he was just twenty years old. In 1610, after the assassination of Henry IV, he was granted the benefice of an abbey in the diocese of Saintes and could have made for himself an excellent career in the Church. However, after a serious spiritual crisis, he abdicated his rights over the abbey and decided to devote the rest of his life to the service of the poor.

In September, 1613, Vincent became the chaplain to the influential family of Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, landowner of large properties in the north of France. He exercised a great influence on the family, and his travels with them showed him the needs of a people starved spiritually and physically and served by an uneducated clergy. It was then that he realised that the evangelisation of rural France was a vital need, and this missionary passion remained with him for the rest of his life.

After a while he felt his service with the de Gondi family too much of a luxury, and so once again became a parish priest, this time in the parish of Chaillon-les-Dombes a village morally abandoned, with a deserted church, disinherited poor and a Protestant richer class. Together with a curate, his care of the parish made it flourish and it was here that he founded a Society of Charity to serve the poor.

But the de Gondi family missed him, and he was forced unwillingly to return to Paris to their service. At this point de Gondi appointed him as chaplain to the galley slaves, and with his customary energy he began to improve their appalling physical and moral condition. He insisted on the value of witness throughout all his works. 1625 was a vital year to him, for during it he founded the Congregation of the Mission (the Lazarists or Vincentians), and began a partnership of charity with Louise de Marillac.

Soon the "Dames de la Charite" had been set up, at first with a group of well-bred ladies: under Louise de Marillac they soon became Vincent's hands for work and his witnesses in the love of Christ. In 1633, to ensure their permanence, they were officially consecrated as the Daughters of Charity, vowing their entire lives to those who suffered. Up to his eightieth year he remained active and the work continued to expand. He died in September 1660, worn out from a life of unbelievable activity of mind and body. In 1729 he was beatified and his canonisation followed in 1737. In 1883 Frederic Ozanam was to place the Society he had founded under the patronage of St Vincent de Paul, and in 1885 Pope Leo XIII proclaimed St Vincent the patron of all works of charity. His feast is now celebrated on the anniversary of his death, September 27th. St Vincent de Paul played what can only be described as a providential role in the history of France and, through his works, in the history of the world.

To read about other important figures in the history of the SSVP such as Louise de Marillac and Blessed Rosalie Rendu, visit www.ssvpscotland.com

Notes

Please use the following pages for any ideas, questions or points of reflection that you may have.



**Society of
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Scotland**

SSVP Contacts

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