



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

## **MANUAL & RULE**

**SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL  
(SCOTLAND)**



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## FOREWORD

The National Council firmly believes that to attract new members to our Society we should adapt to the times, hence we now have an updated Scottish Manual.

This 'user friendly' edition comprises the Manual and Rule of the Society.

The study of these booklets is necessary if members are to become imbued with the true spirit of Ozanam and his companions. It is this spirit which ought to permeate our Society as we come to recognise the face of Christ in each and every one with whom we come into contact, leading us to realise that, in this world of ours, people are all that really matter.

It is our hope that every member will acquire his or her own copies and use them in developing their Vincentian Vocation at Conference Meetings and in personal reflection.

The National Council of Scotland is grateful to the team which worked tirelessly in producing these booklets, as it is to the memory of all those involved in compiling previous Scottish Manuals.

**“You have the poor with you always...” Matthew 26:11**

National Council of Scotland April 2013

## GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS

These guidelines will be well known and practised by most of our members, but with the harsh reality of life today it can do no harm to bring them to your attention. They are not exhaustive but supplement common sense and prudence, and seek to make you more aware of YOUR vulnerability as well as that of the people YOU visit.

- **Always visit in twos or more.**
- **Where necessary seek permission from Nurses/Wardens etc. before approaching residents in hospitals/homes/refuges etc.**
- **Keep the Conference fully informed of all that transpires at and during the visit.**
- **Advise the Conference of any and all approaches made to you between visits.**
- **Ensure that each member engaged in person to person contact with people in need goes through the Disclosure Scotland process and current Church procedure relating to the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults. Provide all members with the Church's official guidance about dealing with Protection issues.**



2<sup>nd</sup> April 2013

Dear members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul,

I am delighted to write this letter of support to you on the occasion of the publication of the new manual of the Society, which has been updated to reflect the change in SSVP status to a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Your apostolate as Members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul is one of the great hidden treasures of the Catholic Church in Scotland. Since 1845 you have been bringing the compassion of Christ to the poor and vulnerable in a way which has changed countless lives for the better. It is too rarely that the Church in Scotland says thank you for your work and fidelity.

Your special vocation is one which has never been more needed in the Church. The twin needs of our society are formation and compassion and you, as members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, are uniquely placed to bear the good news to those who need to hear it and experience it in their lives.

All of the bishops join me in expressing their support and admiration for your work, and we ask you to continue with ever greater fidelity your great apostolate of care in our parishes and dioceses.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ Philip Tartaglia  
Archbishop of Glasgow  
*President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland*

## **Introduction**

The Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) appeared for the first time in 1845. Since then it has been updated frequently to suit changing times and conditions.

**When referring to the rule, the following must always be borne in mind as it encompasses the whole spirit of the rule.**

The object of the Manual is to record decisions arrived at as a result of experience and thus to forestall future discussions and acquaint all interested parties with our past history, our present position and our future hopes. But what it is chiefly aimed at is to set out for the benefit of members the spirit, aims and trends of the Society which they have joined.

The spirit of the Society is present in every page of the Manual; it is the principle of its life, its most intimate and most precious element. If we forget it or depart from it, the work degenerates and comes to an end. If we follow it we realise the aims which the founders assigned to the Society.

### **Mission Statement**

*"As committed 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**

## Summary

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is an international organisation of Catholic lay people, men and women, who practice Christianity by helping those in need on a person to person basis.

The Society was founded in the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1833 by Frederic Ozanam. He was a twenty year old student challenged to prove the practical value of his Christian beliefs. With his friends he formed a small group who set about helping the oppressed and the poor. The essence of the Society is personal service and commitment.

The Society is named after St Vincent de Paul who lived from 1581 to 1660 and whose life was devoted to helping the underprivileged. He is the patron of Christian charity and, as such, he is a fitting patron for our Society.

The aim of the Society is to provide a means whereby members can practice Christianity by loving their neighbours in the person of the needy.

Vincentians show this love, compassion and understanding by giving of themselves - their concern, their friendship, their time, their talents - to help people, regardless of creed, colour or political belief.

Help is not confined to the needy close at hand. It may be given to persons overseas through the agency of fellow Vincentians on the spot. Thus the help is never impersonal. Help may be in the form of counselling, moral support, relief from loneliness, or in referring people to other agencies or specialist organisations. It will vary according to the resources of the members and should be adapted to local requirements and changing conditions. The type of help is not restricted, provided the element of personal involvement of the member is present.

Although the basic work is helping people individually, the Society encourages self-help projects and sponsors group or community special works.

In helping others, Vincentians do not attempt to preach or convert, nor do they attach any condition to their aid. Great care is taken to preserve the dignity of the person helped. There should be no trace of a patronising attitude.

The Society co-operates with other organisations, religious and secular, to achieve its aims. It is ecumenical. The Society is concerned not only with relieving need, but also with redressing the situations that caused the need in the first place. If need results from injustice, the Society is concerned that justice shall be achieved.



## **The History of the SSVP in Scotland**

The SSVP in Scotland is organised geographically in line with the Catholic Dioceses. The history is presented in the same way.

### **St. Andrews and Edinburgh**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul came to Scotland in 1845 only twelve years after the very first Conference was founded by Frederic Ozanam in Paris. The 1840s in Scotland were years of the Irish immigrants and "hungry forties", with a crying need for those in better circumstances to help poor, unjustly-treated and often sick people trying to eke out a living in Scotland. The Holy Guild of St Joseph had been founded by Bishop James Gillis and had 300 members by 1845. It was from this group that the first Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul was founded. It met on 25 May 1845, in the rooms of the Guild of St Joseph at 7 Hunter Square, Edinburgh.

Each member had to promise to receive the sacraments regularly and to recite every night the Litany of Loretto, one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and the Prayer of St Vincent de Paul. Their main task was to visit the homes of the poor and sick, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, pray at their deathbeds and follow their remains to the cemetery. It was this more than anything else which impressed the non-Catholics in the city. The members of the Society gave great edification by their simple piety and great faith. They also found time to instruct children and adults in the faith and to prepare them for the reception of first communion.

In the parishes of St Mary's and St Patrick's, half the collection taken up at the doors of the churches was given to the Conference. There were soon fifteen honorary members and one aspirant preparing for a month to be taken into the Conference. Their ideals were for a night shelter, the supervision of apprentices and an orphanage. Soon, however, the work was becoming too much to cope with, especially financially. Other Conferences began to appear with the springing up of new parishes. More immigrants were arriving and the city was becoming unhealthier - there was so very much to do.

In the years 1850 to 1867 the Society continued to grow. A new Conference was founded and met in the new clergy house of St Patrick, Brown Square, and a Council of Direction was set up to monitor the work of both city Conferences. In 1855, a new Conference was founded in the old St Cuthbert's, later moved to Lauriston. In Edinburgh an apprentices' association was founded in 1854 and in 1858 an orphanage was founded in South Bank, Canongate. In 1889 a home for working boys was opened in Lauriston: these

were to become less necessary in years to come, thankfully, with new social trends.

By 1900 there were 13 Conferences in the Archdiocese – 6 in Edinburgh, plus Musselburgh, Broxburn, Dunfermline, Stirling, Falkirk, Denny and Kilsyth. The Society spread gradually reaching 27 Conferences by the end of the Second World War. As new parishes were established a further 38 Conferences were established by 1989. Since 1990 there have been only 6 new Conferences started and the average age of our members has risen sharply.

In the last fifty years we have set up special projects to tackle problems which persist despite the Welfare State. We pioneered the recycling of furniture as early as 1962 and are still actively involved through our project in Fife plus partnerships with other agencies in Edinburgh and Stirlingshire. Since the late 1980's we have provided a soup kitchen in Edinburgh in cooperation with the Jericho Benedictines. For almost thirty years, thanks to the joint efforts of members throughout the Archdiocese, we have offered families Caravan holidays in East Lothian and Fife. Conferences now recognise that loneliness, loss of mobility and isolation from family members affect people regardless of their financial circumstances. Social events like Christmas parties and outings for older people in our communities supplement our visiting. We care for people's spiritual needs by transporting people to our special Masses.

The Society has succeeded in the last forty years by attracting more and more women. Recruitment of youth has been patchy. Youth Conferences have tended to do excellent work for a few years and then decline as members became adults. Our school Conference at St Modan's, Stirling has run a very popular lunch club for senior citizens for 25 years until the relocation of the school now makes that project impractical. Some Conferences are recruiting a few teenagers and the future of the Society depends on recovering the youthful energy of our founders, who were in their early twenties.

## **Glasgow**

The Society was founded on 23 August 1848, in Glasgow in St Andrew's Cathedral with the approval of Bishop Murdoch, Vicar Apostolic for the West of Scotland and under the direction of Father William Gordon. The needs of the growing city, packed with Irish immigrants and full of poverty and need and disease were immense. The first president was John Burns Bryson, a solicitor who had joined the Society in Edinburgh the previous year; the treasurer was Hugh Margey of Great Clyde Street; the vice-president was David Rodgers of Anderston and the secretary, John Trainer of Clyde Terrace.

In the first 10 years, 13 additional Conferences were established; there were 131 members with upwards of 6,000 poor people as their “masters”.

In 1887/88 in conjunction with a Marist Brother Walfrid, the Society’s food kitchens for the poor of the East End were supported by the formation of Celtic Football Club. Throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the work in Glasgow expanded - as well as the visitation of the poor in their homes other works were quickly to spring up according to the needs of Glasgow and the West of Scotland. It was not only the practical needs of the poor that the Society worked to alleviate - the Society also became well known for the way that we served those who passed away. The burying of the dead if they could not afford a funeral and the reciting of the Rosary were just some of the ways that dignity was shown to the deceased. Some Conferences to the present day are still involved in the funerals of their parishioners.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Society expanded both in membership and in its works. Prior to the implementation of the Welfare State after the Second World War the Society strived to do its best to assist those who came for help. In 1948 the Archdiocese of Glasgow was split into 3 parts; Glasgow, Motherwell and Paisley.

After this separation in Glasgow with the building of new estates and the removal of the previous tenements there was an increase in the number of parishes which in turn increased the number of the Conferences throughout the early post-war period. The works of the Society developed throughout this period and there was a change away from homes for boys etc which had been established in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to new works by the early 1970’s such as the Ozanam Centre.

From the 1970’s to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was much change within the Society in Glasgow. With the change in the Rule female members were allowed to join and over the years the numbers increased and, with this, the type of work carried out has changed. In 1997 members of the Archdiocese attended the beatification ceremony in Paris by Pope John Paul II where Frederic Ozanam was declared Blessed.

By the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there were a number of changes taking place within the Archdiocese. The Furniture Project ceased after it was decided that this project had run its course. The shop which had been opened at the same time as the Furniture Project continued. The Ozanam Centre, which has moved now on a number of occasions to new premises, has changed from its initial work of providing clothing to homeless men to doing the same for women also and operating a Sunday lunch club. In 2001 the Louise Project

was formed to work with women involved in prostitution and this has continued and developed throughout the intervening years. A caravan project has also been started to provide free holidays in Saltcoats - again another successful project. The newest Project is the Rendu Group which has been developed to learn sign language mainly to assist the Catholic deaf community at Mass - particularly the weekly Archdiocesan Mass for the Deaf. As like all our other projects the Rendu Group has developed and the members have received accredited training for British Sign Language.

Also at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century an Ozanam Talk and Week have been instituted to promote both the life and cause of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the works of the Society.

## **Motherwell**

The first Conference was established at St. Margaret's, Airdrie on 30/07/1854, and a further 8 Conferences were formed by 1890. There were no further Conferences formed between 1890 and 1899.

There were 18 Conferences formed between 1900 and 1935, and another 10 Conferences formed between 1940 and 1949. A further 17 Conferences were formed between 1950 and 1959, and between 1960 and 1976 a further 17 Conferences were formed. The last Conference to be formed was St. John Ogilvie in Blantyre in 1980.

Our largest Legacy was left to Motherwell SSVP in 1992, for the Poor of the Diocese, by Fr. Lawrence Kenny, who was the Parish Priest of St. Edward's, Airdrie and he left the magnificent sum of £97,000. This Legacy helped the Society to purchase 3 Caravans at Port Seton, outside Edinburgh, and to purchase Vans for the Furniture Project, which has been going over 25 years. We trust that we used the Legacy wisely and have done as requested and helped the Poor of the Motherwell Diocese.

Jim Lynch started the Ozanam Clubs, with the first club opening in Viewpark in May 1989 and this was followed by Hamilton in 1991 and Carfin in 1992. Airdrie Club was opened in 1993 but closed in 2000. East Kilbride was opened in 1994 but closed in 2001, and Lanark opened in 1995. These Clubs do great work with Adults and Children with special needs, in addition to providing a welcome respite for their family/carers when the Clubs are in session.

The members of the Society in Motherwell are getting older every year and unless we find a way to attract new members, we will see a lot of Conferences closing.

## **Paisley**

In October 1948 Bishop Black established a Paisley Diocesan Central Council of St Vincent de Paul. Prior to this date Renfrewshire, as existed at that time, formed part of the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

The present Diocese of Paisley encompasses the areas of Inverclyde, Renfrew and East Renfrewshire District Councils.

The first Conferences were formed during 1853, being St Mirin's, Paisley and St Mary's, Greenock both of which have served continuously to this day. Further Conferences were formed throughout Barrhead, Greenock, Port Glasgow, Paisley, Renfrew, Johnstone and Neilston and by 1900 there were 10 Conferences existing.

The Society continued to grow during the first half of the 1900's and by 1948 the total number had reached 19, stretching from Gourock in the west through Greenock and as far as Clarkston. Conferences also sprung up in the villages of Bishopton, Houston, Howwood and Linwood. At present there are 37 active Conferences.

The first major undertaking by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Paisley was a concert attended by Bishop Black in February 1949.

The latter part of the 1900's saw massive growth in housing developments with new parishes being set up and new Conferences being formed. All the major towns saw new Conferences formed and Newton Mearns welcomed St Cadoc's to help in that area. During this period some Youth Conferences flourished for a period but have all now closed, mostly as the members joined the 'senior' Conference.

Paisley Diocese has 4 Special Works Conferences:

- Holy Spirit, Inverclyde, who support Jericho in their drug rehabilitation work;
- St Vincent's Hospice, Johnstone, who provide support for those who care for the terminally ill;

- Our Lady of the Wayside, Paisley, who run the Paisley Ozanam Centre to feed the homeless and distribute clothing;
- Rosalie Rendu, Paisley, who run the Paisley Ozanam Club for those with special needs.

St John the Baptist Conference, Port Glasgow held a 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary Mass of thanksgiving on Sunday 18 March 2007. The principal concelebrant was the Right Reverend Philip Tartaglia, Bishop of Paisley and a large number of former priests of the parish were present. St John's is also unique in having a ladies auxiliary group, formed in 1891. The group promote social functions and raise funds for the Conference.

Unfortunately, due to various circumstances a number of Conferences have closed over the years. Our most recent casualty is St Mungo's, Greenock where the parish has closed. Fortunately the members will join with other local Conferences.

## **Aberdeen**

The SSVP started in Aberdeen with the setting up of St Mary's Cathedral Conference on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1914, followed a few days later by St. Peter's Church Conference. The first meeting place of the St. Mary's Conference was a small room in the Cathedral, later converted into the ladies toilets. We were then moved into the very small works sacristy for a number of years. Finally, at the suggestion of Fr. Chalmers, we gratefully moved into the large basement of the Chapel House.

The Society moved fairly slowly through this diocese and on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1935 St. Mary's in Inverness at long last opened their Conference, followed by St. Joseph's in Aberdeen on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1938. In 1955 a Conference was raised in the Sacred Heart Church, Torry and named after Blessed John Ogilvie. The President at that time was Albert Mc Dermott, Vice President Charles Blackhall, Secretary Patrick Harrington and Treasurer Albert Prest. Records for 1966 show Fr. John McCabe as Spiritual Director.

An interesting fact emerged from the notes found in the Our Lady of Aberdeen's accounts for the years 1967 to 1971. It appears that Aberdeen's annual returns were sent to the Superior Council, Brandon Street, Edinburgh in those days, the records also show that Mr. John Harkins was the very popular Conference President from 1985 until his death a few years ago.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1980 a Conference was opened in St Ninian's Church Inverness, followed by the opening of St. Sylvester's Conference in Elgin on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1982. Ten years later another two Conferences were raised, St Joachim's in Wick on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1990 and one day later St. Anne's Conference in Thurso. These two Conferences are now closed. In September 1999 St. Mary's Conference in Nairn was opened.

Records for the year 1955 show us that the Spiritual Director of the Cathedral Conference was Rev Gordon Robson, and in 1982 the Director was Canon John Symon. The President was James Breslin, Treasurer Lewis Mackie while two of our longest serving members Sandy Main and Jack Finnie, who celebrates 50 years in the SSVP this year, were also in the Conference at this time. James Breslin was followed by Douglas Cruickshank, who was also the Diocesan President. In 1983 Eve Murray became President of St. Mary's Aberdeen.

In 1966 John McCabe was the spiritual Director in the Blessed John Ogilvie Conference. Unfortunately this Conference is now closed and there is no further record of it.

On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2001 the Aberdeen Diocesan Council were delighted to welcome our Scottish National Council President Ian McTurk to our Quarterly meeting in St. Peter's Church. Our Spiritual Director of the time was Canon Andrew Mann. In 2002 the Holy Family Conference closed with the resignation of the three members. It was restarted two months later with new Conference members led by Anne Sharkey. In the year 2006 St Peter's Conference closed due to the ill health of its President Patrick Conway and the death of the Treasurer Dennis Moloney, both long serving members of the SSVP. It re-opened last year and is now a strong Conference with seven members.

## **Argyll and the Isles**

The first Conference to open in Argyll and the Isles was St Mary's, Rothesay on 20 November 1864, which is sadly now closed. It wasn't until 55 years later that St Kieran's Campbeltown opened on 06 July 1919. Another 66 years later and St John & St Mary's, Caol opened. The last conference to open was St Columba's Cathedral, Oban on 1 December 1993. All three Conferences are still flourishing and the Diocese is also actively involved in an expanding Furniture Project.

## **Dunkeld**

Within 30 years of the foundation of the Society in the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1833 a new Conference was formed in Perth at St. John the Baptist Church, to serve the poor within the City of Perth. This Conference was founded on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1861 and became Aggregated within the Society on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1861. The Conference still flourishes today and plans to celebrate its 150 years in existence are well advanced.

The work of the Society quickly spread within the Diocese and the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1863 saw the founding of the next Conference at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Dundee with Aggregation granted on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1863. Sadly this Conference ceased to exist early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to the age and illness of existing members and the failure to recruit new members. Four years went by before the next Conference was formed at St. Mary Our Lady of Victories Church, Dundee on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1867. For some unknown reason Aggregation was not granted until 8<sup>th</sup> June 1874, almost seven years later.

Following a gap of over twenty years a new Conference was formed at the Immaculate Conception Church, Dundee on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1889 with Aggregation granted on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1890. Two years later the fourth Conference to be formed within the City of Dundee was founded on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1891 at St. Patrick's Church with Aggregation granted on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1891. Sadly this Conference too has folded in recent years through lack of members.

The first Conference to be formed outwith Perth and Dundee Cities was at St. Mungo's Church, Alloa. This was founded on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1896 with Aggregation granted on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1896. There then followed a gap of over ten years before the next Conference was formed at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, Broughty Ferry, on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1909 with Aggregation granted on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1910. During the years 1929 to 1933 three further Conferences were formed. The first of these was at St. Peter and Paul's Church, Dundee on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1929 with Aggregation granted on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1930. This was followed by the formation of a Conference at St. Serf's Church, High Valleyfield on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1932 with the granting of Aggregation on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1932. St. Francis Church Conference, Dundee was formed on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1933 with Aggregation granted on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1933.

The only Conference to be formed during the 1940's was at St. John Mary Vianney Church, Alva on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1946 with Aggregation granted on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1946. The start of the 1950's saw the formation of a Conference at



Holy Family Church, Dunblane on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1950 with Aggregation granted on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1951.

The post war years saw a rapid increase in the number of Conferences formed throughout the Diocese. With the splitting of many of the older parishes and the building of Catholic Churches within the Housing Estates created by the building of Social housing the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's and 1980's a total of fifteen new Conferences were formed between 1951 and 1987. These additional Conferences were formed in Blairgowrie, Dundee, Tullibody, Perth, Montrose and Arbroath.

The start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the formation of the first Youth Conference at Dundee University. This Conference was formed in 2004 and was granted Aggregation in December 2006. The members of this Conference are available mainly during term time but those who reside locally continue their involvement within the Conference throughout the year. As Dundee University stands adjacent to St. Andrew's Cathedral, the University Conference members respond to the needs of the poor within that parish following the closure of the Cathedral Conference. Members also help to run a soup kitchen for homeless people two evenings per week and visit residents in nursing/rest homes in their area.

Many of the Conferences throughout the Diocese are flourishing at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Two of the oldest have closed in recent years and a couple of others have closed or amalgamated with adjoining Conferences due to changes within parish boundaries. Sadly many are also struggling to stay active and depend very much on elderly members to remain functional. Recruiting new members is something many of our Conferences find virtually impossible and it is questionable how long some Conferences can survive before they are forced to close. We can only place our trust in God and pray individually and collectively that the "God of the Harvest" will imbue many more people with the Spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam to step forward and join in His work for His people within the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Over the years members of the Society within the Dunkeld Diocese have continued their charitable and spiritual work through the visitation of the sick in their homes and during visits to hospitals and nursing homes. In addition visits to the housebound have helped to maintain contact with parishioners who live alone or are unable to attend Church Services or Parish social events. Many of our Conferences organise parties, day outings, lunch clubs and other social events for our elderly parishioners.

The Furniture Projects run by the Dundee, Perth and Clackmannan Group Councils have over the years been in constant demand and a great source of help for clients being re-housed or those in need of replacement items. Keeping these Projects going has not been easy due in part to the increasing age of the members involved, the limited number of fit members available to do this work and the problems of storage and transportation.

The Perth Group Special Works Conference have taken a long lease on unused Church property from Bishop Logan and, after renovation, following a large grant from the National Activity Fund, are now able to offer good quality accommodation to homeless people.

The Ozanam Club in Dundee continues to provide an opportunity for children and young adults with disabilities to meet weekly where games, social interaction and outings are encouraged under the supervision of volunteers.

The SSVP Shop in Dundee has been a great success since it opened and provides a wonderful source of income which is donated to local worthy causes and National and International Appeals in times of crisis. This shop is run by volunteers.

Caravan holidays are provided by the Dundee Group in two caravans sited at Arbroath. These provide holidays for young families and elderly members of all communities who might not otherwise be able to afford a holiday. The Nairn caravan has also been widely used for families who would benefit from such a holiday.

## **Galloway**

The first Conference to open in Galloway was St Andrew's, Dumfries on 02 February 1862. The next Conference to open was St Margaret's, Ayr on 01 November 1868, closely followed by St Joseph's, Kilmarnock on 01 April 1869. Between 1872 and 1899 a further four Conferences opened in Girvan, Kilbirnie, Cumnock and Stanraer. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century a further 28 Conferences opened, with a spate of those opening in the late 50s, early 60s. The last Conference to open was St Anne's, Thurso in 05 March 1990.

## **Langbank**

Langbank has a special place in the national history of the Society. Opened in 1921 on the estate (bought for £2500!) called "The Hollies" overlooking the Clyde, it was meant to give holidays to needy children from the West of Scotland and was run by the Daughters of Charity. Between 1921 and its

closure as a home in 1961, Langbank gave fortnightly holidays to 75,000 children, many of whom had never seen a white sheet or a green tree before.

The work in the 1920s and 1930s grew so speedily that, thanks to a host of great benefactors, (the Don Bosco Society of Teachers, Mrs Cross Lynch, Baillie John Noonan, Mr David Mullen, the Gattens family of Port Glasgow and many others) the sum of £35000 was spent in enlarging the Home - first with a play hall on top of the greenhouse foundations topped with a dormitory; then with a new wing in 1926 with dormitories and a refectory and kitchen; and finally in 1931 with the addition of a beautiful and homely little stone-built church at a cost of a mere £11000.

Langbank Home had to close for the six years of the Second World War, during which the chapel and play park suffered extensive damage. The work resumed after the war but, by 1961, the local authorities had eventually assumed responsibility for much of the holiday home work. At this time the Society handed Langbank over to the Bishops of Scotland who were seeking an extension to Blairs College, the National Junior Seminary in Aberdeen.

In 1977, the function of St Vincent's changed again. Economic factors prevented its continuation as a College and it was leased back to the Society as a National Centre for the alleviation of poverty in every sense. No work of charity was foreign to St Vincent's with old people, alcoholics, handicapped children, one-parent families, school retreats and the poor in general being guests. The Centre was used extensively by the Society and other groups for retreats, meetings and conferences.

From 1977, the Special Works Conference diligently worked to keep the Centre running, their main fund-raising event being the annual Summer Fete, which was the highlight of the Vincentian calendar, despite the rain. Because of the changing demands on the services provided at St Vincent's Centre and the deteriorating fabric of the buildings, it was with great reluctance that the National Council decided in 1994 that the Langbank site should be closed.

In June 1994, a final Mass of Thanksgiving was held to mark the closure of the Centre.

# THE RULE

The rule consists of three parts:

Part 1 - the International Confederation Rule – applies worldwide

Part 2 – the Statutes for the International Council

Part 3 – the Internal Statutes – apply to all Scottish Conferences/Councils

## **PART 1 - RULE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL**

### **1. ORIGINS OF THE SOCIETY AND SERVICE TO THE POOR**

#### **1.1 Origins**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide Christian community, founded in Paris in 1833, by a group of young Catholic lay people and an older person, who joined together to create the first Conference. The Society wishes to remember them all with gratitude, as they set an example of dedication to the poor and to the Church. From Le Taillandier, who received the first inspiration, to Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Deveaux, Félix Clavé, all of them knew, in their humility, how to seek the wise advice and support of the one who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society, Emmanuel Bailly.

The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charisms of each one. Among them, Blessed Frederic Ozanam was a radiant source of inspiration.

The Society has been Catholic from its origins. It remains an international Catholic voluntary organisation of lay people, men and women.

*Commentary.-This first article seeks, in addition to making a firm declaration of its Christian and Catholic faith from its very origins, to make a hymn to the laity's capacity to honour the commitments acquired in Baptism. Those young people, whose names are quoted for the first time in our Rule, were more than one hundred years ahead of their time concerning the obligation of the laity to extend the Kingdom, which the Second Vatican Council would later emphasise.*

*The Holy Spirit was also present in the first Conference as a group, not only in each individual, as the bond of their unity, ensuring that the various charisms they were given were precisely those necessary for the Conference to achieve the mission willed for it by God. It is the founders' response to the Holy Spirit's inspiration, which enables the Society to help us, in our time, to grow every day, as human beings and spiritually, in devotion to the poor.*

## **PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF OUR SERVICE**

### **1.2 The Vincentian Vocation**

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.

*Commentary.-Belonging to a Conference is a vocation in itself: a vocation of personal contact with Christ in the Poor. The predominant feature of this contact must always be compassion and the will to free people from their burdens: an effort to build the coming Kingdom. Personal contact with the suffering is the most obvious distinctive characteristic of the Vincentian ministry. We bring unconditional love to the poor and seek to love in the way Jesus loved, because "the first vocation of the Christian is to follow Jesus" (CCC2232 )."Vincentians serve in hope". What air is to the lungs, so is hope to the human spirit. We have a real hope that our work will make a difference, both in the lives of those we visit and, in a mysterious way, in the world at large. If we go through difficulties, we remember that "(hope) affords us joy even under trial" (CCC1820).*

### **1.3 Any form of personal help...**

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.

*Commentary.-This is also one of the basic distinctive characteristics of the Conferences: any form of help. From its origins, the Society has claimed that the freedom of action of each Conference makes it possible to adapt to the specific needs of those it visits, serving through personal contact.*

*"promotes .. personal integrity"*

*"True development concerns the whole man. It is concerned with increasing each person's ability to respond to his vocation and hence to God's call" (cf. CA 29) (CCC2461).*

*Poor is the one who has no option to choose.*

### **1.4...to anyone in need**

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

*Commentary.-Members do not judge. To judge is reserved to God who sees deep into every person's heart. We serve, considering what each person needs, in keeping with what they themselves consider they lack, which we will not always understand. Vincentians do not impose: they serve in hope and wish to be able to influence by the example of their lives. "Who does not know that among the poor, very often, emotional and spiritual suffering is more acute than material poverty? What saddens them most is that there should not be a friendly hand holding theirs, nor a heart beating with theirs" (Introduction to the Manual 1845).*

*We should avoid the danger of forgetting those closest to us: our family, other members and friends. There is the danger that, when attending the poor, we become insensitive towards the pain of those nearest to us.*

### **1.5 To Seek Out the Poor**

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

*Commentary.-This article implies a positive initiative to seek and find the poor, rather than being content with the list of people we currently help. There is a clear need to visit "**the forgotten**". We should not expect that the poor will come to us. On the contrary, it is we who should go to encounter them and devote ourselves to share their poverty and their sorrow. Vincentians should always retain their capacity to imagine and observe, working continuously to discover the new forms of suffering that threaten people at every moment.*

### **1.6 Adaptation to a Changing World**

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to 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.

*Commentary".-To give priority to the poorest of the poor" Indeed, the Conferences in their daily work must give priority to the poorest of the poor. To them, precisely to them, they have to bring comfort, to reach out and share their*

suffering. (See 1.5 and Commentary). Each Conference and each member, must not forget the difficulty of identifying who are the poorest of the poor. Sometimes, as stated elsewhere, not only financial poverty but emotional and spiritual suffering may result in people being rejected and becoming isolated.

## **OUR PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POOR**

### **1.7 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.

*Commentary.-We are unable to achieve anything of eternal value on our own, without the assistance of God Himself (Jn 15:5). Prayer, individual and communal, is a fundamental need when the Conferences and each Vincentian undertake any action. The Society's logo: "serviens in spe", always reminds us of the need for hope in our service: a service impossible without deep prayer and reflection, that should be fostered by the community that each Conference is.*

*The tradition in the Society, established by the first Conferences, shows us the great value of the "Visit before the visit", prior to personal contact: the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the House of God where, with a humble attitude, we will put ourselves at his disposal in order to be his eyes, his hands and his understanding in the subsequent contact with the poor. If that is not always possible, some moments of inner recollection are absolutely necessary: recollection to ask the Holy Spirit for his gifts: Wisdom to understand the situation, its priorities and the deeper needs; Fortitude to persevere, not to give up; Counsel to tackle the problem appropriately; Piety to feel, to feel compassion, which is nothing other than feeling what the other feels; Reverence and awe of God to visit with humility, with the humility that recognises we are ourselves finite human beings who beseech Providence for those who are our brothers and sisters. Children of God and Temples of the Holy Spirit, they and we are, therefore, equal in dignity no matter what distress they feel or how much misery surrounds them.*

### **1.8 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 in the provision of material and any other type of support.

*Commentary.-This joy should not be tarnished by the pain caused in us by the very suffering of the friend in need whom we are trying to comfort. Cheerfulness is a Christian characteristic and each Vincentian should nurture it. Vincentians respect the views and aspirations of each of the human beings in need whom they encounter. It is their needs, their longings we seek to meet. Sometimes, they will even be far away from our own scale of values; from our scale of needs. Only gentleness and example will be useful to bring about a change; never any imposition. "Another point that also deserves our attention is the discretion that should accompany zeal for the salvation of souls. Fervour is not always holy, nor is it always inspired by God. Not every moment is appropriate for new ideas and Christian teachings to penetrate hearts; it is necessary to wait for God's time and to be patient, as He himself is" (Rule, 1835, PC)*

## **1.9 Empathy**

Vincentians endeavour to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts 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.

*Commentary.-Sharing is not possible without friendship. The extension of the Kingdom is not possible unless we are aware of our own frailty. Let us be thankful for our faith; for the call we receive; for having the opportunity of becoming close to Christ in the poor we serve; for being able to avoid judging; for being always available to attend to our brothers' needs. "...the member mixes his tears with those of the poor and with patience and love he makes Christian friendship spring up in that heart." (Introduction to the Manual, 1845).*

## **1.10 Promotion of self-sufficiency**

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

*Commentary.-Conferences do not wish poverty to exist. For this reason, it is implied that they fight against this unjust situation. Nevertheless, the poor should be the ones to find their own path. We, Vincentians, will accompany them wherever they wish to go. Promoting self-sufficiency and the awareness by those who suffer, that they have the ability to overcome suffering, is a basic task which can never be given up by Vincentians. (See 7.9).*



## 1.11 Concerns for deeper needs and spirituality

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

Vincentians serve in hope. They in discovering the spirit of prayer in the poor, for in the silence, the poor can perceive God's Plan for every person. The acceptance of God's Plan leads each one to nurture the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace in themselves, their families and all those whose lives they touch. Vincentians are privileged to foster these signs of the presence of Risen Christ in the poor and among themselves.

*Commentary.-We encourage them to improve their life and we try to show them the existence of a different kind of life and spiritual values, always respecting their own values.*

*"profound respect": That does not mean complicity or silence when we witness situations that are intrinsically perverse or sinful. Respect for the Gospel obliges us to state, without imposition, without contempt, our own moral vision of the world, even when this is opposite to the values of the poor whom we are trying to serve. The Vincentian, despite a deep respect for the decisions of the poor person, cannot give up proclaiming the Word of Life. He cannot give up sharing with others the best of himself: his faith. "Let us avoid arguments with the poor, not being offended if they do not accept our advice nor try to oblige them to accept it with an air of authority: let us be satisfied with suggesting to them the pattern of behaviour that seems good to us, and having encouraged them to follow it, leave it to God to enable our words to bear fruit, if this is His Holy Will" (Rule, 1835, PR).*

*On the other hand, we cannot and we should not forget that very often when people call poverty God's will, it is not his will at all, but is only the product of our deficiencies when distributing the Earth's resources; the result of not loving each other as Christ Himself taught us to do.*

*"signs of the presence of the Risen Christ": In the commentary on 1.8, the focus is on seeing "the Suffering Christ" in the sufferings of the people we visit. In 1.11, Vincentians are encouraged to see the "signs of the presence of the Risen Christ" in the virtues of those we visit, especially when there has been a transformation of an attitude or of actions, which is a sure sign of grace, and a confirmation that "Christians ... participate in the life of the Risen Lord" (CCC1694).*

## 1.12 Gratitude to those we visit

Vincentians never forget the many 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.

*Commentary.-Many Conferences, at the end of their meetings, thank God for the good they receive from those who suffer. It is a great truth that, in our contact with the poor, we receive much more than we can bring them with our poor donations. Only the Lord's help, only His assistance obtained through deep prayer, individual and communal, can make us useful to those we try to serve. "Many times, the member gains more benefit himself from what he hears than is produced by what he says" (F.Lallier, circular to the Conferences, August 1837)*

## 2. VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY & VOCATION

### Faith in Christ and the Life of Grace

*"Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5,1-2).*

### 2.1 Love in Union with Christ

Convinced of the truth of the Apostle St. Paul's words, Vincentians seek to draw closer to Christ. They hope that someday it will be no longer they who love, but Christ who loves through them (Gal 2,20 **"... I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God"**), and that even now, in their caring, the poor may catch a glimpse of God's great love for them.

*Commentary.-Our starting point is the conviction that the Lord is infinitely good, he who has given us the gift of salvation through His sacrifice. What can we do to repay, with all our imperfections, such devotion from God Himself? We can only try to be a pale reflection of His Love, trying to grow every day in that Love for all people which He taught us. We know that we will only manage to do so if every one of us, day by day, at every moment, tries to discover in each of our actions, what Our Lord himself would do in the specific situation with which we are faced. For this, it is necessary to know and pray the scriptures, where we find: "The Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in my name, .. will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I (Jesus) have said to you" (Jn 14:26).*

## 2.2 The journey together towards 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. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity. Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their ideal is to help relieve suffering for love alone, without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves. They draw nearer to Christ, serving Him in the poor and one another. They grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and one another.

Therefore, their journey together towards holiness is primarily made through:

- Visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live. Vincentians assume the needs of the poor as their own.
- Attending the meeting of the Conference or Council, where shared fraternal spirituality is a source of inspiration.
- Promoting a life of prayer and reflection, both at the individual and community level, sharing with their fellow members. Meditating on their Vincentian experiences offers them internal spiritual knowledge of themselves, others and the goodness of God.
- Transforming their concern into action and their compassion into practical and effective love

Their journey together towards holiness will be all the more fruitful if the members' personal lives are characterised by prayer, meditation on the Holy Scriptures and other inspirational texts and devotion to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary, whose protection we have always sought, and to the teachings of the Church.

*Commentary.-"journey together". This is, without doubt, one of the most fundamental articles in the Rule. It has to be read very slowly, meditated upon deep in our heart and shared with our fellow members. We are not walking alone. We are not called to be saved alone. Each member walks next to his brothers and sisters towards perfection. He is responsible for his own actions and, when*

*appropriate, for the example and help he gives to his brothers and sisters. Nothing good is achieved outside the Conference, if the members do not love one another. No service to the poor is guaranteed if we, the members, are not aware of the service we owe to each other. The ignition of our love in the Conference is the fuel that will allow us, later, to devote ourselves to those who suffer. No one can give what he does not have.*

*"true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love" This definition of holiness comes from Vatican II. "We will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, holiness," (LG 50) which is "expressed by those who .. strive for the perfection of charity" (LG39). The call to become someone who radiates perfect love is nothing less than a call to sanctity. 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification' (1Th 4:3; Eph 1:4) Vincentians are called to become saints!*

## **2.3 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.

*Commentary.-Alone, we cannot achieve anything of eternal value. The members' prayer, individual and communal, ensures our union with Christ and enables us to spread His Love. In this prayer, we should feel linked to the Holy Church's prayer and listen to what those who suffer have to teach us. They are undoubtedly our masters, who can teach us best the way of self-denial and of generous devotion. St. Vincent said, "Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything." He proclaims that prayer is a "fountain of youth" which invigorates us.*

## **2.4 The Spirituality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam**

The spirituality of one of its founders inspires Vincentians profoundly. The Blessed 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.

*Commentary.-The Conferences should take advantage of the teachings of one of our founders, maybe the most important one for Vincentian spirituality, and whose life of perfection has been acknowledged by the Holy Church. A layman, a family man, model husband, professional man and friend. We should not miss the enlightenment that our Lord gave us with the presence of Frederic Ozanam.*

*"Sought to renew faith ...in Christ" Ozanam's words and example brought others to Christ. Vincentians are called to proclaim the Good News in word and deed (see Commentary to 1.11).*

*"a network of charity encircling the world" Members share in this aspiration of Ozanam by contributing to Council General. One of its main functions is to help the Society in all nations to start new Conferences and Councils, providing financial help, volunteers and always, prayer (see Rule 4.1.2).*

## **2.5 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.

*Commentary.-The founders chose St. Vincent de Paul as patron saint and life model: the great saint of Charity. How could we forget him? How could we not know his works in depth and try to follow in his footsteps? Vincent's holy audacity and creativity should be a permanent example for Vincentians when facing the difficulties that are sometimes entailed in helping people in need. Let us be imaginative in assisting them. Let us dream of new solutions that allow us to help them rise above their current condition. Let us dream as Vincent did, when he set up the Daughters of Charity, and sent them worldwide, without being bound to a convent. They were obliged only to serve the poor, in whom they could find Christ.*

*"To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" Through this text and those about charisms (1.1, 3.11) and prayer (1.7, 3.9). the Rule is calling on the Society to become more and more open to the spiritual light and energy of the Holy Spirit. We will not experience the 'more abundant life' Jesus came to give (cf. Jn 10:10), unless we are open to the 'release of the Holy Spirit', an expression of the Holy Spirit which will frequently become manifest in modest gifts not normally considered to be extraordinary graces. Nevertheless, this intervention and these modest and simple gifts will greatly enhance our service of the poor.*

### 2.5.1 Essential virtues

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 – a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

*Commentary.-Read these words slowly. These virtues reveal the essence of what a Vincentian should be and how we should work. Is this difficult? Everything is possible with Love, in the encounter with God. "...studying St. Vincent de Paul's most intimate actions and discovering the secrets of his thought, they know that, if he deserves the glorious title of Father of the poor, it is because he learned how to love them through loving our Lord Jesus Christ. If he provided them with bodily care, likely to elevate the deprived instead of humiliating them, it is because he honoured them as images and brothers of his Divine Master ... he considered himself as a gentle instrument of the Divine Providence, which he wanted to obey, but never to run ahead of, because he preferred that the good be done by others rather than by himself. He only appeared when the other workers left the field. After having worked hard with his arms and the sweat of his brow, his deep humility made him consider that he did nothing and that he was a useless servant." (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Manual 1845)*

## **2.6 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.

*Commentary.-We follow Christ as Vincentians, at every moment and in every situation of our life. Our belonging to a Conference should not be a separate department of our lives. On the contrary: our experience in the Conference and in the contact with the suffering, our prayer, individual and communal, should pervade all our life. Not only for a short time or one day a week: our whole life: as parents, as sons and daughters, as working people and professionals, as friends. We should strive to ensure that everything is presided over by the love we have for Christ.*

*"making them more sensitive and caring" Vincentians should become known more and more as people who listen. This is how they will be viewed by their next-door neighbours, their colleagues at work and by anyone with whom they come into contact. Listening is another name for love.*

## **3. MEMBERS, CONFERENCES, COUNCILS – COMMUNITIES OF FAITH & LOVE**

### **3.1 Membership**

The Society is open to all those who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbour in need. (See Article 6.4 of the Rule).

*Commentary.-Open to everyone. We do not seek to be closed and isolated groups. On the contrary: only if we grow is there evidence that we are really giving witness and a witness that inspires love. Failure to attract new members should always be observed as an indication that something is wrong within the Conference. It could be a symptom that we are asleep; that we are no longer in touch with the needs that the society we serve regards as fundamental."...let us always move ahead and keep developing our modest Works; let us hope that every year a new idea springs up in us, a new improvement and let us, thereby, avoid the apathy which is easily contented with what has already been done" (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Manual 1845)*

### 3.2 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.

*Commentary.-Does our Lord make distinctions? We do not aim at making them either. The "Gentile and the Jew" are the same. Men and women, the learned and the illiterate, the white and the black, everybody is the same in the Conferences, so far as they seek to serve God by devoting themselves to the poor in the community of the Conference. "... for all those who wish to do good, it is pleasant and charming to see men from all social levels, positions, views and ages, united by the sacred bond of faith, learning the lessons of charity..." (Introduction to the Manual, 1845)*

### 3.3 Meetings of the Vincentian members

The 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. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide Community of Vincentian friends.

*Commentary.-"a worldwide community of friends" It is recommended here that we re-read the commentary to 2.2. Very little is possible without the fellow members' love for one another. First, in their own Conference, later feeling they are members of a single immense Conference that includes all the members worldwide. "The meeting day was a celebration, because it was a reunion of those who had lived apart during the week." (Introduction to the Manual 1845) "Following faithfully the advice of our Divine Master and of his beloved apostle John, we will love each other. We will love one another now and for ever, far and near, from one Conference to another, from town to town, from nation to nation. This deep friendship will enable us to bear with each other's failings." (Rule, 1835, PC)*

*Members who do not live up to their vocation "We will never believe an evil report of a brother but with great sorrow, and when we cannot reject the evidence of facts. Then, in order to conform ourselves to the will of Him who has confided to each one the care of his neighbour, in a spirit of charity, and with all the kindness and warmth of sincere friendship, we will ourselves counsel our failing, or fallen, brother or cause advice to be conveyed to him; we will help him to become stronger in good or to get up from his fall." (Rule, 1835, PC)*



"with Christ in the midst of them" Christ is in the midst when we are gathered "in his name," i.e. sharing the mind and heart of Christ, when love is present and the Conference is open to all the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see 2.5). Ozanam experienced all this in the first Conference and wrote: "God who draws the clouds together to scatter the lightening, also draws souls together to radiate love", implying an immense amplification of love, far beyond that which could be achieved by all the members as separate individuals.

### 3.3.1 Frequency of the meetings

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

*Commentary.-Friends wish to see each other frequently; the poor need us urgently. This article says that we should meet at least once a fortnight. But we strongly recommend that, whenever possible, a week would be the longest gap before meeting to talk about all the issues - concerning the poor, and concerning God. "Isolated virtues wither easily; together and intertwined they form immortal wreaths" (Blessed Frederic Ozanam, letter from Lyon to the Conferences of Paris, 1838).*

### 3.4 Fraternity and simplicity

Meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.

*Re-read the commentaries on 2.5 and to 2.5.1 How can it be otherwise? Everything has been given to us. Nothing belongs to us: simplicity is required. "Our mutual kindness should be warm and without limits" (Rule, 1835, PR). "To have friends means to live twice" (F.Lallier, circular letter 1/3/1837)*

### 3.5 Preserving the spirit

Members of all ages strive to preserve the spirit of youth, which is characterised by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination. They are willing to make sacrifices and take risks for the benefit of the poor wherever they may be: by sharing their discomfort, needs, and sorrows and defending their rights.

*Commentary.-We have already written concerning 2.5, about the need to dream. Youth is the period with a capacity for "daydreaming". Let us all be young and never lose the capacity to be surprised, by trying to discover new ways in the service required by the poor: seriously! Suffering is not something that we can accept without trying to eradicate it: always with charity, but without forgetting*

*clarity. People only become old when they lose the ability to teach or to learn. Let us not become old in the service of the poor (see also 1.9, 2.2, and 2.3).*

### **3.6 Councils**

Conferences are grouped under various levels of Councils.

Councils exist to serve all the Conferences they coordinate. They help the Conferences to develop their spiritual life, to intensify their service and to diversify their activities so that they may always be responsive to the needs of those who suffer.

Councils at appropriate levels are particularly called to: create new Conferences, to help existing Conferences to expand, to promote Special Works, to prepare training courses and encourage Vincentians to attend them, to foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian Family, to promote cooperation with other organisations and Institutions, to develop friendship between members in the same area, to provide communication to and from Conferences and higher Councils. In summary, to promote the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world.

*Commentary.-Councils have an enormous importance in intensifying the Conferences' life and development. This article should be read carefully. Councils exist in order to serve, and the required service is perfectly explicit in the article. Let the Councils be diligent in their task and let the Conferences value the Councils' effort to serve; "...if there is a Council at their service, this is because the highest trust prevails among us and no one wants to rule over the rest. One heart and one soul: cor unum et anima una" (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Manual 1845).*

### **3.7 Young members**

Young members keep the Society young. They see with new eyes and often look far ahead. The Society works constantly to form Youth Conferences and welcomes young members into all Conferences. Their experience in a community of faith and love and their exposure to poverty deepen their spirituality, spur them to action and help them to grow as human beings. The senior members assume the responsibility of assisting them along their path of training, respecting their personal choices and their aspirations of Vincentian service.

*Commentary.-What a great mission for the senior members: to serve the youngest ones! It is not about leading them. It is not about commanding them. It is about*

*serving them, being useful to them on the road they are beginning to travel – their own life - and which should be discovered by them with the support, example and humility of the senior members: just as it was when we were founded. Bailly, the first President General, was close to the young members, who dreamed of and desired the foundation of the Conferences. It was his example, his good work that convinced the students to join the first Conference. Let us do the same. Let us be at their disposal; making clear our opinion regarding their doubts and their aspirations but allowing them to find their own way.*

### **3.8 Aggregation and Institution of Conferences and Councils**

The visible unifying link within the Society is the Aggregation of the Conferences and the Institution of the Councils declared by the Council General.

*Commentary.-We are a "worldwide Christian community", says the first article in the Rule. Incorporation into the union of that universal fraternal community which is the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, is called Aggregation for the Conferences and Institution for the Councils.*

### **3.9 Subsidiarity and freedom of action**

The Society embraces the Principle of Subsidiarity as its basic standard of cooperation. Decisions are made as close as possible to the area of activity to ensure that the local environment and circumstances (cultural, social, political, etc.) are taken into consideration. In this way, the Society promotes local initiatives within its spirit. This freedom of action of Conferences and Councils, which has been kept faithfully since the origins of the Society, enables them to help the poor, spontaneously and more effectively, exempted from an excessive bureaucracy.

In exercising this freedom of action to face the challenge of poverty in their area, Vincentians feel called to pray together for guidance and strength and for that creative imagination which is the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, "Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 3,1).

*Commentary.-A certain authority and certain functioning rules are, undoubtedly, necessary for a worldwide organisation. But even more important, the principle of Subsidiarity has been enjoyed by the Conferences from their beginning. Where are the needs of the suffering best known? In the local area. Therefore, all Conferences have total freedom to serve the deprived as they think best, within the spirit of the Rule. But this does not mean that Conferences and Councils are*

*autonomous in all ways. Conferences and Councils have an obligation to comply with civil law, to adhere to the Rule and Statutes of the Society, and to the policies and strategies of the National Council. It is also essential for the good name and transparency of the Society that National Councils require adherence to good but simple accounting and auditing practices, including, if appropriate, central banking and consolidated accounts for the entire Society.*

### **3.10 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.

*Commentary.-"consultation». Is anybody cleverer or holier than the other members? We cannot be sure through whom the Holy Spirit will speak. Are we sure that we, like God, can see deep into the heart of each person? Obviously not. Let us consult, let us comment, with charity and clarity, about all the issues. Light will frequently arise from the one of whom we expect the least. The Lord will enlighten whoever He wishes. A dominating leader will de-motivate some people, be a source of conflict and ultimately will harm the Society.*

*"consensus". Let us take our decisions after listening to each other. 'Consensus' implies general approval with no one feeling strongly enough to continue advocating an alternative view.*

### **3.11 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 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.

*Commentary.-What is the Mission of the Presidents? To serve. It is as simple as that. As the President is, so is the Conference. Our tradition says that usually Conferences are what their Presidents are. This is not because they preside over them, nor because of what they demand, nor because of what they know. It is because of what they are able to elicit from each one of the members by listening to them, encouraging them and by accompanying them, by being concerned about them, all to achieve better service of the poor. Presidents are the key figure in the Conferences but usually this will not be obvious because of their humility. "(The President) is marked out to be the servant of the rest, to lead and direct Christian societies. He combines in himself the necessary knowledge and a sincere practice*

*of his religion with a great spirit of prudence and conciliation. Prudens est, regat nos" (E. Bailly, I President General, Circular Letter 1/3/1844). A servant leader will ideally have that deep faith which is a silent influence for good.*

### **3.12 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.

*Commentary.-On-going training is a requirement in the life of each Conference. Continuous social changes, new legislation, new resources that become available, demand from each Vincentian the effort to keep up and constantly to enhance his formation. It is not possible to dispense with this almost daily "updating", that enables us better to serve those who suffer. "Is it not true that we must study steadily, if we want to carry out our works successfully?" (Introduction to the Manual, 1845)*

*"essential" is a strong word which implies that every National Council should develop a programme of formation and training, either alone or with the support of the rest of the Society.*

### **3.13 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. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Adviser is very important.

*Commentary.-Each Conference, whenever possible, aspires to enrich itself with the presence of a priest who encourages the members towards a life more and more perfect and devoted. But neither does a Conference forget the ultimate responsibility of the laity in the Conferences. This does not diminish the importance of the priest's contribution among us. On the contrary, we owe him the highest respect and consideration, and give his views special weight in matters of faith or morals. But this should never be the excuse for us to neglect or to leave in his hands the most serious decisions affecting our Vincentian work. The responsibility we acquire in Baptism demands from us our own commitment in matters regarding the poor entrusted to our care.*

### 3.14 The use of money and property for the poor

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. Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. 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.

*Commentary.-An old member used to call money, even though it was necessary, "the devil's dung". It should be used properly, of course, not in any way hoarded. We should firmly believe that God will provide everything we need, and instead of hoarding it in excess, the Conference should put it at the disposal of other Conferences having needs but inadequate resources. Sometimes, there can be situations of real scandal, due to the lack of a commitment to share. This is an issue about which each Conference should think seriously.*

### 3.15 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.

*Commentary.-Without communication, we simply do not exist as an interdependent Society. It is one of the most frequent omissions committed by the Conferences. How can we not tell others of the things we do which we find makes it easier to serve and to tackle a specific poverty? How can we not pay attention to those things discovered by others? How can we properly serve the poor without exchanging experiences among us? Without telling what we do, is it possible to improve and to attract resources to assist the poor? Any country or Council publishing any kind of Magazine about the Society should send it to other Vincentian nations and to the General Council itself, in order to contribute to this effort of communication.*

## 4. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE VINCENTIAN & CATHOLIC NETWORK OF CHARITY

### 4.1 Twinning

Conferences and Councils help others in need, both at the national and international level. This is one of the activities most cherished by the Society. The awareness of acute poverty in a great number of countries and the Vincentian preferential option for the poor spurs Conferences and Councils to assist others with less resources or in particular situations.

This direct link between two Conferences or Councils, consisting of sharing prayer, a profound friendship and material resources, is called twinning. This activity contributes to world peace and to understanding and cultural exchange among peoples.

*Commentary.-Could a Christian, seeing another member of his community in the most absolute poverty, refuse to reach out to help? The negative answer, arising from faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, compels us to be very attentive in providing help to the Conferences who need it. The amount sent every year by Vincentians to other poorer Vincentians in order to help them in their task, is huge. It cannot be otherwise, if we really understand the challenge of a globalised poverty, for the alleviation of which we are all responsible. The Conferences do not limit themselves to the care of poverty nearby. On the contrary, those Conferences which really feel the true nature of their mission, are always ready to send the necessary assistance so that members in other parts of the world with smaller economic resources, will be able to help the most deprived to release themselves from poverty. This is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful tokens of selfless love; to help the poor whom we only see with the eyes of faith through the work of other members in remote places of the world.*

#### 4.1.1 Prayer as the basis of friendship

Twinning promotes spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help. Funds and other material resources can be provided to enable a Conference or Council to help local families. Financial, technical, medical and educational support is given to projects which are suggested by the Society locally and which encourage self-sufficiency. Even more important is support given through prayer, as well as through mutual communication regarding what has been accomplished and what is happening among Vincentians in each area, including news about persons and families.

*Commentary.-If any kind of economic help is necessary, so is spiritual help through prayer. None of us is so poor that we cannot help someone else, and this applies even more to prayer, to offering small personal sacrifices, to help fellow members with whom we are not acquainted. We do not know them, but we feel linked to them by the universal work of bringing God's Love to all people.*

#### **4.1.2 Vincentians' personal commitment**

The Society urges the Vincentians to consider undertaking a personal commitment for a particular period of time to work with Vincentians in other countries or to spread Conferences.

*Commentary.-Some Vincentians, when they find the time and the capacity, volunteer to bring their experience and knowledge to other places in the world. They are called "Vincentians for Peace". These groups of the Society's members, of different ages, commit themselves for a specific period of time, either to help the Conferences in general, or to work on specific projects helping to develop certain skills in other countries. This is a sort of Twinning where the donation generously offered is personal experience and devotion.*

#### **4.2 Emergency assistance**

When disasters, war or major accidents occur, the Society launches emergency initiatives on the spot and provides funds for the local Society to help victims.

*Commentary.-The Society, through the Council General, always has bank accounts containing Emergency Aid Funds. For Conferences and Councils worldwide there is always a special responsibility to contribute to these accounts so that, faced with unforeseen situations of distress, the Council General, on behalf of the whole Society, can send the necessary assistance to the Conferences or Councils needing it. The action of Conferences in such emergency situations will always be to help the poor when larger organisations are not able to meet their individual needs.*

#### **4.3 The Vincentian Family**

Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help, form a single family. Gratefully remembering the support and encouragement the first Conference received from Blessed Rosalie Rendu, the Society maintains and develops close relationships with other branches of the Vincentian family, while preserving its identity. It cooperates with



them in spiritual development and common projects, as well as with the Church's charitable pastoral initiatives at every level, whenever this may be mutually enriching and useful to those who suffer.

*Commentary.-True to the wishes of the founders, the Conferences do not forget the inspiration of Vincent de Paul (Rule 2.5; 2.5.1). That inspiration leads us to share our efforts and challenges with the ecclesiastical institutions which share the spirituality of the Saint of Charity. With them, (The Daughters of Charity, Congregation of the Mission, Religious of Saint Vincent, International Association of Charity, Vincentian Marian Youth and Misevi -Vincentian lay missionaries -, among others), we strive to serve the poor better by a coordination between consecrated and lay persons, which is always so necessary in the life of Holy Church.*

*Conferences do not forget the one who undoubtedly can be called our first Spiritual Adviser: the Blessed Rosalie Rendu, who knew how to stand by our young founders in the beginning, with her advice and her example, afterwards letting them walk on their own, in response to their lay vocation. She always remained at their disposal for everything they could need from her. She was an example of a mother who dreamed of the formal and responsible independence of those children who sought her help in the first moments of their journey.*

## **5. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH HIERARCHY**

### **5.1 A close relationship**

Faithful to the clear intentions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the Society has a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Respect of the members for the hierarchy provides the foundation for harmonious reciprocal cooperation.

*Commentary.-Being part of a lay Society which takes seriously its responsibilities within the Church, the Conferences strive to maintain an absolute respect and love towards the Holy Church's hierarchy. The Society strives to scrupulously respect the Hierarchy's voice in everything that concerns it, whether from the Parish, the Diocese or the Holy See. The process is reciprocal. Canon law says, "(The laity) have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church" (Canon 212.3). The Society also bears in mind that "associations and movements need to work in full harmony within both the universal Church" (NMI 46) and the dioceses.*

## 5.2 Autonomy

The Society is legally autonomous as to its existence, constitution, organisation, rules, activities and internal government. Members freely choose their own officers and manage the Society's activities and assets with full autonomy, in accordance with their own Statutes and the legislation in effect in each country.

*Commentary.-The Society, usually a civil institution, legally constituted in most of the countries, is free in all its actions and does not need the formal authorization of any entity to develop its activities. The Society's autonomy has been recognised on many occasions by the Holy See, in particular in the decision dated 13th November 1920.*

## 5.3 Moral recognition

The Society recognizes the right and duty of the diocesan bishop to confirm that none of its activities is contrary to Catholic faith or morals. The Society, whenever possible, informs the diocesan bishops of its activities annually, as a sign of ecclesial communion.

*Commentary.-The Conferences, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, whose members wish to be faithful children of the Holy Church, acknowledge that it is each Diocese's Bishop with whom it should cooperate in the Diocesan Pastoral social welfare initiatives that the Bishop considers appropriate and which foster person-to-person contact with the poor. In particular, it recognizes the Bishop's competence to confirm that the Society's activities in his Diocese are in keeping with Catholic faith and morals. "Let us never do anything new without having received the blessing of the Hierarchy at its different levels. Neither will we ever undertake any new and important work within an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, without consulting him who is at the head of it. We will do nothing in opposition to spiritual authority" (Rule 1835, PC)*

## 6. ECUMENICAL & INTER-FAITH RELATIONSHIPS

### 6.1 Every member should foster ecumenism

Each Vincentian should seek to deepen a personal commitment to ecumenism and to cooperation in works of charity and justice as a contribution towards the achievement of that full and visible unity of the Church for which Christ prayed, **'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me'** (Jn 17:21).

*Commentary.-The Society, each Conference, even each Vincentian, does not forget the requirements of ecumenism as stated by the Holy Church. It is not possible to make this commitment as a duty, following a 'rule'. "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from newness of attitudes (cf. Eph 4:23), from self-denial and un-stinted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow toward maturity (UR 7). It is prayer to the Holy Spirit which will open us to this change of heart (cf. CCC1108).*

*"that the world may believe" "Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature" (UUS 6). "Those belong to (the ecumenical movement) who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour, doing this not merely as individuals but also as corporate bodies." (URI)*

## **6.2 The Society is committed to ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation**

Following the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul recognizes, accepts and encourages the call to ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation which arise from its charitable activity. It is prepared to participate in the Church's ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives within each country, in harmony with the diocesan bishop.

*Commentary.-Being aware of this ecclesiastical requirement, the Society, everywhere in the world, abides by the guidelines of each Diocese. Each Conference understands that the Catholic response in each area should be characterised by harmony and, therefore, prior to any action in this delicate field, it listens to and acts in keeping with the indications of the local bishop.*

*If this cooperation with people of other denominations is to be a witness to an unbelieving society, it is important that the public should observe an easy friendship and trust, and a oneness that is a reflection of the oneness of love, knowledge, will admission at the heart of the Trinity.*

## **6.3 The adoption of practical initiatives**

Conferences and Councils should establish a dialogue with their counterparts in other Christian churches or ecclesial communities and other faiths, with regard to cooperation in charitable work, wherever this is appropriate.

*Commentary.-There are various circumstances in which the Conferences can be established in so many places around the world. The principle of Subsidiarity (refer to Rule 3.9), allows the different Conferences and Councils to decide locally*

*with whom to cooperate in their service of the poor. Prudence will indicate on each occasion what advice to seek before commencing this cooperation, which must always be in keeping with the spirit of the Society (Rule 6.7).*

## **6.4 Ecumenical and inter-faith membership**

In some countries, circumstances may make it desirable to accept as members Christians of other confessions or people of other faiths who sincerely respect and accept the Society's identity and its principles insofar as differences of faith allow. The Episcopal Conference should be consulted.

*Commentary.-The world is big and many people feel the call to help the poor. The Conferences must be open to admit them. Having said that, the Society cannot forget that, in addition to trying to help people in need, those who suffer, each Conference is part of a worldwide Catholic community. The members who feel called to admit people of other beliefs must ensure they understand that whilst we will always have the utmost respect for the faith and conscience of such members, we will always preserve those prayers and other spiritual practices which are fundamental to the Catholic ethos of the Society. To protect ourselves from any possible danger to our ethos, the Rule underlines the need to consult the local Episcopal Conference. Let us submit to its criteria; that will always be good for the peace of our souls. (See also 3.1)*

## **6.5 Preserving the Catholic credo and ethos**

The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The President, Vice-President and Spiritual Adviser should, therefore, be Roman Catholic. They may, in certain situations depending on national circumstances, and after consultation with the local diocesan Bishop, be members of churches and ecclesial communities which share the Catholic belief in, among other issues, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the seven Sacraments and devotion to Mary.

*Commentary.-In addition to the Spiritual Adviser, the President has an obligation to promote Vincentian spirituality and the Catholic ethos (see 3.11). This also applies to the Vice-President who, when necessary, fulfils all the duties of the President. Such an*

*obligation should not be imposed on someone who cannot in conscience discharge it. The intention of the Society's 1999 General Assembly was to allow at least Catholic, Orthodox and High Anglican members to hold these offices. The Catholic hierarchy within each country will know whether there are other churches or ecclesial communities which meet these criteria. As other officers do*

*not have a specific obligation to promote Vincentian spirituality, these offices, Secretary, Treasurer etc, are open to any member.*

## **6.6 Affiliated groups can work very closely with us**

The Society accepts the principle of affiliated groups. These groups consist mainly of members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities who are attracted by the work of the Society and/or its spirituality. They are welcome to participate in the charitable work, appropriate Council discussions and the fraternal life of the Society, but are not eligible for office in the Society. Groups from non-Christian religions may also be similarly affiliated.

*Commentary.-In some places, it can be appropriate to accept with an affiliated status, and with the limitations stated by the article, groups from other creeds or beliefs. The Society can admit them, but in its desire to remain Catholic, rules out their eligibility for representative offices.*

## **6.7 Relationships with state agencies & other charities**

When the problems they encounter are beyond their competence or capacity, Vincentians may contact State Agencies and other more specialised charitable organisations, provided that such action helps the Society in its struggle against injustice and respects the spirit of the Society.

*Commentary.-A more and more globalised world is also a more complicated world. The Conferences, through the appropriate Councils, can and should seek a ready collaboration with other organisations, agencies or institutions that could assist their work, with benefit to the most deprived. A prudent, observant attitude, will keep us away from the scandal that could be implied by collaboration with groups or people having approaches opposite to the Holy Church' moral teaching. "...it is necessary to avoid even the appearance of evil and everything that could cause scandal to the weak" (Rule 1835, PC)*

## **7. RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY – WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **7.1 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.

*Commentary.-The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and each of its Conferences, seeks the spiritual and material prosperity of each of the persons it helps. It seeks to prevent the extension of poverty in its various manifestations. It seeks to alleviate suffering. For this purpose, it uses as many means as possible to re-establish justice, always with Charity towards all men. "Peace is also the fruit of love, for love goes beyond what justice can achieve" (GS 78).*

## **7.2 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.

*Commentary.-It is not possible for Vincentians to remain solely interested in the effects of deprivation on individuals. We have to seek to remedy the causes as far as our modest possibilities allow. To evangelize, the inalienable mission of each Conference and each member means to proclaim the Good News and this includes the promotion of a civilisation of love. It is not possible to tell men that God loves them, without them seeing our determination to change the structures of society so they are founded on Love.*

*"As citizens of one world». Of course, Vincentians are loyal citizens of their country but their concern for the common good embraces the world and we have a loyalty to the poor everywhere.*

*"culture of life": Vincentians are committed to promote the right to life from conception to the natural end of earthly life.*

### **7.3 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.

*Commentary.-The Society's Twinning projects foster "sustainable development." protection of the environment". It is essential to respect the environment, as a consequence of our faith in its creation by God for the benefit of human beings, who are the stewards of creation and must care for it and nurture it for future generations. The environmental crisis "is truly trans-national and intergenerational, the first of such kind ever to face humanity as a whole" (To the UN 11/91).*

### **7.4 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.

*Commentary.-There are no two ways about it. Our outlook is that of the poor, of the oppressed, of the persecuted, of the hungry, the exploited... Others may defend other views and other options. Ours is the viewpoint of the poor.*

### **7.5 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.

*Commentary.-Let us help them to tell their truth, to reveal their suffering, to explain their needs. Let them feel responsible for achieving their goals. When this is not really possible, only then, let us become the voice of the voiceless ones. Only then.*

### **7.6 Facing the structures of sin**

Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak out clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements.

*Commentary.-"speak out clearly .. with charity". We cannot pretend that the structures of sin do not exist. They do exist. We should point them out, even with our modest resources, but with the full conviction and vigour that derives from a*

*life shared with the poor. Charity towards everybody will help us to achieve this with the least possible offence to those responsible. To challenge what is wrong in society was seen by Ozanam as essential; "What evil is done in the world through the inconsistency and timidity of good people." But, he reminded us, "kindness will be the character of Christian controversy." "Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society" (GS 27). "There exist also sinful inequalities that affect millions of people" (CCC1938)*

## **7.7 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.

*Commentary.-The poor are our friends: regardless of their colour, of their medical condition, of their poverty, of their weakness, of their defects. Let us introduce them to the world as Children of God: as our brothers, as beloved friends.*

*"opposes discrimination .. promotes understanding" To be misunderstood and discriminated against is a severe form of poverty because it humiliates, reduces self-esteem and reduces opportunities for work. Let us encourage sympathy and tolerance.*

## **7.8 Political independence of the Society**

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.



Those members who hold political offices will be asked, always with charity, not to hold any mission of representation in the Society during their term of political office.

*Commentary.-From its foundation, the Society has taken extreme care not to identify itself with any political party or political option. It even advised that there should be a total absence of party-political conversations within each Conference. Of course, the Society understands and praises the members who wish to take the Christian message into active politics. But these dear members, in order to avoid misunderstandings of any kind, are begged to relinquish any representative service in the Society while they are in a period of direct political activity. This is a small sacrifice that will undoubtedly be welcome and understood by all of them. "The spirit of charity, together with Christian prudence, shall further induce us to banish party-political discussions for ever from both general meetings and ordinary meetings. (Rule 1835, PC)*

## **7.9 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.

*Commentary.-It frequently becomes necessary to go beyond simple personal help, as has been mentioned so often in this Rule and in its commentaries. We referred in 1.10 to the empowerment of individuals to help forge the destiny of their community. In this article, 7.9, it is envisaged that in a deprived community in which Vincentians already visit the poor, members may be able to help gather together people in the community who want to find ways to improve their lives. Vincentians could help them to discern their most pressing problems, to decide on the relative priorities and to develop a plan to raise public awareness and achieve change.*

*Any action of the Society, to be fully justified from a Vincentian point of view, always has to arise from personal contact with the individuals who suffer. It is far from our intention to become simply pressure groups. The Society and each Conference must first live close to those who suffer, and only then build on this experience by helping them to overcome difficulties.*

## **Part 3 - Internal Statutes for National Council of Scotland**

### **THE GOVERNANCE OF THE SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND**

#### **Statutory Framework**

The Society is constituted under the Laws of Scotland as a company limited by guarantee (Company Number: 347803). The Society is also a Charity registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (Charity Number: SC006326). The governing document of the Society is the Memorandum and Articles of the company.

Where there is a conflict between the Memorandum and Articles of the Society and the Internal Statutes of the Society in Scotland the Memorandum and Articles will take precedence over the Internal Statutes of the Society.

The Society in Scotland will ensure that the Memorandum and Articles of the Society will comply with the International Statutes of the Society insofar as those Statutes do not conflict with the Laws of Scotland.

Where there is a conflict between the Laws of Scotland and the International Statutes of the Society then the Laws of Scotland will take precedence over the International Statutes but only in relation to the Society in Scotland.

Where there is a conflict between the International Rule of the Society and the Internal Statutes of the Society in Scotland the International Rule of the Society will take precedence over the Rule of the Society.

These Internal statutes of Scotland received the approval of the Permanent Section of the Council General on 8 June 2010. They are subordinate to and interpreted according to “The Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul” and to the International Statutes, in so far as these do not conflict with the laws of Scotland, which shall take precedence in relation to

the Society in Scotland, and shall be treated together with them as a single document.

## **AUTONOMY**

The Society is legally autonomous as to its existence, constitution, organisation, rules, activities and internal government. Vincentians freely choose their own officers and manage the Society's activities and assets with full autonomy, in accordance with their own Statutes and the legislation in effect in each country.

## **THE STRUCTURE**

### **Conferences meet frequently**

ARTICLE 1: Members of the Society, called Vincentians, traditionally gather in communities called "Conferences", which meet weekly unless authorised to meet fortnightly by the Group or Diocesan Councils to which they belong.

### **Councils - the minimum number of levels**

ARTICLE 2: Conferences are organised under different levels of Councils in the simplest manner possible.

National Council co-ordinates and represents the general activity of all the Conferences in Scotland. Diocesan Council represents groups of Conferences in a particular geographical area under the supervision of the National Council to which it belongs. Both Councils shall include the area they serve in their name in order to differentiate between them.

The National Councils determine the boundaries of the Diocesan Councils and create new Councils when the number of Conferences they assist so requires, informing the Council General of the same and requesting their Institution.

Other Group Councils may be instituted when deemed appropriate for an area within a Diocesan Council.

Councils are at the service of all Conferences under their jurisdiction. They help Conferences develop their spiritual life, intensify the service of each Conference, and diversify their activities so that they will be constantly attentive to the needs

of those who suffer.

In particular and without creating a parallel organisation, Councils at appropriate levels should particularly promote Youth Committees, helping them to be fully integrated into the life of the Society. The Youth Committees shall have the same relationship with the Council under which they operate as the rest of the Committees linked to the same Council.

### **Aggregation and Institution**

ARTICLE 3: All Conferences and Councils are full members of the Society when they are respectively Aggregated and Instituted by the Council General.

## **CONFERENCES & THEIR WORK**

### **Membership**

ARTICLE 4: Membership is limited to Catholic lay persons. In certain circumstances it may be possible to admit to membership persons of other denominations who can fulfil the essential qualifications for membership, but this will remain subject to the authority of the National Council and the guidance of the hierarchy.

The Society may have different categories of members. Full members are those who voluntarily live the Conference's life of prayer and action by attending the meetings and through regular personal contact with those who suffer. The Internal Statutes of the National Council may establish, as necessary, other categories of members who collaborate with its service to the poor. Auxiliary Members are those who participate in the Society's charitable activities but do not usually attend Conference Meetings. They are invited to attend the general meetings and liturgical celebrations of the Society.

### **Conference Meeting essentials**

ARTICLE 5: 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).

- 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 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.

### **Visits to the poor are made in a Vincentian spirit**

ARTICLE 6: Visits to those in need should be made in the place where they live whenever possible. The contact with friends in need should always be made in a spirit of friendship, respect, cordiality, empathy and affection. It should also promote self-sufficiency whenever possible for those who suffer and show concern for their deepest needs.

### **Conference & Council Annual Review**

ARTICLE 7: At least once a year, each Conference and Council must evaluate their service to the members and to the poor they visit, and find ways to provide better service.

They should also consider the new types of needs they seek to alleviate and how to find those in need.

At least once a year they submit a report on their activities to the National Council and the immediate Council to which they belong.

### **Commissioning Ceremony**

ARTICLE 8: All members shall annually renew their promise of service to the Members and to the poor, thereby deepening the spiritual dimension of their vocation.

## **OFFICERS & DECISION-MAKING**

### **Subsidiarity and Democracy**

ARTICLE 9: The Society accepts the principles of subsidiarity and democratic consensus as the basic rules of its functioning. At all Council meetings, a quorum is 50% plus one of the members with a right to vote. Those entitled to vote at a Council meetings are Society members who have been elected to that Council plus the Council President. At National Council meetings the National Treasurer is also entitled to vote.

### **Commentary**

“Democratic” - in the International Statutes of the Society care has been taken to state whether a quorum is required and if so, what is the quorum who can vote and what majority is required The Internal Statutes should also make these matters clear.

Our custom is to allow Presidents to make their own distinctive contribution but they are expected to listen to the members of their Conference or Council.

If after prayer and serious open-minded discussion the consensus or majority vote is clearly against the President’s view he will fully accept the democratic decision.

At Council level if both the majority of the Board and the voting members are against a proposal this should always be decisive. If however the Board are unanimously in favour but a majority of voting members are against a proposal

the proposal is defeated but there is another possibility in that unusual situation. Would the Council agree to allow the scheme to go ahead for a limited period or on a limited basis? It could then be evaluated and either withdrawn or, in the light of a positive experience, sustained. This will ensure that a President can lead more effectively whilst still being bound finally by democratic decisions.

### **Servant leadership**

ARTICLE 10: Offices in the Society, at any level, are always to be accepted as service to Christ, the members and the poor.

### **Board members and other officers**

ARTICLE 11: For a specific period of time the Society chooses members for the various Council and Conference offices, who will carry out their tasks with the same dedication with which they work within their own Conference.

Similar to the Board of the Council General, each Conference or Council should have at least a Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer appointed by the President after consultation with the members.

To safeguard the good reputation of the Conference or Council and therefore, that of the Society itself, appointees should not be relatives of the person empowered to make the appointments.

The President is elected by secret ballot by the full members of the Conference or elected members of the Council (including the current President), in accordance with Scottish legal procedures.

- a. Where the office of President of any Conference or Council becomes vacant or notice of such an impending vacancy is received, the Secretary or other officer of the Conference or Council will notify the position to all the members and request that nominations for the office be submitted by a date at least three weeks ahead.
- b. The nominee(s) must agree to his or her name being submitted and in the event of more than one nomination, an election will be held.
- c. The date of the election should be made known at least three weeks in advance to all members entitled to vote and those unable to attend should have the opportunity to hand in or post their vote in a sealed envelope.

- d. Two tellers (neither of whom being candidates) should be appointed to count the votes and this should be done openly.
- e. A candidate obtaining 50% plus one, of the possible votes will be declared elected.
- f. In the event of a second ballot being necessary, this should be held between the two candidates who have the most votes and the candidate obtaining a simple majority of votes cast, will be declared elected.

The maximum term of office for President of National Council or those of any other level should not exceed six years.

Under exceptional circumstances, National Council may request the Council General's permission to extend the term of office of its President. The Council General, through the Permanent Section, will authorise or refuse such a possibility and, in case of its authorisation, will set the maximum period of time for that extension.

Councils, at any level, have the same power as Council General to authorise a second term of office for the Presidents of the Councils and Conferences they coordinate, on written request of the same. By virtue of the above, Council and Conferences Presidents cannot be re-elected without requesting and obtaining the agreement of the next higher Council.

It is recommended that members should not be elected to the office of President after the age of 70. Candidates for President who will be over the age of 65 at the time of taking office should indicate their age when they are nominated for office.

### **The Society must remain voluntary**

ARTICLE 12: Employees of the Society, of its Special Works or of organisations controlled by the Society, may not be elected or appointed to any office within the Society. They may, however, be members and hold offices in a Conference, provided it is not the Conference responsible for the work in which they are employed.



## **The Spiritual Adviser in a lay Society**

ARTICLE 13: As traditional since the beginning of the Conferences, a Spiritual Adviser should be appointed to foster spiritual life within the Conferences and Councils. Priests, permanent deacons and other members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office outside of their spiritual work.

Should a priest, permanent deacon or other member of a religious order not be available for the spiritual advisory function, the President of the Council or Conference, after consultation with the President of the Council to which it belongs, may appoint a member who has had the appropriate training as Spiritual Advisor.

## **PROMOTING UNITY WITHIN AND BETWEEN CONFERENCES**

### **Festival Meetings & Conference Masses should be maintained**

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

## **AUTHORITIES OF PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL**

### **To suspend members, Conference & Councils**

ARTICLE 15: In accordance with Article 6.8 of the International Statutes, the President of the National Council has the delegated authority to suspend members, Conferences or Councils of the Society in Scotland as a precautionary measure.

When the National Council President has made such a decision, the member, Conference or Council suspended as a precautionary measure will cease to exercise any office and may not act on behalf of the Society under any circumstances.

The suspended member may appeal to the National Council so that the case may be reviewed at a plenary meeting of the latter, which will listen to the member and make its decision by vote.

If the decision of the National Council President is confirmed by the National Council, the member, Conference or Council suspended is entitled to appeal to the President General.

### **To annul the election of a President**

ARTICLE 16: National Council President may, for serious reasons, annul the election of a member as President of a Conference or Council. Such member will immediately cease to exercise the office and may appeal to the National Council.

### **May establish a Conciliation Committee**

ARTICLE 17: The National Council may establish a Conciliation Committee, to which Councils, Conferences and members may appeal.

Councils, Conferences and members trust the integrity of the Society and its life of prayer and communion, so that they need not appeal to civil or legal authorities to resolve internal differences.

Any member, Conference or Council which uses means other than those provided by the Society to resolve internal disputes renounces Vincentian communion and leaves the Society.

The exception to this Article is when a Council/Conference or Vincentian has good reason to suspect that one or more Vincentians has acted contrary to the Law of Scotland, and has advised National Council of the suspicions. If the alleged illegality is not suitably corrected, the Council/Conference or Vincentian is obligated ,(to ensure the good name of the Society), to reports such events to the appropriate Authorities.

In matters concerning the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults members of the Society have an overriding obligation to comply with the civil and criminal law of Scotland. The Society fully supports both civil law, criminal law and Catholic Church guidelines on Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults.

## **TRANSPARENCY IN USING MONEY AND OTHER ASSETS**

### **Annual finance & activity reports are normally publicised by National Council, other Councils & Conferences**

ARTICLE 18: The Society shall preserve its good reputation for honesty and responsible stewardship. It will produce finance and activity reports at least annually.

Whenever circumstances permit, these reports should be publicised externally and internally and be made available to all members and the public in general. These reports should be sent to the diocesan Bishops and the Civil Authorities for their information whenever possible.

### **Councils and Conferences should prepare similar reports.**

The National Council will be, to all legal effects, the sole responsible party before any national or international jurisdiction for the events occurring within Scotland.

### **Property and the distribution of unused funds**

ARTICLE 19: Conferences and Councils zealously manage and maintain the Society's assets.

The authority to dispose of, purchase, mortgage, lease or rent the Society's real estate assets shall remain exclusively with National Council.

Faithful to the spirit of non-accumulation of wealth, the National Council will determine annually the percentage of income of each of the Councils or Conferences within their area which will be made available to them. The National Council will determine the direct allocation of such funds, which may not be hoarded as a capital sum, to the service of the poor in Scotland or abroad, in the poorest areas of the world.

### **Collections for the poor and to maintain the structure**

ARTICLE 20: Each Conference shall assume its responsibility in assisting other Conferences and Councils with greater needs. Likewise, Conferences should feel responsible for the maintenance of all the levels of the structure of the Society. In

order to achieve this, they must make a quarterly review of their own financial needs for the following quarter and allocate surplus funds to poorer Conferences in their Group Council or to the Group, Diocesan or National Council or to Conferences in poorer countries.

### **Council Presidents' right to audit and to see correspondence**

ARTICLE 21: When deemed appropriate, Council Presidents should authorise audits of the Conferences, Councils and Special Work under the auspices of their Council.

The President of the Council to which any of the Society's Special Works belongs, shall be entitled, after due consultation with the National Council and evaluation of the legal consequences, to replace the members of the Board of that Special Work and any of its employees regardless of their functions.

Council Presidents are also entitled to have access to all correspondence sent by any Conference on behalf of the Society. This same authorisation is applicable to any Council with regard to the other Councils under its auspices.

### **Refund of expenses**

ARTICLE 22: Vincentians entrusted to undertake previously and duly authorised offices, missions or tasks for the Society are entitled to the refund of the expenses incurred.

### **Changes to Internal Statutes**

ARTICLE 23: To change the Internal Statutes, a majority of two-thirds of those entitled to vote is necessary. Such alterations require the approval of the Permanent Section of Council General.

## ARTICLE 24: NATIONAL COUNCIL

### **Status and Purpose**

24.1 The National Council is responsible for:

- maintaining the ethos and principles of the Society in Scotland
- the election of the National President
- the discharge of any other functions and responsibilities of the Corporate members, as defined in Internal Statute 24.2, as may be described in the Memorandum and Articles
- the consideration of any relevant matters raised by individual Diocesan or Archdiocesan Council Presidents

### **Membership of the National Council**

24.2 The National Council of the Society comprises:

- the National President,
- the National Vice-President, who shall be an elected President of a Diocesan or Archdiocesan Council
- the National Treasurer
- the other elected Presidents of Diocesan and Archdiocesan Councils

The persons listed above constitute the Corporate Members of the Society as defined in the Memorandum and Articles.

24.3 The President shall co-opt to membership a Twinning Officer, a Youth Representative, a Communications Officer and, after agreement with the Council, may co-opt any members with experience and qualities deemed to be of advantage to the Council. Co-opted members shall be non-voting and shall not be Corporate Members of the Society.

## Part 2 – Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

### 1. The Confederation, Head office and Members

#### 1.1 The Confederation

At international level, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is united in its spirituality and management through an International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (hereinafter referred to as the "Confederation"), which is presided over by the President General.

#### 1.2 The name of the Society

The International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the sole owner of the Society's name. Only the Council General may, on behalf of the Confederation, authorise or prohibit the use of its name.

#### 1.3 The international head office

The Confederation's head office is based in Paris, France, the city where the first Conference was founded.

The head office may be transferred to any other location in the world by resolution of the Council General Assembly; this resolution shall be adopted by a majority of two thirds of the votes of the members present and represented.

In order for this resolution to be validly adopted by the Assembly, the point must have been included on the agenda prepared previously and sent to the members of the Council General.

##### 1.3.1 Other international Confederation centres

Other work Centres may be established in different cities around the world.

#### 1.4 Official language

In recognition of the establishment of the first St. Vincent de Paul Conference in France, the official language of the Confederation is French. All the Confederation's official documents shall be drafted in this language.

#### 1.4.1 Other co-official languages

The co-official languages of the Confederation are English, Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. The Confederation undertakes to publish most of its documentation in all the co-official languages.

#### 1.5 The Assembly of the Council General

The supreme democratic body of the Confederation is the Council General, which meets in ordinary or extraordinary Assembly and is presided over by the President General.

#### 1.6 Legal members

Each Superior or Assimilated Council that duly joins the Confederation, and is instituted accordingly, shall become a legal member of the Confederation's Council General.

They must be constituted within the scope of their national legislations as non-profit or similar organisations, and duly Instituted by the Council General.

Although the tradition of our Society prefers to use the term "Superior Councils", which is used throughout the wording of the Statutes, special provisions in legislation or other circumstances may warrant the use of the term "National Council".

##### 1.6.1 Representatives on the Council

The Council General is formed by the duly elected Presidents of the Superior or Assimilated Councils, which they represent, and which are instituted in the different countries and clearly-defined regions around the world.

##### 1.6.2 Definition of Assimilated Councils

Assimilated Councils are Councils that have been Instituted or Conferences that have been Aggregated, and which are legally constituted within the scope of their national legislations as non-profit organisations representing a country or region in which a Superior Council has not yet been Instituted.

## 1.7 Affiliation to the Confederation

Any Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council (as defined in Article 1.10.1 of the International Statutes) of the Society around the world that wishes to join the Confederation must request this in writing and submit such request to the President General of the Confederation.

### 1.7.1 Requirements for the affiliation

The abovementioned written request for affiliation to the Confederation must state that such Council complies, pursuant to national legislation, with the provisions established in Article 1.6 of the International Statutes of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and must also indicate the area for which it is responsible.

Likewise, it shall expressly accept all aspects of the Rule and Statutes of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which consists of three parts: the Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Basic Requirements for Drafting the Internal Statutes for Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

### 1.7.2 Legal liability

Under no circumstances shall the Confederation or any of its governing members, by virtue of the affiliation described above, be liable for events occurring without their full and proven knowledge. The Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils shall, for all legal purposes, be the highest and ultimate bodies responsible, before any type of national or international jurisdiction, for events occurring within their jurisdictional areas.

## 1.8 Institution of Superior Councils

In order to achieve a better service for members and the poor in the same country, two or more Superior Councils may be Instituted in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 1.9 of the International Statutes.

### 1.8.1 The conditions

The following conditions must be met in order to justify this need:

- a) Excessive territorial scope. b) Difficulties in communication
- c) Large number of Conferences and Councils d) Large number of members and Special Works



## 1.9 Procedures for instituting new Superior Councils

The following conditions must be met in order for a new Superior Council to be instituted in a country where there is already a Superior Council:

### 1.9.1 Establishment on the request of a Superior Council

- a) Existence of more than 3,000 Conferences working in the country of the applicant Superior/Assimilated Council.
- b) The new Council which is the object of the institution request has more than 1,000 Conferences.
- c) The request is presented by the existing Superior Council, authorising the institution of the new Superior Council.
- d) The legislation in the country in question permits the institution of two Superior Councils in that country, with different jurisdictions.
- e) Favourable report by the Territorial Vice-President. f) Express authorisation from the Council General through its Permanent Section

### 1.9.2. Institution following an official request

The Council General, through its Permanent Section, may officially institute Superior or Assimilated Councils for specific regions around the world, regardless of the frontiers of the countries in question, whenever socio-political, geographic reasons or the service make this necessary.

When the Institution of these Councils affects already Instituted Superior Councils duly aggregated to the Confederation in accordance with the provisions established in Article 1.6 of these International Statutes, the aforementioned Council must be consulted beforehand. This consultation obligation shall be binding on the Permanent Section of the Council General.

## 1.10 Other members of the Council General

Different circumstances may mean that there are other members of the Council General, in accordance with the following classification:

1.10.1 Associated Councils: These are Councils that cannot achieve full legal member status due to limitations in their national legislations or to the fact that they have availed themselves of legal instruments governing legal members other than those established in Article 1.6 of these International Statutes.

1.10.2 Temporary Members: These are members appointed by the President General in countries or regions where the Society is not present and until the corresponding Superior or Assimilated Council can be instituted.

The same shall apply to the provisional Presidents of the Superior Councils instituted by the Council General, in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 6.5 of these International Statutes.

1.10.3 Missionary Members: These shall be members appointed by the President General to perform specific tasks and services. They shall always include members that have served as International Presidents General.

### 1.11 Right to speak but not to vote

All the other members of the Council General that is: Associated, Temporary or Missionary members shall be entitled to speak but not to vote at Council General Assemblies.

### 1.12 Related Special Works

Special Works related to the Society that may use the Society's logo in the places and situations that are considered appropriate, shall be deemed to be those Special Works in which the Society of St. Vincent de Paul participates at any level of the organization; the aforementioned participation shall enable the Special Work to be controlled by Vincentian members on an effective, majority and real basis.

#### 1.12.1 Use of the Society's logos

Every Superior or Assimilated Council shall authorise the use of the Society's logos within its jurisdiction in accordance with the provisions established in the previous paragraph.

#### 1.12.2 Employees

The employees of these Special Works and in general those employed by the Confederation may not hold Offices on the Councils of the Society, with the exception of the technical and executive position corresponding to them at the Special Work or Council where they render their services.

## 2. The Council General Assembly

### 2.1 The General Assembly of the Confederation

The senior body of the Confederation is the Council General, which meets in a General Assembly as provided in Article 1.5 of these International Statutes.

Each Superior Council and Assimilated Council which is a legal member is represented by one vote. The President General shall likewise have one vote which, if the case may be, shall be considered the casting vote.

#### 2.1.1 Quorum and voting

The valid adoption of resolutions by the General Assembly shall require the attendance or representation of at least 30% of its full members. Should a second call be necessary, this shall be issued at least 24 hours later, and shall be considered as validly constituted regardless of the percentage of members present or represented. Resolutions shall be validly adopted by a simple majority.

### 2.2 Frequency of Assembly meetings

The Council General Assembly normally meets once every six years.

#### 2.2.1 Extraordinary General Assemblies

The President General may convene Extraordinary General Assemblies whenever circumstances make this advisable.

An Extraordinary General Assembly must be convened when so requested by more than 50% of the legal members of the Council General.

### 2.3 Participants

These Assemblies may be attended by the representatives of the Councils indicated in Article 1.6 herein as well as those indicated in Articles 1.10.1 and 1.10.2 and 1.10.3 of these International Statutes, each by virtue of the powers granted to them in the aforementioned Articles.

### 2.4 Agenda

The agenda of the Assembly meeting and the notice convening the meeting are determined by the General Secretary in agreement with the President and taking into account any suggestions by members of the Council to whom this notice is delivered.

## 2.5 Prayers and meditation

According to tradition, the meeting begins and ends with a prayer, consisting of a spiritual reading or meditation, which may lead to a brief exchange of opinions. This reading is given by the International Spiritual Adviser. The corresponding secret collection is always taken among attending members.

### 3. The President General, the Board of the Council General and the International service structure

#### 3.1 The President General

The President of the Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and its Council General represents the Society before the Holy See and all international religious or civil organisations, and in general, before any public or private organisation.

Since the founding of the first Conference, this figure has represented the nexus of union and moral authority of the Society in periods when the Council General Assembly has not met.

The President General personifies the unity of the Society worldwide.

#### 3.2 The functions of the President General

The President of the Council General, supported by a team within the International Structure, supervises, fosters and coordinates the Society's activities worldwide and, for this purpose, makes any decisions deemed appropriate, implementing the resolutions of the Council General Assemblies in compliance with the provisions established in the Rule, the International Statutes and pursuant to the Society's tradition.

##### 3.2.1 Report on the progress of the Society

In January every year, and for general information of all the members and Councils, the President General drafts a moral report for all the members of the Council General, reflecting the progress of the Society during the previous year and the prospects for the future.

#### 3.3 Election of the President General

The President General is elected by all the members of the Society, represented by the Presidents of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils, who exercise this right on their own behalf and on behalf of the members they represent.

#### 3.4 Duration of the term of office

The term of office of the President General is six years; this term of office may be renewed once only.

### 3.5 Age limit

The President General may not be more than 65 years of age when elected.

### 3.6 Election procedure and deadlines

When a President General must be elected because the term of the existing President has reached its end, the Vice President General must announce this at least ten months prior to the time of the election to the members of the Council General, who are then responsible for notifying the members accordingly.

#### 3.6.1 Electoral Board

The electoral board is presided over by the Vice-President General and is formed by the latter, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General, provided that none of them is a candidate. If any of the aforementioned three persons is a candidate, he/she shall be replaced by a legal member of the Council General.

### 3.7 Presentation of candidates, forms and limitations

During the two months following the notification of the elections, the members of the Council General, either individually or in groups, may present the candidates that they deem suitable and worthy, chosen from among those members who have belonged to the Society for more than fifteen years and who do not hold remunerated service posts in the Confederation at any level or in any of the participated or related Special Works.

### 3.8 Announcement of candidates

At least three months prior to the Council General Assembly meeting, the Vice-President General shall announce the candidates who fulfil the required conditions and whose proven acceptance has previously been obtained by the Vice-President General.

This announcement shall be accompanied by a short Vincentian "curriculum vitae", together with the candidate's action programme if elected, presented on a maximum of two sheets.

### 3.9 Time and form of election

The new President General shall be elected at the General, Ordinary or Extraordinary Assembly called for this and other purposes.

### 3.9.1 Quorum for election

In order for the General Assembly to be validly constituted to elect a new President General, a quorum of 30% of the members with voting rights pursuant to Article 2.1.1 of these International Statutes shall be required.

### 3.9.2 Voting procedure

The voting system used shall consist in two rounds and shall be effected by secret ballot. The first round shall include the postal votes of those electors who are unable to attend in person. In the second round, which shall only be required if no candidate obtains one half plus one of the votes presented, the candidates shall be the two members who have obtained most votes in the first round. Due to time restrictions, this second voting round shall be performed directly and by secret ballot; no postal votes shall be accepted.

Voting shall take place on the afternoon of the first day of the Council General Assembly meeting in which the voting is included on the agenda and shall have priority over any other matters.

#### 3.9.2.1 Limitation

If an existing President General is presented for a second term of office having passed the first round without any candidate reaching half plus one of the votes, in order for his/her election to be valid, he/she must obtain at least one half plus one of the votes presented in the second round. Otherwise, the voting process shall recommence twenty four hours later with the proposed candidates, excluding the existing President.

### 3.9.3 Taking of office

The President General shall take up the Presidency on the next Feast of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, namely on 9 September, in the city of Paris.

### 3.10 Termination of functions

The President General may cease to perform his/her service functions for the following reasons:

- a) End of the term of office for which he/she was elected.
- b) Not selected for a second term of office.
- c) Expiry of the maximum of two terms of office.

- d) Resignation during the period of service.
- e) Incapacity.
- f) Death.
- g) Loss of civil rights.

### 3.11 Resignation from service

In the event a President General should resign, in order for such resignation to take effect it must be formally presented before the International Executive Committee, pursuant to Articles 4.1 and subsequent of these International Statutes, and accepted by the aforementioned Committee.

### 3.12 Incapacity

Should any incapacity impede the President General's performance of service, the Board Members, i.e. the Vice President General, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General shall jointly call an extraordinary meeting reserved solely for the International Executive Committee in order to deal exclusively with this matter. This meeting shall be held within a maximum of 30 days.

In order for the meeting to be validly constituted, the attendance of 30% of the members established in Article 4.3 of these International Statutes shall be required.

#### 3.12.1 Consideration of incapacity

The Committee, meeting on an extraordinary and emergency basis to deal exclusively with this matter on the agenda, shall examine on a charitable and reserved basis, the alleged incapacity of the President General based on founded and documented arguments presented by the members of the Board of the Council General. During the period elapsing between the convening of the Committee and its decision, no international Vincentian office undertaking may be suspended, replaced or cancelled.

### 3.13 Guaranteeing the decision about incapacity

In order for the incapacity decision to be legally executed and validated, it must be supported by at least two thirds of the votes present and represented at the meeting of the International Executive Committee. The Secretary General of the Society shall immediately take detailed minutes of all the events at the Committee meeting, which, on this specific occasion, must be signed by all the



attendees.

### 3.14 Replacement of the General President

In any of the events envisaged with respect to the termination of services and functions on the part of a President General, the Society's Vice-President General shall be responsible for the international management of the Society.

In all cases he/she shall notify the other members of the Council General and particularly the President General when specifically declaring the latter's incapacity.

### 3.15 Deadlines for the election of a new President General in the event of resignation or incapacity.

In the event of resignation or incapacity, and within the maximum and non-extendible period of 90 days, the International Vice-President General shall call elections in accordance with the provisions established in Articles 3.3 to 3.10 of these International Statutes.

### 3.16 The Board Members of the Council General

The President General, after making the appropriate enquiries, shall appoint a Vice-President General, a Secretary General and a Treasurer General for a limited renewable period; these persons, together with the President General, shall form the Board of the Confederation's Council General, and shall provide the President General with counsel and shall also have the functions described in Article 7.4 of these International Statutes.

The President General shall preside over the Board. All the members indicated pursuant to Articles 3.16 through 3.18 of these International Statutes shall be entitled to vote at the Board meetings, with the exception of the Spiritual Advisor. Meetings of this Board shall not require a quorum and resolutions shall be adopted by simple majority vote.

#### 3.16.1 The Board's Mission

The Board shall collaborate with the President General in order to develop the strategy required to implement the agreements reached by the Council General Assemblies and the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

It shall also collaborate with the President General in designing the strategy to be proposed to the Council General Assemblies and to the International

Executive Committee.

It is the closest Vincentian body to the President General, whom it advises and counsels on any matter.

The President must consult the full Board at least three times a year, in between International Executive Committee meetings

### 3.16.2 The International Spiritual Adviser

The International Spiritual Adviser always belongs to the Board of the Council General, as a member, with a right to speak but not to vote; this person shall also be appointed by the President General with the authorization of his direct superior.

### 3.16.3 The International Youth Delegate

The member entrusted with the International Youth Delegation shall also always form part of the Board of the Council General.

### 3.16.4 Other Board Members

Depending on the Board's needs, other members may be appointed as deputies to the Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer.

## 3.17 The Vice-President General

The Vice-President General shall replace the President General if the latter is prevented from attending, absent or disqualified and all the latter's functions shall be delegated to the former.

### 3.17.1 The special mission

The Vice President General is responsible for ensuring and organising the election of a new President General, whenever the post becomes vacant, and in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 3.6 et seq. of these International Statutes, and announces the election results and submits these to the Society.

## 3.18 Deputy Vice-Presidents General

Whenever necessary, and for specific general Areas of considerable responsibility within the Vincentian Society, the President General shall appoint Deputy Vice-Presidents General to whom certain functions shall be delegated;

these Deputies shall automatically form part of the Board of the Council General.

### 3.19 The Secretary General: functions

Under the authority of the President General, the Secretary General ensures the smooth running of the different administrative services and bodies worldwide that report directly to the Council General. The Secretary General prepares the schedule of Council General Assemblies, organising its agendas and drafting the Minutes. The Secretary General performs the same mission for the International Executive Committee, the Permanent Section and the Board.

The Secretary General handles habitual and regular relations between the Permanent Section and the different Councils and Conferences of the Society.

The Secretary General is responsible for the Council General's Archives and may be assisted by Deputy Secretaries.

#### 3.19.1 Annual Report

In July every year, the Secretary General shall draft an Annual Report on the Society's worldwide activities, based on the information obtained from the Superior Councils. This Report shall also be publicised internally and externally.

### 3.20 The Treasurer General: functions

Under the authority of the President General, the Treasurer General is responsible for the financial management of the Council General. The Treasurer General keeps the accounts, which must be checked at least once a year by a financial Commission appointed by the Council General and by a professionally qualified independent body.

The Treasurer General may be assisted by Deputy Treasurers.

### 3.21 The Budget of the Council General

The Treasurer General establishes the budget for the Administration of the Council General: the income and expenses accounts are approved by the Permanent Section, in its capacity as the Governing Board, before being presented at the Council General Assembly. In years in which no ordinary Assembly is convened, the International Executive Committee shall be responsible for approving these Budgets.

### 3.21.1 Income

The ordinary budget of the Council General in terms of income is generated by:

Contributions from the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils.

Collections taken during Council meetings.

Donations with or without special applications.

Subsidies from any type of public or private institution.

The personal contribution of each member of the Society, through secret collection in the last quarter of each year, as a sign of solidarity with the Council General.

Others.

### 3.21.2 Expenses

The main expenses are as follows:

Expenses incurred to finance actions in any country in order to develop, extend and support the Society.

Expenses incurred by the Secretariat and with respect to Council General publications.

Expenses incurred in the organization of Vincentian meetings that serve the international structure.

Expenses incurred in connection with strictly essential trips.

### 3.21.3 Extraordinary Budgets, Global or Special Funds and others

Besides the ordinary budget, a provision may be allotted for creating Global or Special Funds, which are managed in the same way and intended for use in emergencies or as aid in specific circumstances for the benefit of one or various Councils, Conferences, countries, geographical regions of the world, in the event of catastrophes, or for any other purpose that is deemed appropriate.

### 3.22 The remaining international service structure

The President General appoints Territorial Vice Presidents and Area

Coordinators from among the Society's worldwide members.

### 3.22.1 Enquiries

Prior to making the appointments to the International Service Structure, the President General shall, on a nonbinding basis, always consult with the countries affected by the appointments.

The countries affected by an appointment to service in the Structure of a Coordinator or International Vice President with which they do not agree by majority vote, shall inform the President General of such a decision. The President General shall be obliged to revoke his appointment and to appoint a different Coordinator or Territorial Vice President within the shortest possible time.

### 3.23 Territorial Vice-Presidents

In close cooperation with the President General and in his/her name, the Territorial Vice-Presidents shall support, advise, protect, help and coordinate the Society in large geographical areas around the world.

#### 3.23.1 Regional meetings

In the parts of the world where they supervise and are responsible for rendering their services, they may organise regional Meetings with the authorisation of the President General.

### 3.24 The Coordinators

The Territorial Vice-Presidents are assisted in their supervisory and promotional tasks by members who report to them and to whom they delegate specific service tasks for specific groups of countries.

They shall also respect at all times the freedom of action of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils which they serve as a nexus of union and means of communication.

### 3.25 International Commissions

For specific purposes, the President General may delegate different members the task of presiding over work or representing Commissions established to achieve specific targets.

### 3.25.1 The members of the International Commissions

Whenever proposed by the different Commission Presidents, the President General shall appoint the members of these Commissions.

### 3.26 Individual responsibilities

Likewise, and for specific missions that do not require a larger number of collaborators, the President General may delegate specific missions to individual members.

### 3.27 Members with international missions

All members summoned to render important international services to their fellow members and to the poor shall do their utmost not to abandon their obligation to perform these tasks simultaneously with their commitments to the Conference to which they belong.

### 3.28 The end of terms of office

In order to ensure the smooth hand-over of functions, all terms, posts and services delegated by the President General shall automatically cease six months after a new President General takes up his/her appointment.

The new President General may shorten this period if it is deemed appropriate.

## 4. The International Executive Committee

### 4.1 The mission of the Committee

The International Executive Committee of the Confederation (hereinafter referred to as the "Committee"), shall be responsible for co-ordinating the Society's international strategy in the interim periods between Council General Assemblies, giving special attention to the need to ensure that this complies with the requests and matters approved during in the aforementioned General Assemblies.

It shall also assist and advise the President General in the task of supervising all the Conferences and Councils, examining the general progress of the Society and making decisions on the strategy for the following year, as well as aspects that the President General considers must be corrected from previous administrations.

#### 4.1.1 The mission of the Committee as an Ordinary Assembly of the Confederation

In the years in which the ordinary Assembly of the Council General is not convened, the Committee shall be responsible for performing the Assembly functions of the Confederation as provided in French legislation governing non-profit associations.

### 4.2 Report to the General Assembly

At the beginning of each Council General Assembly meeting, the Committee shall report to the Assembly through the Secretary General on the results of its management and administration during the years in which the Assembly was not convened and shall request the ratification of its performance.

### 4.3 Permanent and legal members

Permanent Committee members are, apart from the President General, those members who are responsible for the effective presidency of the Committee, namely the Vice-President General, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General. Likewise, they shall include, where appropriate, the Deputy Vice-Presidents General envisaged in Article 3.18 of these International Statutes.

Legal members of the Committee are the Presidents of the Superior or Assimilated Councils with more than 1,000 active and aggregated Conferences within their jurisdiction.

Moreover, the President General shall appoint, on the proposal of the other permanent and legal members of the Committee, five members from the Superior or Assimilated Councils with a lower degree of Vincentian representation around the world; these members are appointed on a biannual basis.

Each Superior or Assimilated Council which is a legal member is represented by one vote. The President General shall likewise have one vote which, if the case may be, shall be considered the casting vote.

#### 4.3.1 Quorum and voting

The valid adoption of resolutions by the International Executive Committee shall require the attendance or representation of at least 30% of its full members. Should a second call be necessary, this shall be issued at least 24 hours later, and shall be considered as validly constituted regardless of the percentage of members present or represented. Resolutions shall be validly adopted by a simple majority.

Each Superior or Assimilated Council, which is a legal member, is represented by a vote. In the same way, the vote of the President General shall be considered, if the case may be, the casting vote.

#### 4.4 Guest participants

The Territorial Vice-Presidents, the Presidents of the existing International Commissions and members especially delegated by the President General with individual tasks of an international nature, shall always be invited to attend Committee meetings with a right to speak but not to vote.

The International Spiritual Adviser shall also be invited especially because of his/her spiritual work.

#### 4.4.1 Special invitations

Any person holding a post of responsibility within the Society's international structure may be called to explain his/her management and administration performance to the Committee, and this shall be subject to approval by the latter; the corresponding observations shall also be made by the Committee itself.

#### 4.5 Special reports

The Deputy Vice-Presidents General, the Secretary General, the Treasurer



General, the Territorial Vice-Presidents, and the members delegated by the President General with Commissions or special missions shall be specifically obliged to report on the work performed.

#### 4.5.1 The Secretary General's Report

The Secretary General, who shall also act as the Secretary of the Committee, shall report on the management of the Permanent Section and on the administrative situation and service of the Offices of the Council General of the Society.

Except for the extraordinary meetings envisaged in paragraph two of Article 4.7 of these International Statutes, the Secretary General shall obtain confirmation from all the Superior or Assimilated Councils, at least two months in advance of the meeting of the International Executive Committee, regarding the inclusion or exclusion of any point on the agenda of the meeting.

The Secretary General shall be the spokesperson for Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils that do not form part of the Committee and do not attend its meetings, with respect to any reports or opinions that have been sent in writing.

#### 4.5.2 The Treasurer General's report

Specifically with respect to the Treasurer General, he/she shall report on his/her management and administration performance to the Committee, which shall represent, for him/her, the financial Commission envisaged in Article 3.20 of these International Statutes.

Likewise, the Treasurer General shall present the budget and obtain its approval in those cases envisaged in Article 3.21 of these International Statutes.

#### 4.6 Correspondents and Coordinators

In addition to the members with the responsibilities mentioned in the previous Articles, the Committee may specifically summon any Correspondent or Coordinator, etc., and included within the performance of their services, to ask questions with respect to any aspect of their service.

#### 4.7 Committee and International Structure Meetings

The Committee shall meet at least once a year, during the first six months of the year, except in years in which the Council General Assembly is convened.

Extraordinary meetings may be convened when the President General considers that these are necessary and also whenever requested by one half plus one of its voting members.

#### 4.7.1 Service structure meetings

The entire International service Structure shall meet in a Plenary Session each two years, except in years in which the ordinary Assembly of the Council General is convened, on the days after those on which the Committee is convened.

##### 4.7.1.1 Participants

All the Vincentian members that are delegated international services and are the so-called components of the International Structure shall be invited to participate in these meetings.

##### 4.7.1.2 Objectives

The aim of these meetings shall be to provide information and to exchange experiences among the different members serving the International Structure of the Confederation. In this way, the members of the International Executive Committee shall learn about the difficulties of the International Structure and the latter shall gain knowledge of the international strategy to be designed by the former - the Committee - during inter-Assembly periods.

These shall be mainly training and informative meetings for the entire structure.

#### 4.8 Prayer and meditation

In accordance with the Society's tradition, the Committee meeting shall begin and end with a prayer. A spiritual reading or a meditation, which may lead to a brief sharing, shall be presented by one of the attending members, normally by the International Spiritual Adviser. A collection shall then be taken among the participants.

## 5. The Permanent Section/Governing Board

### 5.1 Head office and convening of meetings

A Permanent Section shall be established at the head office of the Council General of the Confederation; it shall be presided over by the President General. It may be convened anywhere around the world, whenever the President General considers that the situation makes this advisable.

#### 5.1.1 The mission of the Permanent Section

Its mission is to closely supervise and monitor the activity of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul around the world, helping the President General to achieve a better international service for members and the poor. It makes any appropriate decisions within the scope of the Rule and Statutes and the Society's Tradition, and also complies specifically with the resolutions adopted by the Assemblies of the Council General and the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

The Permanent Section shall specifically monitor resolutions adopted at the last Assembly meeting of the Council General or the International Executive Committee, as well as their degree of implementation in the different Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils and by the Council General itself whenever appropriate.

#### 5.1.2 The mission of the Permanent Section as the Governing Board of the Confederation

Whenever appropriate, and at least once a year, the Permanent Section shall be responsible for performing the role established by French Law for the Governing Boards of non-profit Associations.

In such circumstances, the Permanent Section shall be convened with a special agenda that shall make special mention of the fact that it acts as the Governing Board of the Confederation.

### 5.2 Permanent Section members

By virtue of the service that they render, the Board Members of the Council General, the Territorial Vice Presidents and the Correspondents are members of this Permanent Section.

### 5.2.1 Voting

Save on the occasions when the Permanent Section meets as the Board of Directors of the Confederation, pursuant to Article 5.1.2 of these International Statutes, all Presidents of Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils who attend a session of the Permanent Section shall be entitled to a voice and vote, as if a full member of this body.

### 5.3 Territorial Technical Liaison Officers

Members of the Section are those professionals who are recruited whenever possible, and on a preferential basis, from among the members from different geographical origins. Their mission is delegated by the President General for a specific renewable period. They are appointed with the right to speak but not to vote.

#### 5.3.1. The mission of the Territorial Technical Liaison Officers

Each Liaison Officer is appointed at the designated Council General Work Centre determined pursuant to Article 1.3.1 of these International Statutes, as an assistant to the Territorial Vice-Presidents and Coordinators of the geographical area to which they are assigned.

From time to time, other Technical Liaison Officers, with or without territorial responsibilities, may be entrusted with special missions reporting directly to the Secretary General or the President General.

#### 5.3.2 Exclusion

These Members of the Permanent Section shall not belong to this Section when this is meeting as the Governing Board of the Confederation, as provided in Article 5.1.2 of these International Statutes.

### 5.4 Correspondent members and others

The members traditionally referred to as Territorial Correspondents who are appointed by the President General for a specific renewable period, as well as other members with specific missions, also form part of this Section.

#### 5.4.1 The mission of the Territorial Correspondents

The mission entrusted to the Territorial Correspondents is that of maintaining a

constant relationship and effective cooperation with the different Territorial Technical Liaison Officers who depend on the former. They shall be close and fraternal representatives before the international structure, of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils, to whose service they have been assigned.

#### 5.5 Permanent guests

The Presidents of the Superior or Assimilated Councils, when present at head office, shall always be invited to attend the meetings of the Permanent Section.

#### 5.6 The Secretary of the Permanent Section

As envisaged in Article 3.19 of these International Statutes, the Society's Secretary General is also the Secretary General of the Permanent Section.

## 6. Institution, Aggregation and Dissolution

### 6.1 Aggregation and Institution powers

Only the Council General is empowered to institute new Councils and aggregate new Conferences to the Society, after consulting the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils accordingly.

### 6.2 Aggregation and Institution Proposals Speaker.

The Aggregation of Conferences and Institution of Councils are presented by a Speaker appointed by the President General, in a session of the Permanent Section. The Speaker receives the proposals and recommendations of the competent Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils on behalf of the President General and obtains opinions from the members of the Permanent Section specifically responsible for handling relations with the Council which has requested the Aggregation or the Institution.

The Speaker presents the request to the Permanent Section, which either approves or rejects the Aggregation or Institution request.

#### 6.2.1 Deadline for presenting and requesting the Aggregation of Conferences

The Conference, object of an Aggregation request presented by the Speaker, must have been created and must have provided services to the poor for at least twelve months.

#### 6.2.2 Preservation of aggregated or instituted status

The Conferences and Councils, once Aggregated or Instituted, shall retain that status as long as circumstances do not require the President General to proceed to their temporary suspension (see Article 6.8 and subsequent of these International Statutes), or to the firm exclusion by the Society of any Conference or Council. (delete "member").

### 6.3 Extraordinary circumstances

The Permanent Section, through the Aggregations and Institutions Speaker, may sometimes request supplementary reports from the International Territorial Vice-Presidents.

### 6.4 Communication

The Aggregations or Institutions declared by the Permanent Section are

notified by the President General to the President of the interested Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, as well as to the beneficiaries.

#### 6.4.1 Aggregation and Institution Letters

The Aggregation or Institution Letters shall be signed by the President General and the Secretary General; a space shall be left for the signature of the President of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council. The Speaker shall provide notification of any Aggregation or Institution requests that have been rejected for different reasons.

#### 6.5 The Institution of a Superior Council. Appointment of a provisional Board.

When the Council General, through the Permanent Section, institutes a Superior Council, the President General appoints a provisional Board, whose term of office is limited to one year and which may be renewed only twice. The President of this provisional Board is a Temporary member of the Council General, as established in the provisions contained in Article 1.10.2 of these International Statutes.

#### 6.6 Missions of the Provisional Board

During this year, the provisional Board shall prepare and ensure the adoption of the Internal Statutes of the new Society for the members in their geographical area and shall establish the legal procedures required for it to subsequently join the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as a fully legal member, in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 1.6 of these International Statutes.

The Council General, through its Permanent Section, shall finally, and whenever necessary, approve the text of the proposed Internal Statutes, including those of any Assimilated or Associated Council. Then, and within the scope of the new Statutes, the members shall elect a new President of the Superior Council and notify the Council General accordingly.

#### 6.7 The dissolution or suspension of the Aggregation or Institution of a Conference or Council

For reasons prompted by the seriousness of a particular event, the President General may suspend temporarily or permanently exclude a Conference or Council, after notifying the Permanent Section accordingly. In case of a permanent exclusion, this shall always entail the cancellation of the Aggregation or Institution. (see Article 6.9 and subsequent)

## 6.8 Extraordinary Delegation.

Each President of a Superior or Assimilated Council is, on a precautionary basis by virtue of his/her election received and accepted accordingly at the head office of the Council General, delegated the powers to temporarily suspend a Conference, Council or member which are the prerogative of the President General. In other words, in cases of extreme seriousness and urgency, a President of a Superior or Assimilated Council may suspend a Conference, Council or member, exclusively as a precautionary measure, within his/her territorial jurisdiction.

### 6.8.1 Communication

In such circumstances and regardless of the direct communications to those involved, the President General shall be notified of such decision, and the justified reasons for the same, within a maximum of 15 working days (as provided in Article 6.9.1.1 of these International Statutes); the member, Conference or Council in question may appeal to the aforementioned President in order to be heard. The President General shall approve or reject the appeals that are presented.

## 6.9 Commencement of dissolution or suspension procedures.

Two procedures may be used to suspend, cancel or, where appropriate, withdraw an Aggregation or Institution procedure.

### 6.9.1 On the request from the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council

On request from the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council within whose jurisdiction the relevant member, Conference or Council are operating.

#### 6.9.11 Necessary documentation

When a Superior Council requests the intervention of the Council General in the event of any problem, it must send, together with the request, full documentation for the information of the President General, particularly the documentation resulting from the intervention of the Conciliation Committee of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, where appropriate.

### 6.9.2 Ex officio

The President General ex officio, i.e. on the initiative and request of one of the International Territorial Vice Presidents, shall start the procedure of suspension or exclusion in the event of any serious circumstances. The



President General shall report this serious situation to the Permanent Section.

#### 6.10 Execution of the decision

The Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council that has supervised the Conference or Council is responsible for taking the necessary steps, in agreement with the Council General, in order to execute the sanction and to ensure the transfer of property and files of the dissolved organisation. In the event of suspension or dissolution of a Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, the President General shall appoint a Provisional Board pursuant to the provisions contained in Article 6.5 of these International Statutes.

#### 6.11 Extraordinary procedures

In agreement with, and normally on the request of, the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council concerned, the Council General may intervene in disputes arising at Conference and Council level. Its proposed decision shall take into account the spirit of the Society and any specific aspects of the Society's Statutes at the location in question, provided that they are approved in conformity with the provisions contained in the Rule and these International Statutes and ratified accordingly by the Permanent Section.

##### 6.11.1 Civil and other Tribunals

Any member, Conference or Council that takes legal action through civil or other Tribunals, without express authorisation from the Council General, in order to resolve disputes between members, Conferences or Councils, shall be automatically separated from the Vincentian friendship by virtue of this action and shall be excluded, for all intents and purposes, from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

## 7. Amendments to and Interpretation of the Rule and the Statutes

### 7.1 Rule and Statutes reform procedures

This Rule and the Statutes, in their three Parts, may be modified by means of two procedures.

#### 7.1.1 General reform

Firstly, on a general basis, by replacing it with another newly-worded version.

#### 7.1.2 Partial reforms, Amendments

Secondly, by so-called "Amendments". By means of this procedure, the different amendments approved shall be attached to the end of the text of the Rule and Statutes and shall have the same effect as those that they rectify, complement or replace.

### 7.2 Rule and Statutes reform periods and methods

In both cases, proposed changes to the Rule and Statutes or Amendments to any of its Articles must be presented one year before the date scheduled for the Council General Assembly meeting at which these changes or amendments are to be discussed.

### 7.3 Quorum

In order for the change or amendment by means of one of the two procedures mentioned above (reform of the entire Rule and Statutes or partial Amendment) to enter into effect, it must be approved by 2/3 of the legal members of the Council General present or represented, including those members who have voted by post.

### 7.4 Interpretation of the Rule.

Any matter that is not specifically governed by any Parts of the Rule and Statutes shall be governed by Tradition and, in the final instance, by the decision issued by the Board of the Council General.

### 7.5 General rules governing interpretation

Despite the fact that the entire Rule and Statutes in their three Parts must be treated as a single legal document, the first of these parts entitled "Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul" prevails with respect to the other two Parts in terms of its contents.

Likewise, the "Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul", are subordinate to the Rule but prevail over the Internal Statutes.

There are also the corresponding Internal Statutes for the Superior Councils. For their drafting, we have the Basic Requirements for the Drafting of the Internal Statutes of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

The Internal Statutes, which must be prepared by each Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, shall comply fully with, and be subordinate to the Rule and to these International Statutes and shall be treated as a single legal document, as provided in Article 1.7 of these Statutes. They must always be approved by the Permanent Section of the Council General in order to be valid.

# A STATEMENT ON CHARITY AND JUSTICE FOR THE SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND

*"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to see me."* Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, *"Lord! when did we see you a stranger and make, you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?"* "And the King will answer, *"I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."*

**Matthew 25, 35:40**

Our Rule says that the Society derives its inspiration from the thinking and works of our Patron, St Vincent de Paul, who helped those who were suffering, in a spirit of justice and charity.

Vatican II counsels: *"We must not offer in charity what is owed injustice."* In other words, we must give to others what they have a right to receive; what is due to them in justice and to maintain their human dignity and importance. They have a right to share in all the essentials of human existence, such as food, clothing, shelter, work with a living wage, health care and free speech.

Our founder, Frederic Ozanam, believed that *"We must proclaim through our acts that man is still our brother's keeper."*

As members of the Society, we distribute aid in cash and kind, most of which is given to us by others to give to those who are in need. If we visit the 'adopted' families just to give them the weekly aid to enable them to tide over their present financial problems and walk away, we are not doing justice to them, and the poor are entitled to feel that we have not done them a great favour.

It is for this reason that our Rule stresses that the Society strives not only to alleviate need but also to discover and redress the situations which cause it.

At the Plenary Meeting of the Society held in 1979, the following resolution, *inter alia* was passed on the topic of 'Justice and Charity': "In all charitable actions there should be a search for justice. In our struggle for justice we should keep in mind the demands of charity."

We should listen to the voice of the Church, which demands we participate in creating a more equitable social order. Where injustice is due to oppressive,

unjust social, economic or political structures or insufficient or bad legislation, the Society, for its part, should contribute to try to change these structures or improve this legislation. We should be ready to work with other organisations provided this action is in keeping with the spirit of the Society. In particular we should cooperate with other parts of the wider Vincentian Family at national and local level. When injustice is endured by persons in their dealings with the administration, we should ensure that we are well equipped to help people to secure their rights under the social laws of the land. We must inform our members of this social legislation and give advice on practical methods of action. We should consider especially those who are most rejected. We should have members who can specialise in providing services to certain types of particularly difficult needs.

Fundamental to our beliefs should be an understanding that, as Vincentians, we should be the first Christian group to respond to the call of the Church to remove the injustices which cause poverty. Justice must take precedence and nothing must be done in charity that was demanded by justice and the dignity of man. The basic work of the Society is a fusion of the divine virtue of Charity and the natural virtue of justice.

The phenomenon of justice is seen not merely in the economic but also in the social, cultural and religious spheres. Charity deals with effects. It responds to immediate needs and does not ask questions. Justice wants to trace the causes of evil events to their source, and to stop the evil effects by eliminating their causes.

Our Society encourages and undertakes self-help and other welfare projects for the betterment and rehabilitation of the poor. These projects not only contribute towards the economic and social well-being of the poor, but also help restore to the poor a sense of self respect and human dignity. The Society, always in a strictly impartial and non-political way, actively, constantly and, where necessary, publicly plays its part in striving for justice for the less privileged members of the community. As our Society is not a political body and discussion of politics at our meetings is prohibited, we have our own constraints in trying to bring about social justice. However, when we see matters of justice being at stake, we must make representations to the Government Departments concerned and to appropriate local bodies, no matter what their political convictions or ours may be, as charity is inseparable from justice.

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

# TWINNING

Resolutions adopted in Dublin on 13 September 1973

The sharing spirit of the Society is made vividly apparent through twinings. In order to extend those activities, the following recommendations are made:

1. Twinings at Diocesan and Group Council level should be encouraged since they may prove effective in certain circumstances, e.g. the more important type of project, supply of equipment, etc .
2. The Councils should themselves participate in such projects.
3. Provision should be made, whenever justified, for on the spot visits by members When such projects have been completed.
4. National Councils of countries involved and the continental vice-president should be thoroughly informed of projects, both contemplated and in the course of being carried out.
5. The Council-General wishes that the guidelines for twinings be brought up to date. (The revised guidelines were published in the June 1968 Newsletter.)

In 2004 the Society adopted an International Twinning Manual which explains the aims of twinning and gives detailed guidelines on how it should operate.

We have a National Twinning Officer and a National Twinning Project Officer who are appointed by the National President and are members of the National Council. They coordinate our twinning efforts by liaising with national officers in our twin countries.

Each Diocesan Council should have a Twinning representative who coordinates twinning by Conferences in the Diocese and cooperates with the National Officers.

For twinning to work it is important that the Conference corresponds with and prays for its twin regularly. If a Conference has problems with correspondence then they should be referred to the Diocesan representative, who will contact his opposite number in the twinned country. If necessary a persistent problem should be referred to the National Twinning Officer.

## RECRUITMENT OF MEMBERS

We are often reminded that the Conference is the basic unit of the Society, and there is no doubt that without it the structure of the whole Society would collapse. With this in mind it is imperative that all members should encourage recruitment, particularly of young members. All members, male and female, must be acutely aware of the image our Society projects, and of its subsequent influence on the recruitment of new members.

The promotion of the Ozanam News and the extensive use of the National Formation Programme can be useful tools in recruitment. Consideration should also be given to holding SSVP "Open Days" in parishes, with displays of literature and photographs showing the work of the Society and the various projects in which the conference is involved. Talks should also be given by members on these occasions.

The main means of recruitment has always been and will always be the example and work of the existing members. Their spirituality and spirit, if properly ordered and enriched, will be a positive encouragement to others.

Young people love challenges and they should be encouraged to regard the Society, its members and its work, as a personal and group challenge. They should be given every encouragement to add their forces and youthful thinking and vigour to it. They should be encouraged to regard membership of the Society and engaging in its work as a Vocation. It should be pointed out to them that Vincentian work is an item which will be advantageous to them when included in CV's.

Youth can be incorporated into Conferences or, if there are sufficient numbers of them, can be made into separate Conferences to do their own specific works under the direction of the parent Conference or adult Vincentian with the safety of the Youth members being of paramount importance.

Information leaflets and meetings will help in recruitment, but it is always the example of devout men and women at prayer or at work which will encourage and enkindle young people to engage in something which is good.

Visits to schools, both primary and secondary, liaison with University and school chaplains and dialogue with other organisations can all help to plant the seed which will hopefully produce future members. There are occasions, such as Festival Meetings, Retreats, Formation Days, etc., which present the

opportunity to invite those outside the Society to join our members in prayer and spiritual discussion. The use of guest speakers can also provide added interest to these occasions.

Our efforts must be concentrated on making the SSVP grow rather than decay. We must take notice of the fact that Conferences in some areas are struggling to survive, due to the ageing process among existing members and the failure to recruit new ones. The current acute shortage of priests and the amalgamation of parishes make the task all the more difficult for Conferences. All Presidents must be aware that the ministry of members may start in their own parishes but may not necessarily end there. Conferences should be encouraged to extend the hand of charity and friendship across parish boundaries into other parishes and areas where help is needed. This includes not only financial and material help, but help with recruitment, thus strengthening the Conferences and ensuring that the SSVP presence is retained and extended.



# **GUIDELINES FOR THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR**

This document presents a description of the role and a list of the responsibilities of the Spiritual Advisor in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

## **Description**

The Spiritual Advisor is a priest, permanent deacon, religious or Catholic lay person who undertakes the role and responsibility for the spiritual growth, development and life of the Council or Conference in accord with the mission and ministry of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

## **Function of the Spiritual Advisor**

Spiritual Advisors play an important role in promoting the work of the Society. They give inspiration and challenge for the adoption of works in keeping with changing times and need.

The Spiritual Advisor's task is that of spiritual animator. The Spiritual Advisor is to help the development of the spiritual life of the members and to enable them to better understand the meaning of charity and its practical application toward those in need.

The Spiritual Advisor attends the meetings, participates in the discussions and provides the necessary guidance to the Council or Conference membership on spiritual matters.

## **Qualities Appropriate for a Spiritual Advisor in the Society**

A commitment to the call and pursuit of Christian holiness.

Personal witness to growth and development of his or her own spiritual life.

A knowledge of and commitment to Jesus Christ and the role of the gospels as an integral part of Vincentian spirituality.

A knowledge of the spirituality, values and lives of St. Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and St. Louise de Marillac.

A commitment to the value of lay ministry in the fulfilment of the mission of the Catholic Church.

A commitment to the Rule, mission and ministry of the society and to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

An ability to recognize and enable the gifts and talents of Vincentians and others in fulfilling the mission of the Society

### **Responsibilities of the Spiritual Advisor**

To either provide scriptural and spiritual readings for the meetings of the Council or Conference which relate to the mission of the Society or share responsibility with others to assure that appropriate readings are provided.

To help design, plan and execute special prayers and formational sessions, such as days of recollection, prayer services, etc.

To help members of the Society reach a deeper faith awareness of

their participation in the mystery of the Church;

their need for openness to others;

their vocation as Christians and Vincentians to serve and minister to others as well as to each other;

their identity with the poor and needy;

fostering friendship with those in need.

### **Functional Responsibilities of a Council Spiritual Advisor**

Aid in the recruitment of Conference Spiritual Advisors.

Organize training sessions and materials for Conference Spiritual Advisors.

Frame the spiritual portion of quarterly gatherings and other meetings of the whole Council.

This will necessitate attendance and participation at these meetings.

Guide Conference Spiritual Advisors on matters of spirituality both collectively and personally.

Be the direct liaison and advocate on spiritual matters with the Bishop.

Assist in supervising the spiritual growth and development of the Conferences.

Arrange for, in conjunction with the Conference Spiritual Advisors and officers, retreats, days of recollection, special spiritual study opportunities, the feast of Blessed Frederic (September 9<sup>th</sup>), Ozanam Sunday, etc.

Attend when and where possible, regional and national meetings and participate actively in the spiritual components of these meetings.

### **Selection and Approval of a Conference Spiritual Advisor**

The Conference president may nominate someone for the priest's approval, e.g. a parish administrator, a permanent deacon, a member of a religious community, a lay person who is an active member of the Conference. However, other candidates may be considered, e.g., a religious assigned to pastoral ministry, a director or teacher of religious education, a retired priest or religious. In any event, the person nominated should be dedicated to his or her spiritual life and one who possesses or is willing to learn the meaning or Vincentian Spirituality.

### **Responsibilities of a Conference Spiritual Advisor**

Lead opening and closing prayers of each Conference meeting.

Obtain, prepare and read - or assign to be read - spiritual reading for each meeting which relates to the mission of the Society.

Lead discussion/reflection after each reading.

Insure that all meetings are conducted in a spirit of Christian charity.

Collaborate with the Council Spiritual Advisor in setting up programs for the spiritual development of the Conferences such as days of recollection, prayer services.

To assist members to reach a deeper faith awareness of their participation in the mystery of the Church, of their need for openness to others, of their vocation as Christians and Vincentians to serve and minister to others, person-to-person, as well as to each other, and of their identity with the poor and needy.

Attend Council and regional meetings and, if possible, other gatherings dealing with or related to spirituality.

Communicate and promulgate information obtained from meetings to the Conference membership regarding spiritual matters.

Provide resource material for the membership to assist in their personal spiritual development.

Maintain ongoing communication with the priest or parish administrator.

### **Relationship of a Spiritual Advisor to the Council and Conference**

Besides contributing to the spiritual life of the Council or Conference, the Spiritual Advisor also serves as the advocate for the rights of the poor and reminds the Society of its responsibility to be servant of the poor. Advocacy may include raising individual and corporate consciousness of the plight of the poor, as well as inspiring and challenging Vincentians in reading the signs of the times and in adopting works in keeping with changing times and needs.

The Spiritual Advisor may be a spokesperson, along with others, for the Society's unity to other parish organizations and in extra-parochial meetings.

Spiritual Advisors should be readily available to members of the Society and should manifest support in every way possible for the ministry and mission of the Society.

The Spiritual Advisor should understand and encourage the development of a Vincentian spirituality in him/herself and in the members of the Council or Conference.

### **Relationship of the Spiritual Advisor to Diocese, Clergy and Local Community**

The Spiritual Advisor should help the Council President communicate the value, works and needs of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to the bishop, clergy, religious and priests or parochial administrators.

The Spiritual Advisor, Council and Conference members should seek ways in which the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul's ministry and mission have a complementary role in relationship to Archdiocesan or Diocesan Social Services.

The Spiritual Advisor should assist members of the Society in seeking ways to expand membership of the Society in the service of the poor. With a special urgency, there should be an outreach to those retired who have the health, time and energy to offer their assistance, as well as to the youth whose vitality and energy level would be invaluable to the mission of the Society.

*I am the Resurrection and the Life. (John 11 :25)*

**LIVES OF THE SAINTS, THE  
FOUNDER AND OTHERS.**

## 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 besetting 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. At only fifteen years of age he received the tonsure and the minor orders. He then set off to Toulouse for his studies for the priesthood: he was ordained in 1600, when he was just twenty years old. Clerics' lives were not so organised and planned in those days as they are today, and he held many minor posts in the early days of his priesthood.

In 1608, we find him in Paris as chaplain to Marguerite de Valois and it was at this time that, at the Hospital of Charity, he met the man who was to influence his whole life, Pere de Berulle.

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. He took possession of the parish of Clichy, under the advice of Berulle, and worked there for fifteen months rebuilding the church, which had been in ruins, and building up a fine Christian community.

In September, 1613, Berulle urged him to leave Clichy to take up the post of chaplain to the influential family of Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, landowner of large properties in the north of France. At once 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. But at least he was near his friend Pere de Berulle, and was also to meet Francis de Sales, and to organise more groups for charity and missions to the poorer parts of rural France.

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.

In 1632 he set up S. Lazare as the headquarters, and the courses of study there, particularly the Tuesday Conferences, were attended by some of the finest clergy in France, many of whom were to become bishops and leaders of the Church. His missionaries were sent to Ireland, to Poland and Italy and to North Africa and Madagascar. It was at this time that his missionary Fathers travelled to South Uist and founded there a faith which is strong to this day.

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.

He gave his time and energy to the two besetting passions of his life, the love of the poor and the formation of the clergy. His works for the poor covered every possible sphere of poverty, and the scope of this work grew as more Sisters joined him in the service of the poor ("our masters" as he called them)- and the education and formation of the clergy improved under the members of his Congregation of the Mission. Even now Vincentians are to be found in seminaries throughout the world, especially as spiritual directors. The Governor of S. Quentin wrote to Vincent: "You have been the father of your homeland."

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. Up until the reformation of the



Calendar it had been celebrated on July 19th. St Vincent is buried in the Vincentian church at 95 Rue de Sevres in Paris.

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.

### **Prayer to St. Vincent de Paul**

*O God, who through Blessed Vincent did bring together in your Church a new family for the salvation of the poor and the formation of the clergy, grant we pray you that we too, a fire with the same spirit, may love what he loved and do what he taught. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

## ST LOUISE DE MARILLAC, 1591 - 1660

Louise was known for her capacity to suffer, and for her ceaseless action. Directed as she was by St Vincent, she walked in his shadow and both were deeply affected by each other's holiness.

Born in 1591, noble in soul rather than by birth, she ranks as one of the great founders of religious congregations along with St Teresa of Avila, St Claire of Assisi and St Colette. In her early days she had wished to become a contemplative, but her family wished her to marry and this she did but her married life was spent nursing her ill husband. Thus she learned the work which was to become her life's vocation in later years.

On Christmas Eve in 1625, she met St Vincent de Paul and put her whole life under his guidance. Thus was started one of the most lovely and fruitful partnerships for the good of the poor in history. It was also the start of a bold new concept, religious sisters who worked outside the cloister "The street is my cloister" being their theme. Nuns up until then were expected to remain inside their convents and monasteries: great was the criticism from all quarters when the Daughters of Charity were seen in the streets, in the hovels of the poor and in the houses and hospitals of the sick.

Louise never refused anything to God, to St Vincent or to anyone-and this is surely a hallmark of Vincent's Daughters of Charity, officially founded in 1633.

One night in June 1623 a divine light shone in her soul-she would become a religious without a cloister in a house where the sisters could come and go as they pleased for the sake of God. When she met St Vincent, his advice to her was, "Go slowly; pray much." Bit by bit, others came to join her in her work, Vincent's work. For three centuries upwards of 600,000 sisters have flocked to her congregation all over the world, giving themselves to God through the service of the poor and the suffering. Vincent had prayed: "May Louise be a tree of life providing many fruits of charity." Today 42,000 Daughters of Charity are working throughout the world, serving God, the Church and their masters, the poor.

Louise died in 1660, just six months before Vincent. He insisted on giving her eulogy from his own bed of terminal sickness. She was beatified in 1920 and canonised in 1934.

## 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.

His childhood was serene and happy: he was a lad of a lively and penetrating intelligence and he seemed to be able to penetrate not only the minds of others but also their very souls. He had profound faith in God and in the Church which he dearly loved.

His studies and his search in the field of philosophy brought about in his teenage mind many doubts: by God's providence this crisis (common to many of his age) which he went through served only to strengthen his faith eventually, and at the same time gave him a precious understanding of restless souls tempted against their religion.

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." But he found with a certain M. Ampere and his family, "Papa Ampere" as he called him, great encouragement. Their family circle made up for his own loneliness far from home, and they were for the young man loving friends in his difficult days. (M. Ampere, a scientist of note, is well known in the field of electricity, giving his name to "amperes").

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 unfailing certainty dominated his life - Christianity was the only cure for the ills of contemporary society. He had immense faith in history as the source of growing belief, and wished to share this passion with his young friends at the University.

Not content to work fifteen hours each day at his studies, to study foreign languages, to penetrate 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. Boldly he urged the Archbishop of Paris to reintroduce sermons of quality, especially at Notre Dame, and the great Lacordaire's preaching was to fulfil his dearest wishes. Ozanam was convinced that the promotion of spiritual and human values must be based on brotherly love and social justice.

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.

Ozanam became a Doctor of Law in 1836, and, without great enthusiasm, took up a career as an advocate; then he took the opportunity to occupy the Chair of Commercial Law at Lyons; he became a Doctor of Literature in 1839 and eventually in 1844 became the Titular of the Chair of Foreign Literature at the Sorbonne. In the meantime he had married Amelie Soulacroix in 1841, and their marriage was blessed by the birth of a daughter, Marie, in 1845.

True erudition was his passion in all his literary work, for example in his Thesis on Dante, his work on the poets of France and his German studies. Never did he allow his tongue to wound any of those with whom he talked or mingled, even though they disagreed with his ideas. Never once did he waver from the truth. Towards the end of his comparatively professorial career, he himself defined what his life had yielded, in a letter to his friend Dufieux in

1850: "If God has given me an ardour for work, I have wished to consecrate my life to the service of the faith. But always considering myself a useless servant, a worker at the last hour received only through charity by the master of the vineyard, my days would be well spent if, in spite of my small merits, I succeeded in retaining around me a great number of young people to listen to the principles of Christianity, to respect the Church and the Pope. It would all be worth it if even a few people learned through me to put aside their prejudices. If only I could dispel their doubts and help them return, with God's help to the Catholic Truth. This is what I have tried to do for ten years without having the ambition for any greater destiny, but without ever having the misfortune to abandon the struggle ... "

Outside his University work, his admirable zeal for charity was having its effect. The foundation of the Conferences of St Vincent de Paul led him to have close contact with the working classes, and to see their real sufferings, an outcome of the great Industrial Revolution during the first half of the nineteenth century. Could Christians remain disinterested in the fate of the victims of these new situations, without in so doing becoming accomplices in their spreading ?

His letters allow us to follow the various successive stages in development of his very soul. Early on he wrote to his friend Lallier: "The question which divides men of our time is no longer a question of political form: it is a social question." Towards the end of his life, in 1848, he writes to another friend, Foisset: "I ask you: let us occupy ourselves with people who have too many needs and not enough rights, who call out rightly for a greater involvement in public affairs, for guarantees of work-and who cry out against misery!"

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. All were in full accord with the principles later to be laid down in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII in his great encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*.

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. On 1 May 1841, he wrote to Amelie, his fiancée: "One day you will understand how much I owe to this Society which was the support and charm of the most perilous days of my youth." More than ever he was convinced that the actual meeting of those who have with those who have not was the best way towards mutual

understanding. Hence the insistence in the Vincentian Rule upon personal contact with those who are suffering, and upon direct service to them-its final object being the spiritual and moral welfare of the poor.

And yet he was so human. He saw creation all around him as God's choice gift to man, and recognised God's image so readily in other people. This realisation imbued him with a gentleness and tenderness towards people. His love for his dear mother and the way he cherished her memory was a manifestation of this, as was his immense love for that elder sister who had helped him so much in his early years and died, unfortunately, when she was only nineteen and Frederic was only seven. How attracted he was to Amelie, his future wife, when he saw her tenderness towards her invalid brother!

He was filled with the compassion and thoughtfulness of Christ himself towards others. Never did he forget that flower for Amelie on each anniversary of their wedding; and how he felt the little illnesses of his young daughter, cheering her up with little verses and chats by her bedside. How he valued those early friendships of his student days- never to be forgotten. Nor was he without humour and appreciation of the amusing situation. Who else would write forty verses on a wrestling match?

Yes, here was a man truly human, one who enjoyed simple pleasures and who was always aware that thoughtfulness, kindness and the gentle touch extended to others was just a practical manifestation of the love of God. And is such a manner of living beyond us? Far from it; in this surely Ozanam is not so hard to imitate; it all seems so very simple. Surely he-can teach us and help us towards simplicity of heart.

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.

Disembarking at Marseilles on his road home, his condition worsened and his end seemed imminent. To the priest who consoled him with the words, "Have confidence in God!" he replied simply: "And why not? I love him so much." A few moments later he died peacefully, murmuring: "My God, my God have pity on me." It was the conclusion, on 8 September 1853, the feast of Our Lady's Birth, of a life of exceptional depths, consecrated solely to the service of Christ and of mankind.

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. The Cause for his beatification was opened in Rome on 12 January 1954 and he was declared Venerable by Pope John-Paul II on 6 July 1993. He was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II on 22 August 1997 at Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris. In the words of the Pope “He observed the real situation of the poor and sought to be more and more effective in helping them in their human development. 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”

## CAUSE FOR CANONISATION OF BLESSED FREDERIC OZANAM

It was not until 1913, sixty years after Frederic Ozanam's death, whilst the Society he founded was celebrating the centenary of his birth, that the first official step towards the Cause for his beatification and canonisation was undertaken. The delay was due to the troubled political and religious situation which prevailed in France in the intervening years. The anti-clerical movement, strong at that time, effectively prevented the normal development of the Cause. The 1913 celebration of the centenary of Ozanam's birth focused attention as never before upon his holiness and upon the fruitfulness of the Society he founded. Cardinal Amette, who was Archbishop of Paris at that time, composed the Beatification Prayer and started the diocesan process.

The Ordinary Process for the Cause of Frederic Ozanam began in 1925, in which year the Archepiscopal Curia in Paris instituted the process concerning his sanctity and his writings. The Curia's findings were forwarded to Rome in 1928. Frederic's body was disinterred in 1929 and was found to be preserved, free from corruption. In 1949, after many petitions to Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII for his beatification, a decree was signed in Rome by the Sacred Congregation, stating that the theological censors had found nothing in his writings which offended against faith and morals and that there was no obstacle to the continuation of the Process. Permission to introduce the Cause formally was given by Pope Pius XII by a decree signed in 1954. This forward step meant that the Holy See had assumed responsibility for the Cause. In 1955, the Sacred Congregation of Rites issued a decree which confirmed that the investigations of the Ordinary Process had shown that no undue cult of Fr6d6ric Ozanam existed. In the same year, instructions were given by the Sacred Congregation to establish the reputation of Frederic Ozanam for his holiness and virtues, which were assumed earlier to be well established. Later in the year, remissorial letters were issued granting permission to begin the Apostolic Process, which was completed in 1956 and Frederic Ozanam was given the official title, "Servant of God."

Before the Church pronounces that a Servant of God is worthy of the honours of the Altar, She requires convincing proof that the person practised virtue to a heroic degree so as to be worthy of being proposed for the imitation of the Faithful. Inquiry is held into the candidate's orthodoxy of doctrine, the fame of his sanctity, the practice of the Theological Virtues and of the four Cardinal Virtues (Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude). The other essentials for the process are miracles, the absence of any pre-emptory obstacles and that no public veneration has been practised.



In the second stage, physical miracles, it must be established that authentic miracles have been wrought through the intercession of the Servant of God. If the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints is satisfied with the authenticity of the miracles, and the same are acceptable to the Pope, then the Servant of God is beatified and called "Blessed." The Holy Father may dispense with the miracles, if the virtues of the Servant of God are well known throughout the world, particularly in the Causes of martyrs, such as St Thomas More, St John Fisher and others. For canonisation, an additional two miracles are required. If these are proved and accepted, the beatified Servant of God is proclaimed a Saint. This becomes an infallible judgement and veneration of the new Saint is imposed on the whole Church.

Since 1973, the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation has been at work preparing a study (*Disquisitio*) treating selected topics which are of importance to the Cause. The Beatification Cause of Frederic Ozanam has now reached a crucial stage. The Society's advocate, Monsignor Luigi Persi, has completed the *Informatio*. Reverend Father Giuseppe Guerra CM, the Postulator appointed in December 1990, has confirmed that the major document, *Positio (Summarium and Informatio)*, has finally been printed and presented in January 1991 to the Sacred Congregation for the Cause of Saints in Rome. We may now hope to reach, within a reasonable period, the conclusion of this protracted beatification process.

On Tuesday 6 July 1993, at 12 o'clock, His Holiness Pope John-Paul II promulgated the Decree stating the heroicity of virtues of the Servant of God, thus proclaiming Venerable the Society of St Vincent de Paul's main founder.

He was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II on 22 August 1997 at Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris. In the words of the Pope "He observed the real situation of the poor and sought to be more and more effective in helping them in their human development. 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".

It is our responsibility to champion the cause for the Canonisation of Frederic and to encourage the use of the following prayer.

## **Prayer for the Canonisation of Frederic Ozanam**

O God, who put the love of the poor in the hearts of Frederic Ozanam and his companions, and inspired them to found a Society for the relief of the spiritual and corporal miseries of those in want: bless this work of charity and zeal, and, should it be in accordance with your design that your pious servant Frederic Ozanam should be glorified by the Church, we beseech you to manifest by your heavenly favour the power he enjoys in your sight. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

## **BLESSED CONTARDO FERRINI, (1859 – 1902)**

There is a great similarity between Contardo Ferrini and Frederic Ozanam. Both were born in Milan, both were University professors in ungodly surroundings, both were members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, both produced remarkable spiritual writings, and both died young.

Contardo Ferrini was born in Milan in 1859, and when he was two years old, the family moved to Suna on Lake Maggiore; he was baptised at the same font as Ozanam had been, just over fifty years before. His mother, herself the eighteenth child of a family of twenty four, was to outlive him and much of his fame and honour she was to read about in the newspapers rather than hear from his own lips.

He always maintained that his First Communion, received at the age of twelve, was the real conversion of his life. From then on, God dominated his living and his thinking. A short time at the University of Milan was followed by two years at the University of Pavia, where, as Dean of Students, he had to undergo a lot of unpopularity. After that he gained a scholarship and entered upon the happiest period in his young life as a student of Law at the University of Berlin from 1880 to 1882. Having qualified brilliantly in Law and with a command of several languages, he returned to Italy at the age of twenty-two, a brilliant career ahead of him. He was thought to be ideal material for the priesthood, but when asked about it replied: "Perhaps I might become a priest if I were worthy."

By twenty-six he was a professor, and served in four universities, ending with his professorship in Milan. He entered local government for three years: called "Aloysius" in his youthful days, he was often depicted by caricaturists with a halo over his head. He was not one to hide or deny his faith. Swimming and mountaineering were his hobbies, and to a friend he once said: "Come with me

undaunted, in good health and sure of foot; I will teach you to know my mountains, and there we will talk of God." Pope Pius XI said of Ferrini at the process of beatification: "My relations with him were purely scientific and dealt with the beauty of high mountains. This was for him an inspiration to holiness and almost a natural revelation of God."

But he was not healthy and was destined to die when only forty-three years old. As he lay dying, he uttered: "One is so well when one is near to God. Have I done my duty?" After his death, devotion immediately grew and Pope St Pius X ordered the introduction of his Cause for Beatification. The Cause was introduced in 1910. In April 1947 he was beatified to the cheers of intellectuals, students, professors-and a band of members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul-all of whom were overcome with joy at the ceremony.

The secret of his life lay in the deep sense of God he had possessed since his childhood, through devotion to the Sacred Heart, through frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, through love of the Mass and through his love of the Mother of God. "Let us receive Communion today, so that we can put on Christ and be transformed into him-the Eucharist is the secret of holiness." A faithful member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, like his father before him, he put his faith into action among the poor. After graduating with the highest honours as a young man he was asked by a bishop to whom he attributed his success; he opened his shirt at the neck and displayed a small crucifix.

Blessed Contardo Ferrini, teach us absorption in God. Amen

## Saint Richard Pampuri, O.H. (1897-1930)

Erminio Filippo Pampuri, Brother Richard in religion, was the tenth of the eleven children of Innocenzo and Angela (nee Campari) Pampuri, born at Trivolzio (Pavia), Italy on 12 August 1897. By the age of ten he was orphaned and lived with his mother's sister at Torrino, a village near Trivolzio. He went to two local primary schools before going to junior high school in Milan. He graduated from Augustine's College, Pavia and, between 1915 and 1920, saw military service in the Medical Corps but became ill with pleurisy. He enrolled in the medical faculty of Pavia University where he graduated in 1921, top of his class, in Medicine and Surgery. In 1923 he was registered as a GP of medicine and surgery.

From his youth he was an example of Christian virtue and had a keen devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was an active member of the Pavia University Catholic Action Club **and also belonged to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.**

When he went to Morimondo to practice medicine, he helped set up a Catholic Action Youth Club and became its first president. He organised regular retreats for Youth, rural workers and needy folk, paying their expenses. His charity extended to his practice work where he donated medicines, money, food, clothing and blankets.

Even as a boy he wanted to become a missionary priest but was dissuaded on account of his health. However, he eventually left his practice to join the Hospitaller Order of St John of God in Milan in 1927 and made his profession of religious vows in 1928. He was appointed Director of the dental clinic at the St John of God Brothers' Hospital at Brescia where he gave himself fully to serving working people and the poor. His wonderful charity was admired by all; everyone coming into contact with him agreeing on his sanctity.

He suffered a fresh outbreak of pleurisy which degenerated into bronco-pneumonia. On 18 April 1930 to Milan, where he died on 01 May aged 33 years. After his death, many of the faithful received significant graces from God - even miraculous ones, through his intercession. The two required miracles were accepted and he was beatified by His Holiness John Paul II on 04 October 1981.

Later on, a miraculous healing through the intercession of the Blessed Richard Pampuri, took place on 05 January 1982 at Alcadozo, Albacete, Spain. This

was approved as a miracle and on the feast of All Saints, 01 November 1989, he was solemnly canonized.

## **BLESSED PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI (1901 – 1925)**

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati was born in 1901 in Italy. His mother taught him verses from the Gospels, and Pier Giorgio deeply moved by them, developed an exceptional relationship with God. Indeed God reveals his love to “little ones.” From the time he was twelve until his death at twenty-four Pier Giorgio received Holy Communion daily.

At 17, he joined **the Society of St. Vincent de Paul** and committed himself to serving the poor. Pier Giorgio said: “Jesus visits me every morning in Holy Communion. I repay him with my poor means, visiting the poor.” When asked how he could stand the bad odors and dirt of the poor, he answered: “Don’t forget that even if the house you visit is very dirty, there you may find Jesus.”

The last months of his life were filled with suffering, he contracted poliomyelitis and became paralyzed. When he died at the age of 24, hundreds came to view his body and there was a line of unknown faces who loved this good and generous young man who always had a good smile for everyone.

Pier Giorgio was beatified by Pope John Paul II on May 20, 1990. His feast day is July 4th.

## **Saint Gianna Beretta Molla (1922 – 1962)**

Gianna Beretta was born in Magenta, Milan on October 4, 1922. As a youth she willingly accepted the gift of faith and the clearly Christian education from her parents. Consequently, she experienced life as a marvellous gift from God, had a strong faith in Providence and was convinced of the necessity and effectiveness of prayer.

She dedicated herself to studies, while applying her faith through generous apostolic service among the youth of Catholic Action and charitable work among the elderly and needy **as a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul**. After gaining degrees in Medicine and Surgery from the University of Pavia in 1949 she opened a clinic in Magenta in 1950. She specialised in Paediatrics at Milan University in 1952 and thereafter gave special attention to mothers, babies, the elderly and the poor.

She married Pietro Molla in 1955. She became a mother to Pierluigi in 1956, to Mariolina in 1957, and to Laura in 1959. With simplicity and equilibrium she harmonized the demands of mother, wife, doctor and her passion for life.

In 1961 in her second month of pregnancy she developed a fibroma in her uterus. This required an operation and the life of the child was saved. A few days before the child was due, although always trusting in Providence, she was ready to give her life to save the life of the child. On the morning of 21 April 1962, Gianna Emanuela was born. Despite all efforts to save them, on 28 April, amid unspeakable pain and after repeated exclamations of “Jesus, I love you”, the mother died, aged 39 years.

This servant of God lies in the cemetery of Mesero near Magenta. A “conscious immolation” was the phrase used by Pope Paul VI to define the act of Blessed Gianna, remembering at the Sunday Angelus, 23 September 1973, as “A young mother from the Diocese of Milan, who, gave her life to her daughter, sacrificed her own, with conscious immolation”. Gianna was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 24 April 1994 during the International Year of the Family. She was canonised on May 16 2004

## Saint Luigi Orione (1872 - 1940)

Luigi Orione was born in Pontecurone, Tortona Diocese, on 23 June 1872. He entered the Franciscan Friary, Voghera, Pavia when aged 13 years, but left after one year owing to poor health. On 16 October 1889, he joined the Diocesan Seminary, Tortona, devoting himself to the care of others by becoming a member of both the San Marziano Society for Mutual Help and **the Society of St Vincent de Paul**. On 3 July 1892 he opened the first Oratory in Tortona to provide Christian Training for boys. The following year, as a seminarian of 21 years, he started a boarding school for poor boys in the St Bernadine estate.

On 13 April 1895 he was ordained a priest. Within a short time, Don Orione opened new houses at Mornico Losana (Pavia), Noto - in Sicily, San Remo and Rome. Around the young Founder there grew up seminarians and priests who made up the first core group of the *Little Work of Divine Providence*. In 1899 he founded the branch of the Hermits of Divine Providence and in 1903 the *Sons of Divine Providence* gained canonical approval.

Following his work assisting victims of earthquakes of Reggio and Messina (1908) and the Marsica region (1915), by appointment of St Pius X, he was made Vicar General of the Diocese of Messina for 3 years. On 29 June 1915, 20 years after the foundation of the *Sons of Divine Providence*, he added to the “single tree of many branches” the Congregation of the *Little Missionary Sisters of Charity* who are inspired by the same founding charism. Alongside them, he placed the *Blind Sisters, Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament*. Later, the *Contemplative Sisters of Jesus Crucified* were also founded.

For lay people he set up the associations of the “Ladies of Divine Providence”, the “Former Pupils” and the “Friends”. More recently, the Don Orione Secular Institute and the Don Orione Lay People’s Movement have come into being. Among his most enterprising and original works, he set up “Little Cottolengos” for the care of the suffering and abandoned. These were usually built on the outskirts of cities to act as “new pulpits” from which to speak of Christ and the Church. His missionary zeal, already manifested in 1913 resulted in him sending his first religious to Brazil, later (1920’s and 1930’s) this expanded to many countries worldwide; he himself made two missionary journeys to Latin America.

He enjoyed the personal respect of the Popes and the Holy See’s Authorities, who entrusted him with confidential tasks. He was a preacher, a confessor and a tireless organiser of pilgrimages, missions, processions and other

celebrations of the faith. He loves Our Lady deeply and fostered a profound devotion to her. Through the manual labour of his seminarians, the shrines of Our Lady of Safe Keeping, Tortona and Our Lady of Caravaggio, Fumo, were built.

On 12 March 1940, surrounded by the love of his confreres at San Remo House, Don Orione died, whilst sighing “Jesus, Jesus! I am going”.

His body was found intact at its first exhumation in 1965. It has been exposed to the veneration of the faithful in the shrine of Our Lady of Safe Keeping, Tortona ever since 26 October 1980 - the day on which Pope John Paul II inscribed Don Luigi Orione in the Book of the Blessed. He was canonised on 16 May 2004.

# **Society of St Vincent de Paul Meeting Prayers**

## **Opening Prayers**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**V.** Come Holy Spirit, penetrate into our hearts and kindle within us the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and new life will be created

**R.** and the whole face of the earth will be renewed.

Our Father. Hail Mary.

## **Vincentian Family Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you who willed to become poor, give us eyes and a heart directed towards the poor; help us to recognise you in them - in their hunger, their loneliness, and their misfortune. Enkindle within our Vincentian Family, unity, simplicity, humility and the fire of love that burned in St. Vincent de Paul.

Strengthen us, so that, faithful to the practice of these virtues, we may contemplate you and serve you in the person of the poor, and may one day be united with you and them in Your kingdom. Amen

## **Prayer for a Fruitful Meeting**

Let us remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

"When two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"

*(Short Silence).*

Lord Jesus, help us through meeting together to deepen our Vincentian friendship and answer the call every Christian receives; to seek and find those who are forgotten, to bring your love to the suffering or deprived. Help us to be generous with our time, our possessions and ourselves, so that we may grow perfect in Your love and learn to share Your sacrifice for others in the Holy Eucharist.

**V.** St Joseph, Patron of Families

**R.** Pray for us

**V.** St Vincent de Paul

**R.** Pray for us

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



## **Closing Prayers**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Prayer to see the Eucharist as the source of our Apostolate**

Father, grant that communion with Christ, present in the Holy Eucharist, may impel us to love you by serving Him in our neighbour and help us to respond with open hearts to the sufferings of others, aware of the depths of our own needs.

### **Prayer that we may bear witness to Christ's love**

Grant us also the grace to persevere when disappointed or distressed and never to claim that our work springs from ourselves alone, so that, united in prayer and action, we may be a visible sign of Christ and bear witness to His boundless love which reaches out to all and draws them to love one another in Him.

### **Prayer for Fruitful Visits**

We thank You Lord, for the many blessings we receive from those we visit. Help us to love and respect them, to understand their deeper needs and share their burdens and joys as true friends.

### **Prayer for the Canonisation of Blessed Frederic Ozanam**

We thank You Lord, for all the blessings that You have given to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and to its members. By Your Divine will, You have given our founder Frederic Ozanam that wondrous title of Blessed. May we be inspired by His example of love and service to follow you more closely. Lord, continue to bless the Society, its works and its members and grant that one day, Blessed Frederic Ozanam will be raised to the altars of Your saints.

**V.** Blessed Frederic Ozanam

**R.** Pray for us

**V.** Blessed Contardo Ferrini

**R** Pray for us

## **For the Pope and all members of the Vincentian Family**

Grant the courage, peace and confidence You alone can give, to our Holy father the Pope and to those we visit, to all who help us in the work, to our overseas brothers and sisters, to any members of this Society and their families who may be troubled or in need.

Lord hear us.

**R.** Lord graciously hear us.

## **For the Society**

We thank You Lord, because You inspired the foundation of our Society to help overcome suffering. Grant the Society and this Conference/Group/Council the grace of continual growth and renewal and we pray that many others will be drawn to seek membership of this Society and share in its work.

Lord hear us.

**R.** Lord graciously hear us.

## **For Unity**

May we accept afresh our calling to make visible our unity in Christ with all other Christians by working together with them in the service of those in need.

Lord hear us.

**R.** Lord graciously hear us.

**For Deceased members of Vincentian Family** Welcome into the light of Your presence those who have died and grant that one day, our friends and relatives, those we visit and our Vincentian brothers and sisters may all come together before you in the perfection of love.

Lord hear us.

**R.** Lord graciously hear us.

## **For Youth**

We pray that young people will grow in faith and, like Frederic and his friends, become active members of the Church and the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Lord hear us.

**R.** Lord graciously hear us.

## **For Vocations**

Lord Jesus we are glad to be your Church. You call all the baptised to "put out into the deep" taking the path that leads to holiness. Fill us with hope and make us willing to serve You. Help us to encourage and support one another and grant that many will hear the call to serve You in the priesthood and religious life, witnesses in the world of today to the power of your love. We ask this in Your name. Amen

Hail Mary for the Sick

Hail Mary for Carers

Hail Mary for Twin Conferences

## Veni Creator

Come Holy Ghost, Creator come from  
Thy bright heavenly throne:

Come take possession of our souls  
and make them all Thine own.

Thou who are called the Paraclete,  
best gift of God above;  
the Living Spring, the Living Fire,  
sweet Unction and True Love.

Thou who are sevenfold in Thy Grace,  
finger of God's right hand,  
His promise teaching little ones  
to speak and understand.

o guide our minds with Thy blest light,  
with love our hearts inflame  
and with Thy strength which ne'er decays,  
confirm our mortal frame.

Far from us drive our deadly foe,  
true peace unto us bring  
and through all perils lead us safe  
beneath Thy sacred wing.

Through Thee may we the Father know,  
through Thee, the eternal Son  
and Thee the Spirit of Them both,  
thrice Blessed Three in One.

All glory to the Father be, with His co-equal Son,  
the same to Thee Great Paraclete,  
while endless ages run. Amen

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

## **Petition Prayer**

God our Father, You alone have the power to bestow those precious gifts of Yours which You rightly call miracles. If it be Your will, be pleased to grant such a gift on behalf of

(name of person or persons being prayed for)

We humbly ask that You grant this favour to glorify Your Holy Servant Blessed Frederic Ozanam, that it may serve to have him raised to the altars of Your saints by our Holy Mother the Church. We make this prayer through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

### **To be recited on the death of a member, benefactor, person visited.**

Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord:

Lord, hear my voice.

Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

If Thou O Lord wilt mark iniquities; Lord, who shall endure it?

For with Thee there is merciful forgiveness: and by reason of Thy law, I have waited for Thee O Lord.

My soul hath relied on His word: my soul hath hoped in the Lord.

From the morning watch even until night, let Israel hope in the Lord.

Because with the Lord there is mercy and with Him plentiful redemption

And He shall redeem Israel from all her iniquities.

**V.** Eternal rest give unto him/her/them O Lord

**R.** And let perpetual light shine upon

him/her/them

May his/her/their soul/souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen

## Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart

Lord Jesus, who, seeing the cold indifference of the world, and in order to revive charity amongst men, has unveiled before them thy Sacred Heart and revealed the infinite riches of thy divine love, behold us prostrate before thee, we who form only one family, by the bond of fraternal charity, scattered, it is true, throughout the world, but united under the standard of St Vincent de Paul, and forming only one body and one soul in the common spirit of the apostolate of charity; we dedicate and consecrate to thy divine person and to thy Sacred Heart this our council (or conference), and all members who compose it, the poor whom we visit in thy name, the youths and children whom we receive in our patronages in order to maintain them in thy service; in a word, all those of whom we have the care, and all the works we have undertaken in various places for thy glory. Quite unworthy though we be, we beseech thee to receive this offering in the odour of sweetness; inflame us with that fire which from the depths of thy heart thou desirest to see burning more and more each day, in order that, filled with the tenderness of thy heart, we may learn to despise things here below, to love our brethren, to help our neighbour, by word and example, and that, amongst the vicissitudes of this world, we may fix our hearts on the riches and happiness that shall never end. Amen.

\*This Act of Consecration, drawn up at the request of the Society, by the Rev. Fr. Matignon, S.J., was read for the first time at Montmartre on the 21 November 1889. The Society has been solemnly consecrated to the Sacred Heart from 05 February 1872. That consecration is renewed annually in June.



