

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Our Holy St. Vincent de Paul Way of Life,

It is a joy to be with you today, as we gather for this Retreat day with Bishop Cotta. Thank you, Bishop for being with us and no doubt we will be enriched by your presentation!

Beloved members, I thank you for your generous service in St. Vincent de Paul. What you do is of the greatest importance! While we do much good work for many people, we are not only a charity organization, but a holy, spiritual, way of life in the way we live and serve. The Mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is well described by the following quotations from the Saint himself:

- *“If you consider the poor in the light of faith, then you will observe that they are taking the place of the Son of God who chose to be poor.”*
- *“Behold, now, how little is needed to become a Saint! Nothing more than to acquire the habit of willing, on every occasion, what God wills.”*
- *“Humility and Charity are two master-chords: one, the lowest; the other, the highest....Therefore, it is necessary above all, to maintain ourselves in these two virtues; for...the preservation of the whole edifice depends on the foundation and the roof.”*
- *“We should strive to keep our hearts open to the sufferings and wretchedness of other people, and pray continually that God may grant us that spirit of compassion which is truly the spirit of God.”* Aren't these words very beautiful, demanding and uplifting for how we are to live as Vincentians!

It is a popular cliché to ask “What would Jesus do?” Yet that is exactly how St. Vincent lived his life, doing the Will of God by helping others. At times we may feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the burdens faced by people who are poor; we are tempted to throw our hands in the air and ask, “What can I do?” This is the question every Christian *must* ask!

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is an international organization of lay persons who wish to live their faith by loving and serving as Jesus did, deriving its name from the great Saint's thinking and work. It seeks, in a spirit of Justice and Charity, and by the person to person involvement of its members to help those who are needy and suffering, serving everyone regardless of creed, color opinion or origin. We Vincentians strive, through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures to bear witness to the love of Christ in our relationship with those we serve, sharing Jesus' healing love and presence with those in need; and in this very giving of ourselves receive from the needy we serve more of Jesus whom we seek to emulate.

Inspired by Gospel values, our Society of St. Vincent de Paul, leads women and men to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering in the tradition of our founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and our patron, St. Vincent de Paul!

As a reflection of the whole family of God, we as members are drawn from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, age groups, and economic levels. As Vincentians we are united in this blessed society of charity by a spirit of poverty, humility and sharing, which is nourished by prayer and reflection, mutually supportive gatherings and adherence to our basic Rule.

As Vincentians we witness God's love by embracing works of charity and justice. The Society collaborates with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes,

making no distinction in those served, because in them, Vincentians see the face of Christ. In our blessed Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we seek personal holiness through works of charity. In this essential way, we differ from other charitable associations or agencies whose principal objective is not necessarily the spiritual advancement of their members, but the doing of good for someone else.

It might be helpful to return to our roots and read the ancient words of then President-General Adolpe Baudon, in his Circular Letter of January 1, 1877:

"It is laid down in our Rule, and it has been always understood among us, that in uniting to serve our masters the poor, as St. Vincent de Paul expresses it, our object is not only to relieve material misery, a very laudable purpose in itself, but to aspire, especially, through the practice of that most sublime of virtues "charity" to render ourselves better and more fervent Christians, and to make our poor enter on the same path, if we have the happiness of succeeding."

In another Circular Letter of December 12, 1915, Vicomte Hendecourt, then President-General wrote:

"The Society has two aims: to do a great deal of spiritual good to its members through the exercise of charity, and to do some spiritual and temporal good to many poor families in the name of Jesus Christ. If it did not continually seek to combine these two aims, it would lose its reason to exist. If it were to seek only the holiness of its members through pious exercises, there is no lack of Confraternities and Third Orders to meet that need. However, if on the other hand, it were to seek only the relief of the temporal miseries of the poor, it would simply add one more to the list of public and private institutions founded for that purpose."

Our Mission Statement is clear: Vincentian ministry is a means for acquiring holiness. The ministry of a Vincentian to those, and with those who stand in need is the powerful means that affects holiness of life for the individual Vincentian. Vatican Council II states that the principal means of holiness for bishops and priests is their ministry. This applies to the laity also, because, in attending to the needy and suffering, a Vincentian is ministering to Jesus Christ himself.

I express my appreciation to all of you for your faith and dedication and look forward to our ministry together in the year ahead, as we strive to put into practice the blessed inspirations of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. I hope this day will bless each one of us, not only with a desire to help people who are poor, worthy as that is, but to see what we do as a holy way of life, making us saints in Christ.

Brothers and sisters in the early church all members were called the holy ones, redeemed in Christ, washed clean in his blood, they living in Christ and Christ living in them. We can sometimes reduce this or not present it in its radical and beautiful way as we should. We must always rejoice in who we are for as Pope Leo X often said "Christian know your dignity!" We are God's holy people and our fortunate situation is well described in 2 Corinthians 2:14, which presents three marks of authentic Christianity. "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphant procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him." May we experience this and share it with all we meet in Peace, Joy, and the beauty of life!