

SELECTED READINGS FOR VINCENTIANS



OZANAM SCHOOL OF CHARITY
PARTICIPANT BOOK

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES

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FOREWORD

The Society of St. Vincent De Paul is a way of life we have adopted because we believe in it. It is built on love; love of God and love of our neighbor for love of Him. Our charity must be limitless, without bounds — for it is that which makes our Society great. Such is the love that burned in the heart of Frederic Ozanam. Such is the love that has carried on the Society these many years. Such is the love that must perpetuate the Society into the future.

We hope these readings will contribute to this boundless growth of love in our members in this Council. But we must remember that these readings can only contribute to part of this growth. The other more important part is contained in the following quotation from Frederic Ozanam emphasizing our person-to-person service and practice of home visits:

“The knowledge of social well-being and of reform is to be learned, not from books, but in climbing the stairs to the poor man’s house, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him, sharing the secret of his lonely heart and troubled mind.”

These readings on various aspects of Vincentian organization and service are a collection of articles from Vincentian Council Newsletters from across the United States and other materials pertinent to the Vincentian person-to-person ministry. These articles do not cover all possible topics which may be of interest to Vincentians but will assist both new and veteran members in understanding the Vincentian spirit of service and its practical application. Together with this base, the members own ingenuity and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, many other practical questions can be worked out within the Conference setting.

We hope that these readings, a member’s person-to-person experience with the poor, the spiritual formation and general discussion experienced at Conference meetings will help members serve as Jesus did in the spirit of St. Vincent DePaul and Frederic Ozanam.

Joseph H. Mueller
Council of the United States
Society of St. Vincent DePaul



FREDERIC OZANAM

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL MISSION STATEMENT

“And Who is my neighbor?”

This quote is from the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10/29:37) which was a story of special personal significance to Frederic Ozanam, founder of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul.

The Society of St. Vincent DePaul is an international Catholic organization of lay persons who wish to live their faith by loving and serving as Jesus did. It was founded in Paris, France in 1833 by Frederic Ozanam, a 20-year-old college student and his companions to bear witness to the Church and the mission it received from Jesus. Placed under the patronage of St. Vincent DePaul, the Society derives its inspiration from his thinking and work and seeks in a spirit of justice and charity, by a person-to-person involvement of its volunteer members, to help those who are needy and suffering, especially those most in need. The Society's charitable services, expressed principally through its network of parish volunteer groups called “Conferences,” is part of the life of the Catholic Church and is closely associated with Catholic Services and other diocesan organizations involved in lay ministry.

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. Its ministry through a person-to-person contact encompasses every form of aid that alleviates suffering and promotes the dignity and integrity of mankind. It serves everyone regardless of creed, opinion, color or origin.

Vincentians strive, through prayer, meditation on the Scriptures, fidelity to the teachings of the Church and in the various aspects of their daily lives, to bear witness to the love of Christ in their relationship with those they serve. It is through these relationships that members share Jesus' healing love and presence with those in need and in this very giving of themselves, receive from the very needy and suffering they serve, more of Jesus whom they seek to emulate. Those who see in the poor the face of Jesus, understand the Vincentian spirit.

Faithful to its founders, the Society constantly strives to renew and adapt itself to the changing conditions of the world. Members, united in the same spirit of poverty and sharing, form with those they help, one and the same family throughout the world. The Vincentian is there to serve, not to judge.

Whatsoever you did to the least of My brothers and sisters, you did it to Me. (Matt:26/45)

(From the Society of St. Vincent DePaul — Archdiocese of Miami)

CHAPTER I

History of the St. Vincent DePaul Society

How The Society Came To Be — Paris, France, April 23, 1833

It was a Tuesday night, the 23rd of April in 1833 that the Society of St. Vincent DePaul came into being at the offices of the newspaper, *Tribune Catholique*, at No. 38 Rue du Petit, Bourbon - St. Sulpice. Six of the seven participants were students: Frederic Ozanam, Felix Clave, Jules Deraux, Francios Lallier, Paul Lamache and August Le Taillandier. The seventh was Emmanuel Joseph Bailly who was 30 years old and the owner/editor of the paper.

They came together that night to celebrate Frederic Ozanam's 20th birthday, but a challenge to these students the previous month was on their minds. Other students accused the Church of being a friend of the rich and the exploiter of the poor, that the laity put the burden of relief for the poor upon the religious orders and then washed their hands of the job and ended saying "Don't impress us with what the priests and nuns are doing for the poor. Tell us, Frederic Ozanam, what are you doing for them — you and your fellow Catholics in this room."

As a result, the first Conference was organized as a lay group to personally provide assistance to people. They were assisted in their initial efforts by Sister Rosalie who worked with the poor and had told them: "Always remember that if we had lived through the hardships the poor have had to meet — if our childhood had been one of constant want, perhaps we too, would have given way to envy and hatred as, I must admit, have so many of the poor in this quarter. Be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than anything else you can bring them." They took as their model, the great St. Vincent DePaul. After their initial efforts in assisting the poor, the group's spirituality and person-to-person ministry spread through France with spontaneous enthusiasm.

The Society in the United States

Twelve years later in 1845, the Rule of the Society was given to Fr. Ambrose Heim in St. Louis, Missouri who catalyzed the first Conference of the Society of the United States at the Cathedral of St. Louis. The movement was quickly and widely supported in this country.

Conclusion

The International Society celebrated 150 years of service out of love of God and His Poor in 1983. Each member should rededicate himself/herself in the spirit of faith and unselfishness by which Vincentians, living and departed, made this progress of service possible. Members should remember that every Conference currently existing in our Diocese can be traced through a direct line back to Paris, France. It is good for all of us to reflect on our "family tree" to realize that each member, each Conference, each Council at some point in time was dependent on another Vincentian from outside their area to make the invitation to become involved in Vincentianism and its ministry. This interdependence is a fact.

CHAPTER II

Basic Principles of the Society

Part I of the International SVDP Rule

I. PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOCIETY

1. The Society of St. Vincent DePaul is an international Catholic organization of lay persons, founded in 1833 by Frederic Ozanam and his companions. Placed under the patronage of St. Vincent DePaul, it derives its inspiration from his thinking and work, and seeks in a spirit of justice and charity, by a person-to-person involvement of its members, to help those who are suffering.
2. Faithful to its founders, it constantly strives to renew and adapt itself to the changing conditions of the world.
3. Catholic in character, it is open to all who wish to live their faith by loving and serving their neighbor. In some countries, circumstances may lead to the acceptance of Christians of other confessions or members of other creeds who accept its principles.
4. No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It works, through a person-to-person contact, encompasses every form of aid that alleviates suffering and promotes the dignity and integrity of mankind. The Society strives not only to alleviate need but also to discover and redress the situations which cause it. It serves everyone, regardless of creed, opinion, color, origin or caste.
5. Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and sharing. They form with those they help, one and the same family throughout the world.

II. VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Vincentians strive, through prayer, meditations on the Scriptures, fidelity to the teaching of the Church and in the various aspects of their daily lives, to bear witness to the love of Christ in their relationships with those most in need.

III. POVERTY AND THE VINCENTIAN

"You have the poor with you always" (Matt. 26,11). The Vincentian is at their service. He does not judge; he is available.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DePAUL

1. Vincentians gather in groups traditionally called "Conferences" which meet regularly and frequently.
2. The Conferences are linked together by local, regional, national and international Councils.
3. The mark of the Society's unity is the aggregation of the Conferences and the institution of the Councils, pronounced by the Council general (International).

V. MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

1. Meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and christian joy.
2. They provide for consideration in common of the experiences of each member and the problems encountered in the pursuit of a better service.
3. This charitable service is part of the life of the Church and justifies the participation, as often as possible, of a spiritual advisor.



CHAPTER III

St. Vincent DePaul Organizational Units — Their Composition and Functioning

Part II of the International SVDP Rule

I. THE CONFERENCES

Article 1 Conferences may be made up of men, women or both. They may comprise adults or young people. They may be established within different social groups, such as a parish, apostolic center, high school or college group or households, youth movements, ward, town or village, firm, etc.

Article 2 Conferences meet regularly at the places, days and times determined by themselves.

Article 3 The meetings should be imbued with the spirit of fraternity and spirituality which animates the Society. The members report on their Vincentian activities and the Conference considers the action taken or to be taken to further charity, justice and efficiency, in a spirit of solidarity. An anonymous collection giving proof of the spirit of sharing of the members is made during the meeting or at its close.

Article 4 The Conference is directed by a President elected through secret vote to serve a three year period. The President is eligible for re-election. The President is at the service of all the poor persons aided by the Conference and of all the Conference members. The presidency should be considered by him as a responsibility, not as an honor. For that reason it is desirable for him to be replaced by another member at the end of two successive periods of office, whose combined duration should not exceed six years.

Article 5 The President attends to the progress of his Conference. He supports its members in their Vincentian action, bringing them help and assistance in every circumstance. He ensures the required liaisons with the Council to which his Conference is attached as well as neighboring Conferences and other organizations with which joint work is done. He represents the Society before the local civilian and religious authorities.

Article 6 The President is assisted by a board, the members of which are appointed by him after consultation with the Conference. The Board consists of at least one Vice-president, a Secretary and a Treasurer. When necessary, other members are entrusted with particular duties. Officers assigned by the President terminate at such time the election of a new President is definitive.

Article 7 The Vice-president or one of them, as the case may be, replaces the President when absent; they collaborate constantly and effectively with him; they organize the election of the next President.

Article 8 The Secretary animates the running of the various administrative services created by the Conference. He prepares the minutes of the meeting and reports thereon.

Article 9 The Treasurer is responsible for the Conference funds. He keeps the accounts which should be audited at least once a year by two members delegated by the Conference or by qualified persons or organizations.

Article 10 The Treasurer draws up the Conference's budget, the income and expenditure being approved by the Conference. The principle forms of income and receipts are: collections at meetings; other gifts, collections, contributions and offerings; grants received from the Councils of the Society; legacies, subsidies; the product of all initiatives taken by the members.

The principal expenditures are:

- help in cash or in kind to the persons or families for whom the Conference has made itself responsible.
- assistance to works depending on or collaborating with the Conference or Councils of the Society.
- expenses in connection with twinings.
- expenses of the organization of gatherings, meetings, entertainments or outings by the Conference with the poor
- a financial contribution to the Councils of the Society according to a percentage of receipts decided by the Superior (National) Council.
- Secretarial expenses and various other general expenses that should be kept as low as possible, the Conferences being only the administrators of funds belonging to the poor.

Article 11 The Central (Diocesan) Council may draw up rules adapted to each Youth Conference when circumstances make this advisable. These rules may concern the duration and number of offices and frequency and organization of meetings. They should not in any case lead to the severance of the full attachment of Youth Conferences to the Society, nor change the spirit of sharing.

II. THE COUNCILS

Article 12 On the proposal of the superior (National) Council to which they are attached, District, Central and Regional Councils are instituted by the International Council General. The competency of District Councils may be geographical or exerted on Conferences the activities of which belong to a special service. These various Councils may be men, women or mixed. If two Councils, one men and the other women exist at the same level, the two Presidents may sit in both Councils with a view of ensuring close collaboration.

Article 13 The Councils are composed of the presidents of the Conferences or Councils attached to them. The Presidents who are members of these various Councils by virtue of their positions can, if they are unable to be present, be represented. In all Councils, representatives of other works and members of the Society may be appointed in a personal capacity by the President after consultation with the Council.

Article 14 It is recommended that at each Council level a Youth Committee or equivalent body be formed. Without constituting a parallel hierarchy, this Committee is charged particularly with the animation of the Youth Conference, with the extension of the participation of young people in the life of the Society, with the liaison with the adult Conferences and with the representation of youth at all levels of the Society. In all Councils where one exists, a representative of the Youth Committee will be a member of the Council.

Article 15 At all levels, the Councils are first and foremost at the service of the Conferences with a view to furthering the continuous evolution of charitable activities. They animate and coordinate the activities of the Conferences and Councils in their circumscription.

They promote a dialogue with other works. They examine the activity reports at least once a year and forward them quickly with their comments to the next higher Council.

They encourage initiatives and strive to bring about the establishment of Councils, Conferences and new works.

They submit to the Council to which they are attached, accompanied with their recommendations, requests for aggregation and institution for transmission to the Council General.

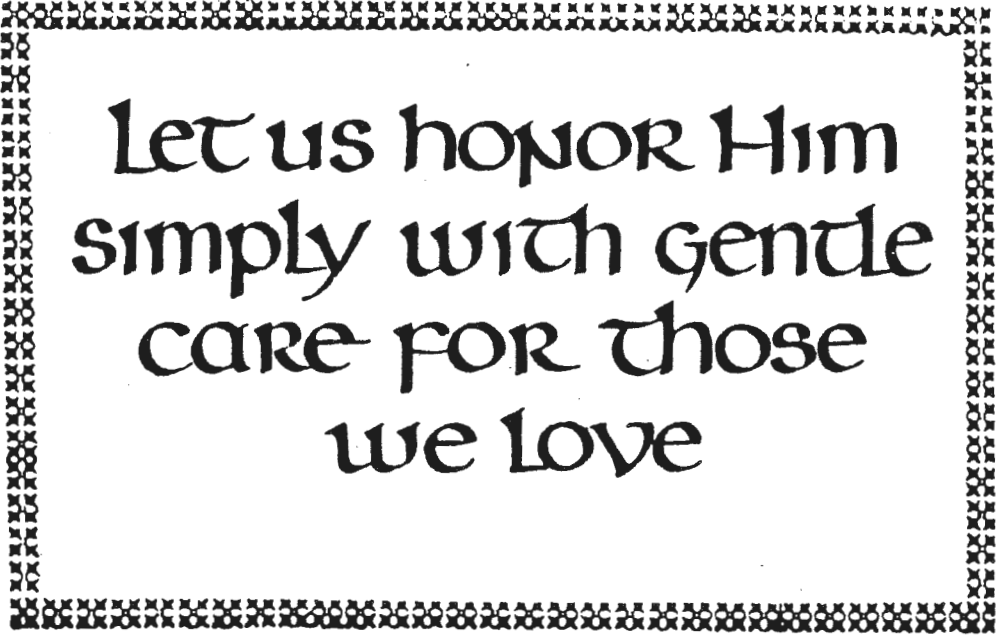
They organize to the fullest possible extent, formation sessions intended for members and future members on spiritual themes, the Vincentian vocation and problems of social action and justice.

Article 16 The Presidents of the various Councils are elected through secret vote by the ex-officio members only of these Councils, as defined in Article 13 above, to the exclusion of members appointed in a personal capacity. For serious reasons, the next higher Council can annul an election, but only within one month of having been notified of it.

Article 17 It may be useful to delegate certain members to visit the Conferences or Councils. Such contacts should be frequent and aimed at rendering a better service to the poor and the Conference.

Article 18 The President of a Council is assisted by a Board whose members are appointed according to the conditions defined in Article 6 for the Conference. The duration of office of the President is limited and he is eligible for re-election. However, it is desirable that he be replaced after two successive periods of office, whose combined duration should not exceed six years. The Secretary and Treasurer of each Council carry out their functions in the same manner as the Secretary and the Treasurer of a Conference.

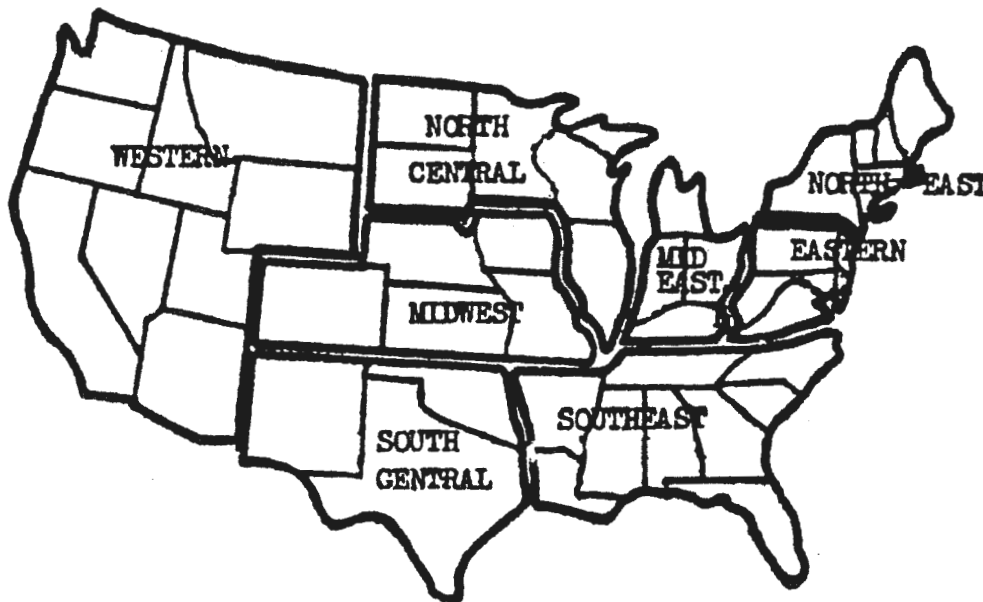
Article 19 Each Council determines the frequency of its meetings in agreement with the Council to which it is attached. The board shall meet between Council Meetings.



Let us honor Him
simply with gentle
care for those
we love

CHAPTER IV

St. Vincent DePaul Organization Structure



Regional Structure

The National Regional division of the United States as shown in the illustration above has developed historically as a way to bring Vincentians of neighboring Councils together for mutual encouragement and sharing information. The size and diversity of our country make it difficult for Vincentians to come together and share experiences very often on a National basis. The creation of Regions overcomes many of these obstacles.

The Regional Chairman is chosen by the President of the National Council, both to represent and advise him in each particular Region. There is normally a Regional Meeting each year with a program encouraging the exchange of ideas between Vincentians. These meetings provide an opportunity similar to the National Meetings but without the great expense of travel.

Council of the United States

The Council of the United States was organized in 1916 and exercises jurisdiction over the Society throughout this country. The Society is organized in 80% of all U.S. Diocese and includes more than 4000 Conferences.

The National governing body consists of a board of trustees, one from each diocese which has a Council structure. These trustees meet twice each year, at the mid-year meeting in Spring and the National meeting in the Fall.

The National Council employs an executive secretary and small staff in St. Louis, Missouri. The responsibility of this office is similar to that of a Diocesan Council Office, except on a national level. The *Ozanam News*, official publication of the Society, and much of the Society's promotional literature is produced there.

The National Meeting of the Council of the United States is held at a different site each year in the early Fall. All members are invited to participate in the educational and social portions of the three-to-four-day program.



International Council General

The International Council General, Society of St. Vincent DePaul has the responsibility of animating and coordinating the activities of the Society throughout the world. It alone is empowered to institute new Councils and to aggregate new Conferences of the Society. The President of the Council General represents the Society before the Pope in Rome and all religious and lay international bodies. He is elected for a period of six years by all the members of the Society. He is assisted by a number of Vice-Presidents, one for each area of the world. The President of each National Council is an ex-officio member of the Council General.

The Council General has its seat in Paris, France, where historically the first Conference of St. Vincent DePaul was founded.

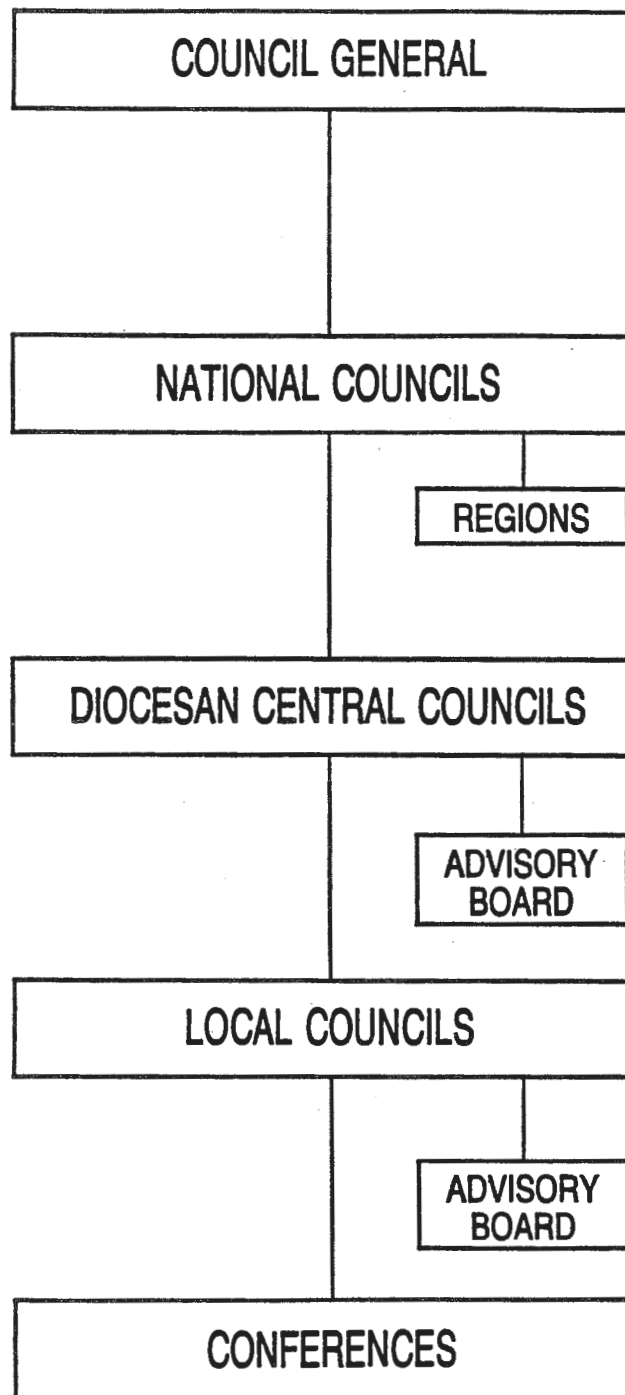
Each Superior (National) Council has a duty to share its resources to fund the operations of the International Council General's Office. Part of the yearly Conference dues sent to the Superior (National) Council by the District or Diocesan Councils are forwarded to the International Council General.

Special appeals, disasters, special rehabilitation needs, etc. also may originate from the Council General's Office to help Vincentians attempting to work on these special problems in countries where financial resources are lacking. These appeals are made known to all Society members through our Superior (National) Council.

There is a custom of holding an International Assembly every six years to bring together Society representatives from all the corners of the world. Matters vital to the future of the Society are discussed and decided at these meetings. The President General looks upon the occasion as a pilgrimage and spiritual witness and asks for prayers that the Holy Spirit will lead the Society to new start in bringing us back to our origins.

SVDP Organizational Chart

Society of St. Vincent DePaul



Although the majority of Vincentian's time and effort is spent at the Conference level, certain individuals are called to make a contribution on the Council level. While first and foremost serving in a Conference, they also participate in the coordinating and extension of Conferences and in special works of the Council. Indeed, very few of our Conferences would have come into existence if not for their brother and sister Vincentians working on this level. We encourage all members to make their time and talent available to their own District Council for the work done by the District Council.

Authority in the Society is seldom exercised in a negative or restricting manner; it is based upon brotherly love and encouragement. Input by the average Vincentian is welcomed at all levels and officers of Councils serve for limited terms and hand on authority to others prepared to accept it. No officer receives material compensation for his/her work.

CHAPTER V

Helping Relationship

HOME VISITATION — THE “HELPING RELATIONSHIP”

A. DEFINITION OF THE “HELPING RELATIONSHIP”

The dictionary defines a “relationship” as the “state of being mutually interested or involved.” Each person in a relationship is somehow affected by the fact that there is a relationship to varying degrees depending on the type of relationship (husband-wife, parent-children, friends, employee-employer, customer-clerk, social worker-client and especially that which develops between a Vincentian and the one who is helped.)

The relationship which develops between the Vincentian and the one he helps can be termed a “helping relationship” and can be defined as “the relationship (mutual involvement) that exists as a result of doing something for someone that he is unable to do for himself or helping him do it himself.”

Perhaps Vincentians have never realized that such a relationship does develop between themselves and the people they help no matter how brief the contact. The helping relationship that develops in Vincentian work can never be regarded as just a simple humanitarian or philanthropic relationship. There are natural, human elements in it for sure but since the Vincentian work that is done is in a wider, supernatural context, the Vincentian helping relationship is a “supernatural” relationship viewed in the context of Christ’s saving Redemption.

In a wider context, the lay apostolate of which Vincentian work or ministry is included has as its ultimate aim the forming of a relationship: the nature of the apostolate, in general, is all the activity of the church that is directed to the spreading of the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father and which, thereby, brings all men to share in Christ’s saving redemption, so that through mankind, the whole world might in actual fact be brought into a relationship with Him (*Decree on the Laity*, No. 2, Vatican Council II).

The aim of Vincentian work or ministry is the development of relationships between individuals and God through the person of Christ. The development of this relationship involves a healing process that members of the SVDP are deeply involved through their role of service to the needy and suffering. Vincentians make Christ’s healing presence felt through their presence to those who are needy or are suffering. By their work, Vincentians help develop and heal this relationship by transforming situations which make the lives of people less human, situations which prevent this relationship from developing with one another and with God. This work also transforms Vincentians and develops their relationship with God and others, in turn by putting them in closer touch with God’s healing presence as found in the world, each other and especially in a Vincentian’s contact with those who suffer.

Vincentians are used as a “channel” or “instrument” for bringing this healing presence of Christ to others and developing this supernatural relationship with God. Each individual “helping relationship” a Vincentian develops with someone has to be viewed in this supernatural context. Vincentians, through spiritual reading, prayer and the sacraments, have to see themselves as being channels or instruments in bringing Christ to others in need and of seeing Christ in others in need.

St. Vincent DePaul and Frederic Ozanam captured this spirit and heritage from the Gospel message and it became a part of their life and work. It has been passed on to all Vincentians through the St. Vincent DePaul Society.

B. PURPOSE OF STUDYING THE "HELPING RELATIONSHIP"

Many things we do are a matter of habit and we rarely think about them once they've become automatic. When we want to improve or use something to better advantage which we do as a matter of habit, usually we take a closer look at it and try to become conscious of our actions and whatever steps are involved (e.g., sales work, planning, special skills, sports). When a person becomes conscious of what he's been doing automatically before, he is in a much better position to evaluate it, find out what its strengths, weaknesses, etc. are, and in general, improve it.

Knowing more about the "helping relationship" can help a Vincentian look at his own attitudes and skills to evaluate ways to help improve the "helping relationships" he will make in the future for the benefit of those who need help.

The helping professions (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc.) all study the "helping relationship" in depth as part of their school because this is their main "instrument" or "tool" in working with people. This is also a Vincentian main instrument or tool.

Any real helping that takes place is in the context of a helping relationship. For the professional counsellor, once a good, trust-filled relationship is established between them and the people they are helping, many good things can take place — people are more apt to help themselves, take suggestions, work on particular problems as a result of this relationship or trustful bond that did not exist previously. Many Vincentians can remember a new case in which family members were not too open to talk about their problems, look at ways they could help themselves, or take advice. But when the Vincentian worked with them, showed he was sincere and willing to help, the family realized he was their friend and could be trusted. It was at this point that they were willing to risk doing something about their problem. The important thing to remember throughout is to treat them the way you would want to be treated if you were in their position.

C. COMPONENTS OR INGREDIENTS OF THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP

1. Understand the person and his background.

a. Knowledge of the emotional needs of people are very helpful. Some of these needs include: to be wanted or needed, to be independent, to feel loved and secure, to feel useful, to receive recognition for past performances. Everyone, whether they're rich or poor have these emotional needs. They are usually met by loved ones, friends, co-workers, status in the family, community and job, etc.

b. Know how hard it is to ask for help of any kind. People rarely want to be helped. To ask means:

1. There is a recognition that there is something wrong and are helpless to do anything about it without asking for help. In short, the person is admitting that they failed.

2. You not only have to admit to yourself you've failed and are helpless to do anything about it, you must also admit it to your family and confess it to someone outside your family, most likely to a stranger.

3. You have to be willing to let another person advise you and have power over your life.

4. You have a fear of the unknown — if you ask for help you don't know where this will lead you or what changes you will have to make. You know the present situation is bad but it is somewhat secure, the future is unknown with no security offered for changes.

2. Positive regard and genuineness

a. This has to be a Christian sincerity. You are interested because you really care about the person and are interested in relieving any suffering that person is undergoing as Christ would do. People pick this up very readily and easily. You can say the wrong thing at the wrong time but if they can feel you are sincere in wanting to help them, are respectful of their dignity, you will succeed.

3. Understand yourself (motivation and prejudices)

a. You must know yourself and what "turns you on or off." Since we, ourselves, are human, we may tend to give more help to the ones we like (they appreciate the help and thank us — this makes us feel good; they are caring for an elderly parent — this reminds us of our caring for our own mother and father; the house is neat and clean, etc. or tend to give less help to the ones we dislike (they never thanked us and seem to expect it; their house is sloppy; the woman reminds me of someone who treated me mean as a youngster; their children are undisciplined, etc.).

There are many more examples that could be given. The important thing is to examine our way of doing things and the feelings we get when visiting and ask ourselves how our feelings affect our judgment and make our decisions on a more objective basis of need and helping people help themselves. We have to learn to be tolerant and accepting of the ways and behavior (moral, cultural, religious, etc.) that are different from ours. We should never try to force our ways on them.

4. Some knowledge of the helping skills are important. Some include: interviewing, referral (have to know agencies and the social service system), confidentiality, etc. Also important is to know how to plan and organize so that goals which the Conference or District Council wants to accomplish, can be attained. Organization also helps use people's time and resources to their best advantage.

5. Some experience in applying these skills is also important. Like all things, practice makes perfect. At the beginning we should not expect to be operating like Vincentians with years of experience. If we do, it could lead to a lot of unneeded frustration.

D. CONDITIONS NECESSARY TO ASSIST THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP GROW

1. Good communication includes a lot of listening. How many times have priests, social workers, Vincentians commented that they just had a case where they just listened and offered no advice, yet when the session was through the people remarked "Thanks so much for helping me solve my problem." In actuality you became a sounding board which helped them put into words their problems and helped them see what solutions existed more clearly because they verbalized the problem and alternatives available. Until a person can put into words and verbalize their problems by explaining it to others, many times, they have not thought the situation out clearly enough to arrive at a solution.

2. Gaining trust (the person being helped knows you understand what he is feeling and feels confident in you).

a. Empathy is important. It means "I know that it must hurt" or "I know it is difficult." Empathy is sometimes confused with pity or sympathy. Sympathy is an act of compassionate understanding. It says "I can understand how you feel and feel it with you in a limited way, but I don't feel that way myself." Empathy feels with a person, sympathy feels like him.

An extreme example would be the following: A man complains about his wife to an empathetic person who would reply: "I can understand how hard this makes your daily life. I cannot judge, for I am not you, but with this feeling you have for her, what do you think you can do?" (This is accepting and constructive).

On the other hand, a sympathetic man says "Oh, I know just how you feel exactly, I can't stand my wife either." This, of course, leads to nowhere.

- b. Empathy comes from strength, not weakness. It is strong because it never judges, though it strives to understand, it never condones and it maintains the difference.
3. The ability to allow the person being helped to express negative feelings without fear of blame, anger, sorrow, or loss of face. They should be allowed to discuss their feelings without fear of being condemned by the Vincentians. This could include negative feelings about the Church, their pastor, the welfare system, etc. The Vincentian should remember not to take what is said personally or try to defend himself, the Church, etc. in the beginning.

The people should be allowed to discuss their feelings without fear of being condemned. For many individuals it is a unique experience to talk with Vincentians who, instead of criticizing or admonishing, listen with non-judgmental understanding. Many Vincentians have experienced the situation or heard the following comment after a visit: "It has been such a help to talk with you. You're the first person I have ever told this to. I see you understand." A possible reason for this reaction is that this person or family, by not being criticized or admonished, sees in the member, the ideal characteristic one is always searching for and this relationship becomes very satisfying.

4. **Reliability** in doing what you said you would or explaining why not.
5. **Support** includes emotional or moral support. It says "I am here to help if you want and you can use me. Whatever you do I will not desert you as a friend."
6. Vincentians must remember that **self-help** requires **self-involving** behavior from the one being helped. This is the aim of Vincentian work — helping people help themselves. The Vincentian should not do everything for the person or family if they can do some of it themselves. This avoids having people become overly dependent on Vincentians.
7. **Confidentiality** is one of the most important aspects of building a relationship on trust. People are sometimes afraid to share their problems because they don't want other people to know about them, especially friends or neighbors. People will more easily seek help if they know what they say will not be spread around or made public. People who come to the SVDP have a right to expect the Conference to use the information about them constructively on their behalf. This means protecting the information against improper disclosure and with their consent, sharing pertinent information with agencies or others as the situation warrants. No case should be discussed by name with family or friends.

E. GENERAL HINTS

1. **Start where the person is** — At the beginning, it is wise to center your attention on the problem that has been presented (food, clothing, rent, loneliness, etc.) rather than pursuing other areas that the client hasn't brought up himself (going to church, immoral way of living, sending the children to catechism, etc.) Once you help with the problem that has been presented, the client sees you as interested in him as a person, trusts you and a relationship is growing because of it. Once the immediate, presenting need is resolved, the people will be more willing to discuss other areas that you may want to bring up.
2. We must center our attention on reality and not on our need to be liked or disliked personally or to satisfy our conscience. There may be unpleasant things we may have to do or tell people. In helping others we must deal with reality, real sorrow, real hate, real sin and real despair.
3. The way we give things is more important than what we give. Material things which are given last only a short time, whereas how we give it lasts forever — a chance of giving people proper dignity and respect.
4. **Humility** is needed. This humility is not one in which we short-change ourselves or be falsely modest but one in which we face the real facts. We have to be honest with ourselves and know that we don't

know what is exactly right for another person most of the time. We are extremely blessed if we know this for ourselves. What this means is that however much we can feel and think with and for another, it is his problem, not ours and it is and will remain his responsibility. On the opposite side, Vincentians are more aware of things than the ordinary parishioner and can be of help so we shouldn't short-change ourselves either.

F. CONCLUSION

The Vincentian's reactions are not the natural reactions of one man on the street to another. The Vincentian begins with such natural responses but they are subject to other influences such as his knowledge, experience and above all, his realization that he brings Christ's healing presence to others.

The Vincentian should react not to the clients actual outward behavior but to possible reasons for the behavior. To the experienced Vincentian, the cue "anger" may mean "defensive hostility" or "anxiety;" unwillingness to share information readily may mean "a fear or distrust" that you will make a report to the welfare office — "lying" may mean "being embarrassed the Vincentian might be shocked and not help if the truth were known;" many other examples could be given. If the Vincentian reads into the responses in this way, his response will be different than it would otherwise be.

Vincentians' reactions are also modified by the fact that in his training and experience he has been exposed to the observation of a great deal of human suffering. He has been with the needy and suffering in their disappointment, sorrow, physical suffering, death crippling frustration, and so on. Unless he has remained untouched by these experiences, he cannot but respond with more spontaneous understanding and acceptance than he would, had he not become a Vincentian. It can be asked "don't you get worn out controlling or concealing your natural reactions?"

The point is that the natural, spontaneous reaction itself is different from that of the untrained person because both perception and judgment have been modified by training and experience. It must be added, however, that no one ever reaches the perfection of understanding and acceptance just implied, but that does not negate the fact that the experienced Vincentian has progressed markedly in that direction.

(From the SVDP Annual Meeting, 1977, Portland, Oregon; prepared by Lawrence G. Lauter, Council of Cleveland)



CHAPTER VI

Interviewing

I. INTRODUCTION

A. What is interviewing?

In many ways an interview can be simple if we use common sense. However, at times, an interview can be complicated and calls for a good deal of skill and experience. You can learn how to do good interviewing.

The following are some important points to remember:

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW? Definition — An interview is a conversation usually between two people. It is carried on and guided by one person who has a definite plan and a goal in carrying on the conversation.

All of us have either conducted an interview or have been interviewed. When you register your child in a new school and you see the principal, the principal interviews you and perhaps your child. When you go to the hospital, the admissions clerk interviews you. If you get a traffic ticket, the policeman interviews you.

An interview is more than just a friendly conversation although it certainly should be carried on in a friendly and understanding way. To repeat what an interview is: (1) it is usually a conversation between two people, (2) one person guides the interview and has a plan and a goal in mind for why he is having the interview.

The interviews we will be talking about are those which Vincentians have with families or individuals.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW. (1) To seek information about the family or individual so that you can help him, (2) to give information which will help them, (3) provide a service.

II. UNDERSTAND YOURSELF AND YOUR FEELINGS

FIRST: It is important that we understand our own prejudices. We all have them. Some people are tolerant of alcoholics but become very intolerant of people who don't keep their houses clean. It is easy to like and agree with the person who is similar to us and lives like we do. It is much harder to understand the person who might not do things as we do.

Sometimes you may be angry with the person whom you would like to help. For example, you may feel angry with him because even though you're trying to help him, he doesn't cooperate; he doesn't seem to want your help. Try to understand your own feelings about the client and if this is standing in the way of helping them, perhaps your own feelings or anger or disgust at the client is coming across and he doesn't accept help from you easily. These are difficult clients to work with and you may be tempted to give up on them or think of them as not being appreciative of your help.

Try not to feel superior to people who may need your help. Try to understand why the person behaves the way he does, why he has problems. This will help you to provide better service to him.

Sometimes people will make you feel very good or very bad depending upon how they react to you. Often their reaction to you is not always based on you as a person but on what you represent. You may be blamed because the many welfare programs have not cured all their problems. On the other hand, you may be seen as a magician who can cure all the problems the person has, or all the problems of the community. Being considered a magician may make you feel so good that you make promises that you won't be able to keep. Try not to make promises unless you know you can and will keep them.

To repeat — it is very important that you be aware of your own feelings as you conduct an interview. You should certainly ask yourself — am I acting in a way that will be of real help to them? All of us have bad days — things go wrong for us. We may feel irritable and would rather not work that day. Try to be aware of these kinds of reactions and not take it out on them.

UNDERSTANDING THE BEHAVIOR OF THE PERSON YOU ARE INTERVIEWING.

Some behavior can be taken at face value. For example, if a woman acts angry because she has had to wait in an outpatient clinic for five hours, there is good reason for her to be angry. It is important to understand what is really going on inside a person and not get fooled by what he or she only seems to be feeling. A little different example of this is the woman who lies to a landlord at the point of renting an apartment. She tells the landlord that she isn't on welfare when she really is. From this you might decide that this woman is a liar and doesn't have a good character. However, if we take the time to understand why she lied — it may be because she knew that she wouldn't get the rooms if the landlord knew that she was on welfare. She is desperate to find a place for her children and so she lied to get a roof over their heads.

It is, therefore, important not to act immediately on what the surface behavior seems to be — but to try to understand whether there is something going on within the client that makes him act the way he does. Another example of this might be the woman who doesn't keep her house clean. Now we could preach to her that it is bad to be sloppy and she should change, but unless we understand some of the reasons why she is this way — preaching and giving advice won't help. Sometimes a woman neglects her home because she has given up; because she has little hope of things ever getting better. However, if we can help her with her problems — show that we care — very often this will help the person not to feel so lonely — so disgusted and to feel that there is some hope — and then she may feel more like keeping her house clean.

III. ACTUAL INTERVIEW

HOW DO YOU START AN INTERVIEW:

It is usually best to begin your interview in a very straight forward way like explaining that you are a member of the St. Vincent DePaul Society from the local parish, that you are interested in talking with the person about his concerns and needs for himself and his family. You are there for him — you are interested in helping.

DON'T OFFER HELP TOO QUICKLY. Before rushing in to offer solutions to his problems, try to understand the problem — what seems to be causing it — then try to get a good understanding of the client himself — the kind of person he is. Encourage him to talk about his problem.

DON'T MAKE PROMISES YOU CAN'T KEEP. One promise you can make to a client is that you will try to do everything you can to help him. You should not give him false hope that everything

will be alright and that you'll be able to cure all his problems but you can guarantee that you will try to do as much as you can and you will stick by him until things get better.

KNOW WHAT YOU CAN AND CAN'T DO. A sign of a skillful interviewer is when you know what you can do and what you can't do. Know the agencies that can be of help to clients. Learn how to make referrals to these agencies. Know what you and your Conference can do for the client and when you should go to other agencies for help. (IT IS NO DISGRACE TO GET HELP IN ASSISTING SOMEONE. THAT'S THE SIGN OF A GOOD WORKER — ONE WHO CARES. DON'T FEEL THAT YOU HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING FOR THE CLIENT YOURSELF.)

Know what not to discuss in your interviews. Try to be careful about going too far in opening up discussions that you will not be able to fully handle. For example, if Mrs. Jones wants to talk about her very difficult marriage problem it will not help for you to go into a lot of detail about this problem. You can, however, talk with her about how you can help her to get a good social worker at a family agency who has a lot of experience in helping people with marital problems. Here you can play the important role of getting your client to an agency where she can get help with the problem which is bothering her. This is a very important service. Very often the client feels hopeless — that there is no way to get help for his problem. It can be like throwing a drowning man a life line when you get him to the right agency.

IV. TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOU IN INTERVIEWING

First: Be a good observer. Notice the condition of the resident's home. Is the house neat or not? Are the children dressed? What are their clothes like? How many children are there? What's the general feeling that comes across from the person toward you? Is it friendly, not friendly, suspicious, etc.?

Second: Be a good listener. Show that you understand what the person is saying by nodding your head, by sometimes repeating a part of what he's said so that he knows you've been listening. Also it is important to express how difficult you know it is for the client because of the trouble he is having.

Third: It is usually helpful to let the person talk first. Sometimes people need to let off steam especially if a recent experience has upset them. Let him tell you what his problems are and then you can talk and ask specific questions to get more necessary information. In this way you will see the problem from the client's viewpoint. You will cut down on the client's fears and suspicions if you ask good questions in a friendly and not a suspicious way. Your words are often less important than the way in which you ask a question or the tone of your voice and your general manner. For example, the question, "Are you looking for work?" may sound accusing and suspicious or friendly and helpful depending on how you ask it and how you feel about the client.

V. GUIDING AN INTERVIEW

The purpose of asking questions is to get information and also to focus the interview so you can guide it in such a way that you'll be able to help the person. It is usually a good idea to allow the client to talk about whatever problem he wants to in the beginning; next, try to help him to focus on which problem he would like to work on first. Then move in the direction of what needs to be done in order to help him with that problem. At the end of an interview, briefly repeat what the problems are as you understand them. Then outline what you are going to do for the client and when. Always be definite about when you will call him or see him the next time.

VI. HELPING A PERSON HELP HIMSELF

This is important to keep in mind. Very often you will see a course of action that is necessary to help someone and you will want to move quickly to take care of the problem. Be careful not to move too quickly or to move on doing things that the client can do himself. Sometimes it is necessary to go with the client to an employment agency or to the hospital. At other times it will make the client feel better if he goes himself. You can help by giving him careful directions on how to get there or make a phone call ahead of time to let the agency know that he is coming.

People need to have a part in making a decision about what course of action is best for them. People are more likely to cooperate in a plan of action if they are part of making the decision about a plan for themselves. Some people need a great deal of help and guidance and are not able to decide for themselves. Here you will need to give more direction, but again it is the way in which you do it. It is a helping, enabling way and not one of pushing or dictating to people. You will have to decide whether to leave the decisions up to the client or to be more direct and encourage that he take a certain course of action. Often it is a combination of these two approaches which is required. This is what makes your job difficult but challenging and interesting.

VII. KEEP IT CONFIDENTIAL

Whatever a client tells you is to be kept just between you and him. The exception to this, of course, is when you discuss the situation with your Conference members or when you have the client's permission to talk about him and his problems with another agency.

The reason we keep information confidential is because we have respect for the people we work with and regard their lives as private. We do not share information with other clients, with friends, or family, about them. Sometimes Vincentians are tempted to do this but it is extremely important not to break a trust the client has for you. If the person finds out that you have told someone else about him, that probably is the end of your being able to help him because he will not be able to trust you. Put yourself in the position of being a client talking to a Vincentian and you will know that you want to be able to trust that member so that whatever you tell him will be kept only between you and him.

Many Vincentians live in the same neighborhood as the people they work with and here it is even more important that you keep information confidential. If you do refer to a family you have been working with, never use the name so that you can disguise who it is you might be talking about.

The above material, with some modifications, is reprinted from *Guidelines for Outreach Workers*, Cleveland Office of Economic Opportunity, Ralph Brody, 1967.



A Guide for Basic Interviewing Skills

ATTENDING BEHAVIOR

Good attending behavior demonstrates to the client that you respect them as a person and that you are interested in what they have to say. By utilizing good attending behavior to enhance the client's self respect and to establish a secure atmosphere, the interviewer facilitates free expression of whatever is on the client's mind.

There are three primary types of activities which best characterize good attending behavior:

1. The interviewer should be physically relaxed and seated with natural posture. If the interviewer is comfortable, they are better able to listen to the person with whom they are talking.
2. The interviewer should initiate and maintain eye contact with the interviewee. However, eye contact can be overdone.
3. The final characteristic of good attending behavior is the interviewer's use of comments which follow directly from what the interviewee is saying.

In summary, the interviewer's goal is to listen attentively and to communicate this attentiveness through a relaxed position, use of varied eye contact and verbal responses which indicate to the client that they are attempting to understand what the client is communicating. Specific behaviors which may be utilized are:

1. Relax physically; feel the presence of the chair as you are sitting on it.
2. Let your posture be comfortable and your movements natural; for example, if you usually move and gesture a great deal, feel free to do so at this time.
3. Use eye contact, by looking at the person with whom you are talking. Vary your gaze rather than staring fixedly.
4. Follow what the other person is saying by taking your cues from them. Don't jump from subject to subject.
5. Let your responses indicate to the client that you are with them, that you are trying to understand what they are experiencing, describing and feeling.

OPEN INVITATION

The client comes into an interview with something that they feel is a problem. The initial task of the interviewer is to stay out of the interviewee's way so as to find out how the client sees his situation.

An open invitation to talk may be best understood when compared with a closed approach to interviewing. For example:

OPEN: Could you tell me a little bit about your marriage?

OR

CLOSED: Are you married? Do you get along with your wife?

It may be observed that the open comments provide room for the client to express his real self without the imposed categories of the interviewer. An open comment allows the client an opportunity to explore himself with the support of the interviewer. A closed comment to talk, on the other hand, often emphasizes factual content as opposed to feelings. Further, it demonstrates a lack of interest in what the client has to say, and frequently attacks or puts the client in his place.

Crucial to the giving of open-ended questions is the concept of who is to lead the interview. While the interviewer does ask questions while using this skill, the questions are centered around concerns of the

client rather than around concerns of the interviewer for the client. Questions should be designed to help the client clarify his own problems, rather than provide information for the interviewer. A typical problem with closed questions is that the interviewer leads the client to topics of interest to the interviewer only.

Open invitations to talk are extremely useful in a number of different situations. For example:

1. This helps begin the interview:
 - What would you like to talk about today?
2. This helps get the interviewee to elaborate on a point:
 - Could you tell me more about that?
 - How did you feel when that happened?
3. This helps elicit examples of specific behavior so that the interviewer is better able to understand what the interviewee is describing:
 - Will you give me a specific example?
 - What do you do when you get “depressed”?
 - What do you mean when you say your father is out of his mind?
4. This helps focus the client’s attention on his feelings:
 - What are you feeling as you are telling me this?
 - How did you feel then?

MINIMAL ENCOURAGES OTHER TO TALK

Once the client has been helped by the interviewer’s attention and open-ended questions to begin telling his story, the interviewer’s task is to facilitate his continuing to talk. The interviewer really needs to say very little in order to encourage a client to continue talking, elaborating and explaining. The word **MINIMAL** refers both to how much the interviewer says, which can be very little, and to the amount of direction or intervention he imposes on the content and flow of the interview. When the interviewer uses minimal input, it encourages the client to continue talking in a meaningful way. The interviewer behaves minimally in both instances.

Some more examples of the type of comments described by the title “*MINIMAL ENCOURAGES TO TALK*” are:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. On? So? Then? And? etc. | 5. Give me an example. |
| 2. The repetition of one or two key words. | 6. What does that mean to you? |
| 3. Tell me more. | 7. Umm-hmm. |
| 4. How do you feel about that? | |

REFLECTION OF FEELING

The more quickly a client comes to see the interviewer as a person with whom it is safe to open up, the sooner the client is able to utilize the interviewer’s support to begin the exploration of their problems. By using reflection of feeling, the interviewer conveys to the interviewee that they are trying to understand how they may feel, thus reinforcing the client’s free expression of their feelings. Reflection of feelings crystallizes the interview more sharply for the client in the area of feeling, thus enabling them to deal more effectively with those feelings. In general, the interviewer can determine if they are using this technique successfully by whether or not the client begins to both express more feelings and to recognize the feelings they do express.

There are a number of fairly common errors which the beginning interviewer quite frequently makes. Often an interviewer will concentrate on information — gathering rather than feeling reflection. On other

occasions, an interviewer may realize the importance of reflecting feelings but may not be attending closely enough to what the client is saying that he can accurately do this. Another frequent error is to mistake the artificial labeling or categorization of feelings for reflection of feelings.

The following are some examples of good reflections of feeling:

example 1: CLIENT: I am so out of it. I can hardly operate. I can't do anything because that feeling is always there.

INTERVIEWER: Like there is a terrible burden that you're carrying around.

example 2: CLIENT: I could hardly believe it. That was probably one of the most wonderful things that ever happened to me!

INTERVIEWER: You were really happy.

CLIENT: I couldn't think of anything to say when he said that he liked my hair (blushes).

INTERVIEWER: You must have felt pretty happy but also a little embarrassed.

example 3: CLIENT: After that I suggested that we all go out for some beer and pizza, but they all kept playing cards. (low affect, sudden slouch in posture, etc.)

INTERVIEWER: You must have felt pretty disappointed when no one responded to that.

SEVEN WAYS TO BRIDGE THE GAP

Although the St. Vincent DePaul visitor seldom thinks of himself as a social caseworker and those visited as "clients," many of our calls cover precisely this relationship. In his book, *"The Casework Relationship,"* Fr. Felix Biestek, S.J., of Loyola University, points out the sources of basic emotions and attitudes as the seven basic human needs of people with psychosocial problems. And the St. Vincent DePaul visitor knows only too well that psychosocial difficulties are all too often the real reason our visits are necessary. Fr. Biestek devotes a chapter to each of these seven needs. They may be summarized as follows:

1. The need to be dealt with as an individual rather than as a case, type or category.
2. The need of the individual to express his feelings, both negative and positive. The feelings may be of fear, insecurity, resentment, hatred, injustice and so on — or their opposites.
3. The need to be accepted as a person of worth, a person with innate dignity, regardless of the person's dependency, weakness, faults or failures.
4. The need for a sympathetic understanding of and response to the feelings expressed.
5. The need to be neither judged nor condemned for the difficulty in which the individual finds himself.
6. The need to make one's own choices and decisions concerning one's own life. The individual does not want to be pushed around, "bossed" or told what to do. He wants to be helped, not commanded.
7. The need to keep confidential information about one's self as secret as possible. The individual does not want his neighbors and the world at large to know about his problems. He does not want to exchange his reputation for the help he will receive from the visitor or a social agency.

On point seven, at least, the record of the St. Vincent DePaul Society, over the years, in meeting the need of confidentiality is outstanding. So quietly does the Society do its work that the names of its members are often unknown within their own parishes.

(Adapted from Vincentian Comments, D.C. Seattle, Washington)

CHAPTER VII

Practical Suggestions For Visiting

HOME VISITATION

A. Know what the purpose of the visit is:

1. "Am I visiting to get some needed information?"
2. "Am I visiting to be friendly and give the person a chance to talk?"

B. Visits for **SOCIALIZING** (especially when visiting the elderly)

1. Try to develop a warm, natural relationship — be a friendly person.
2. Chat about ordinary, everyday topics (weather, children, price of eggs, recipes, etc.). Avoid the controversial and depressing.
3. Read aloud or help with letter writing.
4. Play simple games such as bingo and checkers.
5. Encourage development of new hobbies or renew interest in an old one such as knitting, embroidery, simple arts and crafts, growing plants, jigsaw and crossword puzzles, etc.
6. Encourage interest in their appearance.
7. Admire and give importance to the possessions of the person visited.
8. Encourage interest in others — writing letters, sending cards, keeping up on the news and when possible, participation in community activities such as church, Golden Aged groups, etc.
9. Send cards to them on special occasions — birthdays and holidays.
10. In situations where possible, plan occasional outings — a short walk, visits to an old friend, shopping, museum, library, etc.

C. Visits for **OBTAINING INFORMATION**

1. Explain simply and in a few words, what the purpose of the visit is (e.g.) "We're from the St. Vincent DePaul Society from _____ Church and Father _____ asked us to stop by. He said that you _____" or something similar.
2. Involve the person in talking about his problem; ask general questions:
"How do you think we can be of help?"
"What would you like help with?"
"Would you like to talk about your problem?"
"Maybe you could tell me about your present financial situation?"
3. Allow the client to tell the story in his own way but listen as carefully as possible to understand the **FACTS AS HE PRESENTS THEM**, to understand how he sees the situation, to understand how he feels about the situation.
4. Be a good listener. Do not interrupt him with unnecessary questions! If you want more information, wait till he has finished speaking, then ask him for assistance in a way which will minimize his feelings that you do not trust him or believe him:
"Could you help me understand better about such and such?"

5. Be cautious about asking a direct question; if necessary try to help the person see before hand the purpose of these questions:
 "Maybe I could ask you these questions so that we can see what your rights might be when we go to the Welfare Department."
6. Be cautious about trying to explain to him what his problem is.
7. A form or questionnaire might get at needed questions — but use it in the least threatening way:
 "Filling out these questions will help both of us not to forget some information that might help."
 "I'll be glad to go through this form with you. We can fill it out together if you like."
 Do not take notes during the visit. This will distract him and make him wonder what you are writing down about him. Your memory will give you the general information you need after the visit. The only exception are facts such as names, dates, case numbers, amounts of money, etc.
8. When he is finished, make certain that you have accomplished the purpose of your visit — at least at the extent that the person is able to involve himself at this time.
9. Recap the person's situation so that he can see how you have understood him. Recap his situation so that he can correct any misunderstanding or can add information.
10. Present the client with the immediate options available to him explaining the possible results of each choice. Include the option of doing nothing about it. You should also explain that the parish Conference will discuss the situation to see in what additional ways they can be of assistance.
11. Outline the possible ways that you and he could become involved in and explain how you could work together. Allow him to do whatever he can — make phone calls, write letters, etc.
12. In terms of a tentative decision, make a plan for the next step and make certain you both understand what it will be.

D. Other Suggestions

1. Do your Conference members pray with those they help at the end of a visit? Not just the regular prayers such as the Our Father or Hail Mary but a spontaneous prayer similar to the following could be made up on the spot:
 "Heavenly Father, You who know all things, we ask you to help this family in meeting their needs (you could name them). Give us, those who made today's visit and our fellow Vincentians at our next meeting, the wisdom and guidance to help this family find lasting solutions to the problems presented. Give all of us the faith, strength, courage and trust in You that will be required. We thank You for all your past favors, we ask all this through Christ our Lord, Amen."
 Some members may not feel comfortable doing this but those who are willing should be encouraged to give it a try and develop this practice.
2. Do your Conference members give literature to those visited, such as material on the St. Vincent DePaul Society, or small prayer sheets dealing with suffering, etc.
3. If your Conference members don't hear from someone for a while, do you check back or do you presume if you don't hear anything, everything is OK? Many times people, once helped are too embarrassed to ask again. Follow-up visits for a while are always good and needed.

4. Even if the situation is hopeless and beyond the resources of the local Conference, members should visit and show their interest and Christian concern.

(From the SVDP Annual Meeting — 1977, Portland, Oregon; prepared by Lawrence G. Lauter, Council of Cleveland; adapted from material of Catholic Charities of Chicago)

Tips On Visiting

(In a hospital — nursing home setting)

1. **LOOK:** You learn much about persons and their individual circumstances just by noticing and observing. By sharpening up our senses, we can pick up crucial clues.
i.e. Are there many letters, or cards . . . or few if any? How does the person look? Are they feeling good, lousy, disturbed, calm, depressed, scared?
2. **LISTEN:** Let the person talk. Listen for feelings. Use your ears at least twice as much as you use your tongue. Don't grab the steering wheel from the driver, let them lead and do the driving. It is your choice as Vincentian visitor to avoid grabbing the wheel so that you are taking care of your needs. It is your responsibility to set up the "agenda" rather than the person being visited.
3. **LOVE:** Love for Christ, and love for people should motivate your visiting. Sometimes, or even often, you may not feel like visiting a person. Such feelings need to be faced squarely, without guilt, they need to be accepted. They are neither good nor bad, they just are. Identifying our feelings before we arrive and while visiting, freely admitting and accepting them is very important if we are to be effective as visitors.
4. **LINGER:** Don't rush! People want and need to feel that you have time for them.
5. **LEAVE:** Do not overstay your visit. Frequent brief visits mean much more to the person than long and tiresome occasional visits.
6. **PRESENCE:** We have a tendency in our society to be compelled to do things for people as well as saying something. We become anxious if there are time lapses — **SILENCE** — in the process of conversation. This silence becomes scary, quite uncomfortable. At times we **PANIC** and make fumbling efforts to fill in these gaps with something, **ANYTHING!** Doing something is a way of lessening this anxiety. The greatest assistance and one that makes visiting easier for the visitor as well as to be supportive to the person, is **JUST BE THERE**. Be a silent, caring, concerned, listening presence. **EMPATHIZE** — Feel with.
7. **SHARE SILENCE:** Sharing silence is an extension of being a presence. Often a person just needs you to sit quietly with them. Again, it is a relief to know that you don't always have to be doing, or saying something or to be having the right answers.
8. **BE CONCERNED BUT NOT TOO CURIOUS:** Being concerned, but not out of curiosity is another extension of letting the person do the driving. Thoughtfully asking relevant questions can be helpful. However, place far more emphasis upon allowing the patient to talk about what they want to. Let them steer the ship, this often requires waiting and patience. Knowing that you don't have to ask questions can be a liberating thought.
9. **DON'T ARGUE ABOUT RELIGION:** Avoid being preachy. Be sensitive to the person's needs, listen, observe, if you sense the person wants a prayer, offer to say one with them. If the person, through their talking about feelings and other topics of interest, wish to talk about religion or other spiritual matters, join in. However, it is good to remember that it is usually most helpful to listen — allow and encourage them to air their feelings.

10. **DIRECT COMPLAINTS TO PROPER AUTHORITIES:** When persons express complaints about a situation in the institution, suggest that they talk it over with the proper authorities. Agreeing or disagreeing with complaints is usually more destructive than constructive or helpful.
11. **WITNESS TO YOUR FAITH:** Witness to your faith when appropriate. Preaching is forced feeding and tends to leave the person with negative feelings about their relationship with religion and even at times, God. Your coming to be with them is a witness in itself.
12. **LIMIT YOUR VISITS:** The fewer people you have to visit, the better able you will be to be present to the individual. It is good not to spread yourself too thin — recruit others to help visit and assist you in this ministry. Often Vincentian teams regularly scheduled to visit hospital or nursing home environments, can assist in this matter by splitting up to conduct one on one visits.

Confidentiality

PURPOSE

This treatise is about families and individuals and the privacy of their relationships with the members of the local parish St. Vincent DePaul Society Conference.

DEFINITION

The concept of confidentiality is based on the individual's right to privacy, expressed or implied and has both legal and ethical implications. Confidentiality means that disclosures of the family or individual to the Vincentian member and the SVDP Conference will not be revealed to others except under certain circumstances and then only for the purpose of helping them.

CONFIDENTIALITY IS ESSENTIAL TO HELPING PEOPLE WITH PROBLEMS

People seek help from the local parish and the St. Vincent DePaul Conference when they have special needs which may range from fairly simple to painfully difficult. The need for service is determined and help is given through sharing factual and often very personal information. Essential to the process of helping the family or individual is the understanding that the SVDP member and Conference will hold confidential the information shared by those they serve. The SVDP Conference also has a responsibility to give an account of stewardship to the parish and community which supports it and to work cooperatively with other community organizations. This can be done through the use of statistics, such as number of cases, types of cases, amount of money spent, etc., but under no circumstances should names be shared.

Information shared with Vincentians, in its very nature, involves some information that in other settings (e.g., medical doctor, psychiatrist, hospital, lawyer, confessional, etc.) would be considered extremely private. Central to the helping process that Vincentians engage in is the belief that what has been told in confidence will remain confidential.

INFORMATION AND THE SVDP CONFERENCE

All forms of human services require obtaining, receiving and giving information. It is in handling such information that questions about confidentiality arise. A family or person seeking help of some kind goes to the local church or SVDP Conference, not to a specific Vincentian. They place their confidence in the church and the SVDP Conference. The SVDP Conference therefore becomes the custodian of the information received from and about the family or individual and is the guarantor of its responsible use. The member as a representative of the SVDP must provide adequate safeguards with respect to that information.

This policy binds each and every person who in anyway deals with this confidential information. It could even include non-members or auxiliaries who helped in certain situations or the parish staff who might have access to information such as secretaries, auditors, etc. Even members of the Vincentian's immediate family should realize their obligation of keeping general information about cases private. A few clues given to the wrong person outside the Vincentian's family could lead to the discovery of the name of the family or individual helped in the parish. It is probably best to share no names and very little specific information about cases with a member's immediate family.

RECORDING INFORMATION

Local SVDP Conferences should discuss and define the information needed to serve families and individuals and what is to be recorded in the minute book or Conference records. Some Conferences have made up their own interviewing sheets, etc., which show the basic information that is needed and is related to the solution of the family's or individual's problem. It is best to keep written records to a minimum.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information about a family or individual may not be shared with any other individual or agency without the family's or individual's expressed consent. Consent is necessary even when verification of information given by the family or individual is needed. Records, minute books, check stubs, etc. should be kept in a safe, private place to insure confidentiality.

IMPORTANCE OF CONFIDENTIALITY IN VINCENTIAN WORKS

In Vincentian work with families and individuals, confidentiality is a basic, lasting concept. Relationships are built between persons who need help and the SVDP Conference. For those relationships to be productive, there must be mutual trust and a strong sense of responsibility on the part of the Conference towards those who come for help. Sometimes families and individuals are afraid of asking the local parish for help for fear their neighbors and friends might find out. Perhaps the local parish bulletin could stress the confidentiality aspect when telling of the SVDP help available and relieve some of the fears of those who want to approach it for help.

Families and individuals who do come for help have the right to expect the SVDP Conference to use information about them constructively in their behalf. This means protecting against improper disclosure and with consent, sharing pertinent information when the situation warrants. Confidentiality is so important that its practice is a prerequisite for membership in the Society. Also if a member breaches confidentiality, it might also be grounds for asking a member to resign from the Society.

POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONS TO CONFIDENTIALITY

Some situations require great care in determining whether or not information should be released without the informed consent of the family or individual. One arises when the Conference or member learns that there is real danger that a person will injure himself or others or endanger the larger community. The other occurs when a family or individual so misrepresents the SVDP Conference as to seriously damage its potential usefulness to the parish or community. All possible means must be taken by the SVDP Conference to protect the confidence and the privacy of the individual in situations such as these.

(Adapted from "A New Look at Confidentiality in Social Welfare Services" by the National Assembly for Social Policy and Development.)

The Vincentian Home Visit

I. A case study

Mr. & Mrs. John Doe called Fr. O'Mally at the parish regarding tuition for their children. After discussing the situation, Father realized that there were many other needs which he couldn't begin to touch or discuss with them.

The Doe's have been married 17 years, have two children (Patricia - 13 and Michael - 11). They rent in an older neighborhood. He has worked as a machinist for 15 years and was making enough money to keep them going before he was laid off. His unemployment ran out several months ago. Their savings have been exhausted. They now have no medical insurance. They did not apply for ADC (Aid for Dependent Children) or Food Stamps because someone told them they weren't eligible. Marge works part time at a fast food store and brings home about \$50.00 a week (about \$215 a month). Their rent is \$200.00 a month and they are almost two months behind. The manager of the home is sympathetic but the owner is pushing him to get them caught up or evicted. Their gas service is to be shut off in two weeks and they owe \$325.00. Their electric bill is unpaid for two months and growing but they have not yet received a shutoff notice.

They own a Chevy that is paid for. The only other regular payment they have is for telephone service which averages about \$20.00 per month. There are no immediate prospects of him being called back to work.

II. Questions

How can this family be helped best? What are the problems? What possible actions could be taken to help solve each problem? What steps should be taken first, second, etc.?

III. Possible Variations in Case Study (discuss if time permits)

1. If Mrs. Doe didn't work.
2. If Mr. Doe was just called back to work and started on Monday. There would not be a paycheck for two weeks.
3. If the gas has been shut off.
4. If Mr. & Mrs. Doe have a lot of little bills of several hundred dollars each (MasterCard, Sears, Department Store, etc.)
5. If Mr. & Mrs. Doe own their home and they are 4 months behind in payments. Payments are \$150 per month and they have a 20 year mortgage and have been paying for 15 years.
6. If there were small/big medical needs to be taken care of.
7. If Mr. Doe was working at a low paying job and was threatened with garnishment.
8. If their refrigerator stopped working.
9. If the SVDP treasury was getting low.
10. If Mr. & Mrs. Doe were arguing a lot about bills, etc. and this was beginning to affect their marriage.
11. If Mr. & Mrs. Doe were beginning to mistreat and/or neglect their children.

HOME VISITS FRAUD

There is little to be gained by the promotion or reward of a fraud. It is the old game. Call the rectory and declare an emergency, demanding immediate attention. Of course, they will come to the rectory "right away" because there can be no delay. "Where do you live?" The address appears to be within the parish. The problem is that there is no such house or number. That is the first mistake. A stream of contradictions follows the confrontation. Nearest intersection, names of landlord or neighbor are unknown — fictitious.

The real emergency was probably drug addiction which had to be satisfied — pronto. Rectories and convents are the targets of this “con” game. Sometimes the approach is made with an infant in arms. Would you think for a moment — they’re using a prop? This has been our experience too often.

The wise Rules of the Society recommend a visitation to the home by two members. This practice of two persons for purposes of investigation or extension of charity is a safeguard for all parties concerned. When the caller is told Vincentians will be dropping in, the wary fraud wants to know the time. The question is a give-away. Waiting in a doorway and claiming residence are routine steps in the illicit sport of relieving the naive of their money.

CAUTION: It is easy to assume that anyone seeking financial assistance may be doing so fraudulently. Unfortunately, deserving poor, sick and distressed suppliants may be turned away. A careful sifting of available facts will lessen this possibility. To refuse assistance to a worthy person is a serious fault for anyone. For a Vincentian, the personal and communal damage is inestimable because it is an aberration from the ideals of charity and a consequent loss of popular respect. Suffering from unemployment, crippling illness, exploitation and general negligence, the unwanted will have been deprived of their last hope, encouragement and support. Let’s not make any hasty decisions.

As Vincentians, we cannot afford the affront to our work. Remember the thoughts of Frederic Ozanam: “The poor are our masters. They give us the privilege of serving them.” This principle should be uppermost in the minds of all men and women engaged in the works of charity. A mild sympathetic and frank approach are important characteristics of interest and understanding. Deceit and dishonesty should not be assumed. When the evidence is incontrovertible, the fraud may be recognized. Just because we see, hear or sense, it does not automatically mean that there is no place for a Vincentian. Allow the conversation to reveal causes, motives and problems and you will have an opportunity to counsel, to support and assist — spiritually and temporally. Frederic Ozanam epitomized the condition: “The poor suffer that which we cannot suffer, they are among us as messengers of God to test our justice and our charity and to save us by our works.”

(The above is from the Newsletter of the SVDP, Rockville Center, New York, Msgr. Arthur Kane, Spiritual Advisor).

VISITING THE HOMEBOUND

The following appeared in the October 15, 1976 issue of the *Ozanam News*. It was entitled “*Notes for Voluntary Visitors*” by Matthew M. Brown. Mr. Brown headed the SVDP’s National Committee on aging at that time as an expert in the field. He believed that “Churches have a basic responsibility to the field of aging. One of the main weaknesses of many present programs is that they do not reach the homebound. SVDP groups can see to it that they are visited regularly.”

WHY REGULAR VISITING IS IMPORTANT

It mitigates loneliness. It dispels feelings of isolation and insecurity. It creates a bond of friendship between visitor and visited. It ensures that needs are known and services offered. It encourages new interests. It links the elderly with the community. It shows that the community, the Society and the church care.

SUGGESTIONS FOR VISITORS

1. An elderly person may be slow to answer the door. Be patient; try to make yourself heard without causing alarm.
2. Your aim is to create a bond of friendship, so don’t bring your briefcase or get into uniform.

3. Don't overstay your welcome. Elderly people get tired easily or may not be in the mood for chat.
4. Accept a cup of tea. An elderly person may welcome the opportunity to act as host or hostess.
5. Be a good listener. A lonely person may be glad of the opportunity to talk.
6. Be patient and don't pry. An elderly person is often suspicious at first.
7. You may take an occasional gift, but be careful not to make the elderly person feel under an obligation.
8. Your aim is to establish a friendship and introduce new interests but in doing so, don't be patronizing.
9. Don't relate gossip and above all, respect confidences.
10. Agree on day and time for your visits so that your friend can look forward to your coming.
11. If you don't come as arranged, let your friend know in good time. This avoids disappointment and creating a lack of confidence.
12. Arrange to leave a stamped-addressed card or envelope so that you can be contacted easily, if necessary.
13. If your friend would like to go out or visit your home, be ready to welcome the suggestion.
14. Never ask a "string of questions." Get the information you require in the course of conversation.
15. If there are problems to be dealt with, don't take action without the elderly person's consent.
16. Remember you are acting as a friend and not a social worker.
17. Social and financial or other problems must be treated in strict confidence.
18. Report regularly and record information which may help to ensure that, when appropriate, statutory and/or voluntary services are made available.
19. Do not get too involved, especially in respect to financial or family affairs.
20. When you go on holiday, don't forget to write or send a postcard to your friend.

Genuine concern, warmth, sympathetic understanding, tact, reliability and the ability to establish a friendly relationship — these are the qualities of a good visitor.

HOME VISITS — VISITING IN PAIRS

"Visiting the poor in their homes is our great, our distinctive business — the business which should occupy the time of the members of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul." (H. Bailly, first President-General — 1844)

Although over 150 years have passed since the establishment of the practice of home visitation with Frederic Ozanam, it is still the almost universal practice of the Society in this country. The activity of reaching out to those in need, meeting them on their own turf, being a privileged guest who is permitted to share in the inner life of another human being, is still a powerful witness of the Vincentian spirit.

Not enough is said today about the importance of the home visit. The New Rule and American Manual devote surprisingly little space to it. One issue is raised again and again with the Central Office: Do Vincen-tians still have to visit in pairs? What prompts the question in some cases is the lack of membership, especially in areas of great need. Others wonder if a single visitor is not better able to establish an environment of confidentiality where people talk about their problems more readily.

The New Rule does not forbid home visitation by single Vincentians. In its spirit of flexibility, the Rule is especially sensitive not to impose structures on Vincentians that do not apply to their situations. It then becomes necessary for us to look at the situation involved and determine what would be the wise course of action to follow.

In many inner city areas, and increasingly in all areas, the question is one of security, especially at night. This is, of course, not the main issue but a factor that might be taken into consideration.

Another issue is the fact that increasingly Vincentian cases are female headed households, and often young unwed mothers. In the past there was great concern over scandal. Is there still such concern? Visiting in pairs certainly does provide some degree of protection from accusation or suspicion if the visitors are both male. Some Conferences in south Florida have established husband and wife teams ideally suited to make home visits in female headed households. Although in some ways the spirit of this age is more tolerant than in the past, there is also a greater tendency for disgruntled people to make accusations publicly. Several such incidents of which we are aware of in the United States St. Vincent DePaul Society could have been avoided if Vincentians would have followed the tradition of visiting in pairs.

In an age when rules and structures are distrusted and flexibility is the byword, much greater maturity and reflection is demanded of us all. Without absolutes, it becomes necessary to look closely at everything involved when making decisions. Before abandoning things like home visitation and visitation in pairs, Vincentians must take a close look at their situation, the values of the past, and at themselves. Their decisions in these matters should not be made or taken lightly, as the implications could go far beyond their little Conference, even beyond the Society of the Church in whose name they minister to the poor.



CHAPTER VIII

The Needy

CHARITY AND JUSTICE REFLECTIONS

(During November 1979 the International Council of the Society in Paris held a plenary meeting discussing the relationship between justice and charity. In the preliminary study for the meeting, there were many good points presented by Vincentians in the United States. The following are some ideas which the Council of Milwaukee had presented in their newsletter.)

One of the steps to justice include **TREATING THE POOR WITH LOVE AND RESPECT**. This love of the poor is more than simply offering service, for service given begrudgingly or half heartedly can be worse than no service at all. This step of loving the poor is most difficult because the poor seldom resemble the romantic ideal once termed the "worthy poor." Many people afflicted by poverty are dirty, unchurched, unmarried and unhappy. Many times they are involved with alcohol, drugs, or suffer from mental illness. Much like the lepers cured by Jesus, few come back to say thanks. The challenge for Vincentians is to love the unlovable.

Reasons abound that tempt Vincentians not to love as they should. In our age, poverty is often seen by many as a result of personal failure, laziness, lack of intelligence, etc. It is very easy to become judgmental and paternalistic. It is also easy to get in the habit of not becoming personally involved and narrowing Vincentian help to just dropping off a check and running. What is needed is to sit down, open your ears and heart — not as if you have heard it all before, but with appreciation of this individual caught up in an often too familiar set of circumstances.

To respect the dignity of each man and woman, to see that unique individual of infinite value, is the challenge of charity and justice in our day. It was the challenge of Jesus' parable of the man, robbed and beaten, laying on the roadside, passed by his countrymen, but helped by a foreigner. It is the standard by which each of us will be placed among the sheep or the goats on the last day.

A second step to justice is relieving the needs of the suffering such as food, clothing, etc. with an understanding that what help Vincentians can give will usually fall short of solving the long-term problem. This means **BEING SENSITIVE TO WAYS OF HELPING THE PERSON/FAMILY TO HELP THEMSELVES**. This could mean, after winning the trust of a person/family in need, leading them to the source of long-term help (employment training, jobs, welfare, child care, medical assistance, budget counseling, marital and personal counseling, alcohol and mental health programs, etc.) This requires some degree of training to really help demands in skills of listening, sorting out problems and their causes, understanding the pressures and handicaps people are subjected to and a general knowledge of community resources.

These are the types of skills and knowledge that are learned through Ozanam Seminars, Regional Council Meetings, etc. Neglecting the on-going training opportunities makes a less effective Vincentian. Spending time learning is a clear way of stating one's love of the poor. Some believe helping the needy simply means spending more money on their behalf. That approach makes them more dependent. Putting more time on their behalf searching for long-term solutions would be a more successful way of putting them back on their feet to live a self-sufficient life lived in dignity, not despair.

Another step to justice that was discussed, included **LOOKING BEYOND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS TO THE CAUSES** which are within the individual's control such as patterns in our society and institutions which do not treat individuals with love and respect, etc., assist people to help themselves or encourage them to be responsible for their lives.

This could mean Vincentians being active as private citizens in other groups that address themselves to today's problems: Respect Life, better housing, strengthening the family, welfare reform, etc. The Society in the past has gone out of its way to avoid political involvement and does not have a structure to lobby, promote legislation, etc. and no workable pattern has yet been developed for the Society to become active in this area. It is up to today's Vincentians to create an effective means of participating as an organization in a world filled with injustice; to make sacrifices required to identify and remove to the greatest degree possible the imperfection of the world we live in.

REFLECTION — A PASTORAL

St. Vincent DePaul, the Patron Saint of Charity of the Catholic Church, saw Christ in the faces of the poor he served. His words reflect the spirit of Bishop Pilla of Cleveland, OH in his pastoral, *"A call to care for one another."*



"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. He showed that His mission was to preach to the poor. We also ought to have the same spirit and imitate Christ's actions, that is, we must take care of the poor, console them, help them, support their cause.

"Christ made Himself the servant of the poor and shared their poverty. He went so far as to say that He would consider every deed which either helps or harms the poor as done for or against Himself. Since God surely loves the poor, He also loves those who love the poor. For when one person holds another dear, he also includes in his affection anyone who loves or serves the one he loves. That is why we hope that God will love us for the sake of the poor. We must beg God to pour into our hearts sentiments of pity and compassion and to fill them again and again with these dispositions."

EVANGELIZATION AND THE ST. VINCENT DePAUL SOCIETY (Witnessing to Others Through Our Actions)

Whenever you tell people about our Lord you are evangelizing. Whenever you are working on a case you are evangelizing. When you evangelize you give witness to our Lord at work. Being a St. Vincent DePaul member is a way to fulfill our Christian obligation to be a witness of Christ. Every time you make a Vincentian visit you are being a witness of His presence and love. Evangelization will succeed if a whole lot of little people will do a whole lot of little things.

It's not the big things, it's the small things and how you do them. It is the little guys and gals who go out and see and recognize that He is out there — on the street corner — in the poor home — in the lonely — in the alcoholic — in the world. There are many little ways to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. When you do this witnessing, you do not have to see the results.

The Gospel says — some will plant seeds, others will do the harvesting. You don't have to see the success of your work. Just love the Lord — and — love every individual who comes your way. Be yourself, let them see God in you as you see God in them.

Another way of expressing the above is to say:

Evangelization is sharing Christ with others, wherever we happen to be. As Vincentians, we try to bring Christ to others through our person to person service so we are evangelizers. Christ is the message. We are the messengers. Every messenger gently impacts on the message but doesn't change the message.

The end of evangelization is the conversion experience but our job is to bring all aspects together and create the atmosphere for it. We do not make the conversion. It is between Jesus and the person with the action of the Holy Spirit. We have first found our life enriched through Jesus and we then reach out and invite others to share in it.

HELPING IS MORE THAN MONEY

It has been suggested on several occasions that Vincentians temporarily disarm themselves on a visit, leaving the armor of their checkbooks and voucher pads at home and offer to the people in need a more listening ear and personal talents of problem solving. This suggestion was made not because our material assistance is not important, but rather that we have begun to look at ourselves too much in terms of the material things we give. Our money is often a convenient excuse, certainly easier to give than sharing of our time to listen and our hearts to feel. Sometimes it is a rationalization not to seek to deepen our helping skills, to learn about community resources, to open doors to services people really need. While we can hardly substitute our friendship for food for someone who is starving, what frequently happens that we offer only the latter.

The validity of the Vincentian tradition, from the time of Frederic Ozanam, has always been the personal involvement of the member with the person in need. The friendship, support, advice and sacrifice of the Vincentian more than any other material gift, has been the means of reconciling people and society with one another and has attacked the roots of the most real of all our poverties.

Some Vincentians counter this line of thought by pointing out that the people they meet are not interested in friendship, advice or anything other than financial help. While they subscribe to the principles and traditions of the Society, their premise is that the ideals contained therein have little application to the practical situation of the poor today. It is their experience that many people do seem to be out to get the most out of them and may have a tendency toward dependency. And so these Vincentians are torn between being generous and being wasteful; they do not want to say "no" but they become less and less happy in their role as helper.

The answer to this problem has to be worked out carefully as an individual and as a Conference but the following are suggested for reflection:

1. Does love ever mean saying "no"? Parents and grandparents may already know that often a "no" spoken out of love can be a greater "yes."
2. Can we blame people for misperceiving us or our service if we have not accurately conveyed to them who we are or what we are about?

MORE THAN A FOOD VOUCHER

Most of the food assistance offered by Vincentians in our community is in the form of food vouchers. These give people the freedom to purchase the foods they need and like and they certainly do much for their dignity. It is not that donations of non-perishable foods are turned down, but many Conferences have had problems with storage and distribution of quantities of such items. Food vouchers seem here to stay as the major means of helping families.

Some Conferences have gone a step further and give gift certificates on the larger supermarket stores. The advantage of this assistance is also in the matter of dignity. Supermarket personnel and people waiting in checkout lines do not become aware that this particular family is a "St. Vincent DePaul case." The

disadvantage is that gift certificates can be cashed in and items other than food can be bought with them. Conferences that use these generally know their families well and distribute them selectively when fraud or misuse is not a question.

Whether it be food vouchers or gift certificates, a Vincentian grocer recently pointed out abuses that have set in. His store honors St. Vincent DePaul vouchers for a number of outlying Conferences. He expressed his dismay at the type of food families are purchasing with our vouchers — items that are expensive and hardly a part of a balanced and nutritious diet. Snack foods, soft drinks, frozen foods, expensive cuts of meat, etc. are all part of a problem: often the people we help just don't know how to make their food dollar stretch. It would also be hard to justify to our donors "emergency food" in those categories.

One creative approach to solving those abuses would be to go shopping with the family. Women Vincentians, as one of the many talents they have brought to the Society, know a lot about managing a food budget and are a resource that every Conference should use to teach basic shopping skills. One or two trips to the grocery store could be an educational experience that would assist a hungry family today and might prevent their future hunger.

Our responsibility in helping should never end with a signature on a food voucher. If we look to our traditions and our principles, we find strong arguments in favor of working with a family through its problems. Too often we relate to the people we help like the Fire Department. We are content with putting out fires and not in preventing them. One way of helping families who run into emergencies is teaching them how to make their food dollars stretch. There is evidence that even in outlying areas these basic skills are lacking. Perhaps one good measure of our commitment is our willingness to take a small step like helping someone shop. We suspect that such action would not only help the family avoid frequent crisis, but would also help us become better Vincentians, according to the Christian dynamic of giving in order to receive.

NEED, NOT CREED — SERVING NON-PARISHIONERS AND NON-CATHOLICS (From *Viewpoint* — the Milwaukee Bulletin)

For most Conferences, the question whether SVDP help should be reserved for Catholics seems like something out of a different age, reflecting the intense rivalry that once existed between religious denominations, when relief was often confused with convert making. Yet for some, that question has never been satisfactorily answered, especially in borderline areas where Conference resources do not seem to keep with the need. The temptation arises to ease the burden of decisionmaking by establishing prerequisites (like religion) for receiving help. It is always easier to categorize rather than sympathize.

The point might rightly be raised whether we have special obligations to parish members. In the context of the New Testament, both the Acts and the letters of St. Paul encouraged the early churches to be sure that their members were not in need, and to help out each other. Similar to a home, where the family is one's primary responsibility, there does seem to be special obligations to our faith community. A good case can be made to justify the parish mutual assistance programs which were especially popular during immigrant times in our country. **CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME** rings true, as long as we understand it doesn't end there.

St. Vincent DePaul Conferences should never be confused with parish mutual assistance organizations. The first Conference, established by Ozanam and his companions and a model for what we should be about, was not created to care for those "in good standing" with the Church. As history records it, in fact, Ozanam's first visit was to a fallen away Catholic woman who was being battered by an alcoholic live-in. It is precisely the people whose lives are in disarray who were sought out by that first Conference. The help they gave was not a reward for being baptized Catholics or for going to church. Conscious of God's love for them and thankful for the gifts freely given them, the early Vincentians came to share what they had, gently encouraging people to better their lives, never assuming that people had to earn relief directed at their need.

One of the finest Gospel passages for reflection by SVDP members is the parable of the Good Samaritan. In response to the question who is "neighbor," Jesus clearly and powerfully taught that neither religious nor ethnic heritage apply. It was the Samaritan, despised by the Jewish population culturally and religiously, who proved to be "neighbor."

The early Rule of the Society, dating from 1835, just two years after the Society's foundation, makes the same point: "Jesus Christ came to redeem and save all men, the Greeks as well as the Jews, barbarians as well as Romans." We will not discriminate more than He did between those whom suffering has visited. The new Rule states simply: "The Society serves people in need, regardless of creed, color, caste or origin."

People in need must not be categorized to disqualify them for help. To do so is a disservice to the Society and the Church. Need rather than creed is the determining factor in dispensing the gifts God puts at our disposal.

PATERNALISM

Paternalism is defined in Webster's as a system under which an authority treats those under its control in a fatherly way, especially in regulating their conduct and supplying their needs. Although the benevolence of someone acting in a paternalistic way is an improvement over apathy or hostility, it falls short of what is expected of a true helper. For a true helper exerts no control. The only goal is to help someone take control over their own life, not to make them more dependent.

For Vincentians and anyone involved in the direct helping field, paternalism is a constant danger. No matter how much a Vincentian might try to avoid that pitfall, it appears again and again in our attitudes and actions toward the poor. It requires that we reflect frequently on our helping encounters with special sensitivity to this problem.

Playing God can be fun. It often leaves us with a warm feeling, especially when people are grateful for our help. But sometimes the expectation of gratitude and the warm feeling of self-satisfaction are clear indicators that we have once again succumbed to that old nemesis: paternalism.

There are many things in our industrial-based culture that tell us that to be poor is to have failed. Aren't the people we admire most those who have been most successful? Aren't their signs of success (their house, car, boat, etc.) something that makes them somehow superior? Our society rewards those who are the most productive, most intelligent, most worthy. And to be poor is to be none of the above. The worst sin against our society, then is to become dependent on it.

The Gospel and life of Jesus clearly tell us that man is more than what he produces. In fact, Jesus said repeatedly that the poor, the little guy, enjoys a special relationship with God. It was the rich, not the poor, that will have trouble entering into the Kingdom. And the ultimate determination of who will enter that Kingdom on Judgment Day will be how we recognized and served Jesus in the hungry, thirsty and naked in our midst.

The conflict and tension between the Gospel message and our cultural values is something we all must work out within our lives. It is certainly something that anyone drawn to the helping role has to work on seriously. For the attitudes of society in regard to the poor and dependent members of our communities certainly must be put aside before we can become truly effective. Recognizing Jesus in these people, similar to our recognition of Him in the Eucharist should lead us not only to treat them as equals, but as our superiors.

This dilemma in helping is an important factor to each and every Vincentian. It recalls those prophetic words of St. Vincent DePaul himself which are at the heart of the Vincentian vocation: "The poor are your masters, terribly sensitive and exacting as you will see. But the uglier and dirtier they are, the more unjust and bitter, the more you must give them your love. IT'S ONLY BECAUSE OF YOUR LOVE that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them."

PRIVILEGED TO SERVE

It's a good thing to talk about our work. A description of a family visit or the matter generally assumed may be very revealing. Approaching a needy family with a sense of expertise — you know that "we've been through this before" attitude can often becloud the intended good. Plain talk at Conference sessions can be helpful if the Vincentian brothers and sisters quietly, but firmly, interject comments that soften harsh and abrasive mentalities. The quality is more important than the quantity. This is true of the monetary considerations, the number of visits and subsequent consultations. A big, otherwise good effort, can be a total loss because the Vincentian forgot the dignity of the individual or the family. The very purpose of the Vincentian thrust is not there. Love of the poor is absent. The callous, hypercritical and impudent assault on the integrity, character and good will of the indigent is not even Christian.

There is no joy in receiving or in giving when the purported gift is accompanied by a "take it and get lost" tone. Sympathy, a desire to help and a willingness to expend oneself are important assets in the service of the poor. In most cases they have already been buffeted from pillar to post, from one office to another, from one day-long wait to another of the same. Pope Paul described it accurately as the "hellish grip of poverty." The struggle seems hopeless. The Vincentian has to change that picture. Into these homes a new hope, a firm and persistent help, a sense of worthiness, must be introduced. They have been discouraged, frustrated, disappointed long enough. Just because the disciple of St. Vincent cannot, with one magic word, heal all wounds, satisfy all debts and permanently separate the family from want, it does not lead to unexpected solutions. At least a way may be found to avoid greater indebtedness.

If it is suspected that human pride is really hiding physical suffering, the hunger of children and complete lack of money, even for necessities, every effort must be made to avoid the invasion of privacy. Vincentians are not narcotic detectives. They are not there to search, to walk into rooms or house areas uninvited. The investigation must be limited to a gentle, understanding dialogue with the family head, the mother or other qualified representative. Opening closets or refrigerators on some pretext is embarrassing to the host. The honest intention of the visitor does not give license.

Learn to respect the poor, their humble homes, sparse wardrobes and inadequate table. Share a cup of tea with them. Be grateful for the favor of their conversation and love. Be mindful of the privilege you have when they permit you to serve them. *"I ask you, how can God's love survive in a man who has enough of this world's good yet closes his heart to his brother when he sees him in need."* 1 Jn 3, 17.

(By Monsignor Arthur J. Kane, Council of Rockville Centre, NY)

SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY (From the Milwaukee SVDP)

An interesting concept related to Vincentian visits was presented by Kelly Van Vliet at the *Dimensions in Caring* workshop: people usually fulfill our expectations. If we expect the worst from people, the worst is usually what we get. Expect the best and you are likely to get the best. Whether we know it or not, our expectations of others are communicated through our words and actions and others tend to live up to them.

This concept is called "self-fulfilling prophecy" and is based on a lot of research, primarily in a classroom setting. It has been demonstrated that a teacher, told that her new students were "high achievers," (even though, in fact they were of average intelligence) held expectations that the students could do better. Another teacher, told her students were "slow," (even though they too were of average intelligence) tended to convey to her students lower expectations and they actually accomplished less.

Although not teachers, Vincentians have a similar experience with the families they assist. If, before their visit they have pegged the people requesting help, the people end to live up to their negative expectations. A Vincentian who believes that everyone asking for help is trying to take him for a ride, or exploit the parish, tends to have more negative experiences of that really happening.

The same principle seems to have been expressed in former times as the power of positive thinking. It is very important for Vincentians to enter into their caring contacts not only with an open mind but with positive expectations of people. What runs through our minds when we get a new request for help? Do we judge people by their race, by where they live, by the fact that they are needy? Do we convey our negative expectations by our body language (failure to smile, remoteness, posture)? By our words?

Jesus himself challenged the people of his time in basically positive ways. He did not present new lists of "do nots" but summed up the whole Law and the Prophets in this way: "Love God with your whole heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself." Vincentians can well incorporate more of Jesus' positive challenge in their helping contacts with others. They can bring hope rather than reinforce hopelessness. Let's not forget how important and influential we can be in the lives of people who may come into contact with few genuine Christians.

THE UGLY POOR

(From *Vincentian Vignette* — Contra Costa County, California)

The poor are especially dear to God — a theme of the Old Testament, particularly the prophetic books. In Hebrew the word for poor person — ANAH — meant one who was put down, submissive and liable to be exploited and abused.

Who are the poor? The term in the Old Testament covers a multitude — widows, orphans, prisoners, the sick, the hungry, the broken hearted. Then in the New Testament, Jesus broadens the concept to include all the casualties of society — prostitutes, public sinners, all the outcasts and rejects, those who were unable to take care of themselves. Tax collectors too!

All these unfortunate people all down the ages are "God's little people" those for whom society has little or no time. They are the ones most liable to be exploited and abused.

Jesus makes it clear that his mission is first and foremost to the poor — "The Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to bring the good news to the poor . . . to set the downtrodden free." This is what he meant when he proclaimed: "Blessed are the poor, Blessed are the hungry." This is what He told John the Baptist's disciples, to go back and tell John what they had seen and heard. "The blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear." The miracles of Jesus are a sign that the power of the living God is at work in Him to comfort suffering humanity.

Our attitude to the poor and needy, old people, sick people, all those in need of understanding, compassion and help is the acid test of our love of God and our commitment to Jesus, our Leader. It is relatively easy to establish a relationship with a Jesus who makes no demands of us, who is socially acceptable to us, who speaks correctly and who smells good: nice people who have struck a bad patch in life. We may call them "the attractive poor." We are delighted to give them a helping hand and presumably God is delighted too. Like the Pharisee, we congratulate ourselves on doing the right thing — but we like doing it anyhow.

Blessed are those who are willing to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their approach to the "ugly poor," those we find depressing. Often to relieve our own guilt feelings we label them lazy, irresponsible and worthless. Blessed are those who are willing to help old people and sick people who are difficult, and demanding and unloved.

We resent whenever we are nudged in a direction of the Jesus who, in the words of the psalmist, is "a worm and no man." The crucified Jesus is a hard reality to come to terms with. And Jesus expects us to recognize Him in the down and out, the wino, the drug addict, the unwanted. "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do something for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you neglected to do it for Me!"

Let us bow our heads, like the repentant tax collector, close our eyes and remember the "ugly poor" we have been bypassing and condemning and fencing out of our lives. Oh God, be merciful to us sinners!

Our Sunday Eucharist is a command "to love one another, as I have loved you." That love is active and demanding. Just as the bread of the Eucharist, the body of Christ, is broken and shared, so we must learn to break out of our self-interest, to give ourselves to others, especially those who need us most.

WE NEED THE POOR

The unique brand of spirituality we embraced when we decided to join the Society of St. Vincent DePaul is centered on helping, on a personal basis, those who are beset by suffering. **PIERRE CHOUARD**, our former International President, describes the poor as a sacrament for us, because Jesus is present in the poor in a way He is nowhere else. In former days, the commentary to the rule stated that we help the poor for the sake of our salvation. The modern concept sounds less individualistic: to bring the message of hope through a spirit of poverty and sharing, leading to common salvation through participation in the Kingdom of God. In other words, the poor are not our stepping stones to heaven (getting squashed along the way) but our companions and partners on the way.

Being human, our ideals frequently become clouded. Our hope is diminished by our past failures with the poor. Their weaknesses, bringing them back again and again to our doorstep, lead us to discouragement. Sometimes we are less than pleased that another family was referred to us from the rectory or Council Office when we are having trouble motivating ourselves to take care of the current needs brought to our attention or present in our personal lives. At these times we need the refreshment and renewal of spiritual reflection. It is never enough just to do; we have to recall the **WHY**.

The fact that the poor not only need us but that we need the poor is the subject of an article by Fr. G. Scott of Australia. He says that if we have a one-sided view of charity, the following usually results:

1. We give goods without love. When these goods are given to us anonymously, it is easy to distribute them with a feeling of self-satisfaction and even a sense of power over the helpless. St. Vincent DePaul's famous passage is material for repeated reflection: "Even the rich can take food to the poor; but you are called to take love with your food. For it is only because of your love that they will forgive you for offering your food."
2. We restrict our charitable activities to what we are used to doing. The real needs of the poor may no longer be just food and clothing. Some Conferences have a real difficulty seeing their vocation of service to be anything other than addressing a certain material need. Are we apostles of charity or middle class dispensers of charity with a small "c"?
3. We become irrelevant to troubled people. **FREDERIC OZANAM'S** main idea in beginning the Conference of Charity was to make the Church responsible to the needs of the society of his day. We must pray that we develop minds and hearts open to the world around us and its needs. We do not have all the answers. In every helping contact we, as well as the poor, should change and be open to new revelations of God's love.

The poor may and do need us. But as long as we need to find Christ and to grow in His love for us, we need the poor. For it was in terms of our response to the poor that our entry into the Kingdom was repeatedly set forth by Jesus. And there is no better measure of our "spirituality" than our sense of justice to the helpless. When we embrace fully the vocation of sharing and caring, truly the Kingdom will be at hand.

(Adapted from the Milwaukee SVDP by the Cleveland Diocesan Central Council)

WHEN CHARITY ISN'T CHARITABLE — (REAL CHARITY)

The *Milwaukee Journal* recently covered a talk their Archbishop gave at a Human Concerns workshop, entitled "When Charity Isn't Charitable." The Archbishop was reported to have described how the Depression affected his family and how he experienced being the object of other people's charity. "I can tell you that there's nothing worse than suffering people's charity." The Archbishop used this point to bring out the need for justice, particularly in its sensitivity to the dignity of the person. "Never confuse charity with justice," the Archbishop concluded.

The remarks of the Archbishop contained several lessons for Vincentians. For one, he challenged us (as we should constantly be challenging ourselves) to a deep sensitivity for the dignity of the people we help. We must try to put ourselves in the shoes of the people who find themselves having to ask for help. Does our friendliness and concern ease their pain of asking or make them recognize the dignity and potential of each person in their family? Isn't it interesting how history has proven the community and church leaders, including bishops and cardinals, who had once been on the receiving end of charity? Cardinal Medeiros, our former national spiritual advisor, made no secret of the fact that his family was helped by the Society when he was small.

Charity, when confused with paternalism or when used to bolster one's own ego, can do more harm than good. It can make people more dependent, lower their self-esteem, increase their feelings of inadequacy and failure. It can be used as a weapon to exert power over others, to make us believe that our own efforts have made us successful. It can be used to make us feel good.

Vincentians might well reflect on the ultimate issue, whether it is possible to be charitable without doing harm. Is charity intrinsically demeaning? The word charity has taken on many disparaging connotations in our world. Who wants to be considered a "charity case?" Yet isn't the root meaning of charity love? And isn't responding to a neighbor in need a vital part of the Gospel?

The model of charity and all Christian life is Jesus Christ. A careful reflection on His life and His ministry to people of His time reaffirms true charity as a valid ministry in our time. A close look at the people fed, cured or otherwise touched by Jesus also points to the deeper ways they were affected by Him. Like Jesus, our material help should also present an invitation and a challenge, and our forgiveness and understanding should extend seventy times seven.

Frederic Ozanam applied the "Jesus touch" to a more modern setting, 19th-century Paris in the midst of social upheaval. His faith, he discovered lacked convincing validity without a personal commitment to people who were caught up in the bad economic situation of the day. Both by his writings and speeches on justice and by his personal service to the poor, he became a model for modern men and women to live their faith to the fullest. The Society which he founded makes real for many people today the healing touch of Jesus.

The world needs charity as much today as in former times. But it needs charity as taught by Jesus and as described so beautifully by St. Paul as always patient and kind, never rude or selfish, taking no pleasure in other people's failures, always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope. In modern terms, justice must be a component of every charitable contact: a justice that respects the dignity of every person, that is concerned about both relieving individual need and addressing the deeper problems of society that so often cause need. Charity divorced from justice is not charity at all, but a tool of domination, a soothing of conscience, a poor excuse for love. That is not the charity that we are called to by Jesus. It must have no part of your Vincentian activities.

DON'T CLOSE THE DOOR

By David J. Muller, M.D.

One of my major interests has been to integrate religion and psychiatry, religion and mental health. This talk will be my latest effort toward integrating these two subjects of Science and Belief. I want to share with you some ideas about poor persons and about the volunteer who serves them. How do both in their relationship with one another think, feel, and act? My belief is that if we can understand the people we wish to serve, and ourselves better, we enrich our potential to serve the poor.

There are many varieties of poverty. To minimize confusion, let me define the specific type of person I will be discussing this afternoon. Now this is very important. I am not talking about all the poor — believe me, it is such a heterogeneous group. I am concentrating on just one segment of the poor. The person I shall talk about is not only materially poor, but also emotionally and spiritually impoverished. This person is outside the mainstream, has been poor all or most of his life, and barring a miracle, will remain so. He or she has few interests, hobbies, or pleasures and lives from one crisis to the next. Survival is the major preoccupation. This is a beaten, helpless and hopeless person. That is who we shall be thinking about in our presentation and discussion.

To continue, this is not the individual who has had a temporary setback and will, with a little help, become self-supporting again. This is not the ambitious refugee who came to the USA a few years ago, ignorant of our language and culture, but who very soon will be financially stable. This is not the child of successful parents who has chosen to live in poverty. Instead, we are describing people who lack not only financial resources, but also the hope and meaning which Christian religious belief can provide. These are the most difficult and least rewarding segment of the poor to serve. They drain others emotionally and financially and rarely will thank you or give you very much in return.

Psychological Characteristics of the Poor

A major characteristic of such poor persons is the lack of appropriate trust. They have great difficulty believing that certain people want to help them. In their resistance, they will not offer much information. Sometimes they will give you half truths or even lies. They can be almost paranoid, feeling that you will hurt them if they are not careful with you. To give information about oneself is to give up some control over self to the other person. And even when it is very clear that you, a Vincent DePaul member, are really harmless to them, they will still withhold facts from you. It may take years to win the trust of a poor person or family. Whenever you do so, it is a rare event.

At times an opposite problem will arise. This is an excessive trust, a gullibility which makes some poor people very vulnerable to exploitation, to get rich schemes and even the encyclopedia salesman.

Another characteristic which has two opposite manifestations is a defective ability to assess reality. On the one hand, the poor person may be terribly pessimistic and at other times, that very same person may be equally unrealistic in an optimistic direction. First, let us talk about pessimism. The poor person lacks hope. He or she does not believe things will get better. When they hear dire predictions about welfare cuts or the economy, they interpret them as inevitable fact. Such pessimism cannot imagine a Loving Provident God; and such people are bitter and resentful often of Churches and religions. Now about optimism, the other side of this reality distortion. The poor of whom we speak may entertain overly high hopes of getting rich quick, such as winning the state lottery or the Irish sweepstakes. Gambling comes to represent a magical hope for reversal of all their defeats and bad fortune.

Again a family will pack up their children and possessions, leave a stable situation and move to another state on the flimsiest of job prospects. Religious beliefs, from this extreme viewpoint, are magical with emphasis on deliverance without growth or love.

Pessimism, to return to the earlier subject, begets passivity. Since things will not improve, there is no reason to hustle or even to get out of bed in the morning or to make a special effort. It does not matter. Life is to be endured and time is to be passed as painlessly and as quickly as possible. Another hallmark of such poor people is their emphasis on living in the present with little regard for tomorrow. Planning or saving for the future does not make much sense when you feel so hopeless. The pleasure, or peace, or oblivion of the moment is very important.

Children in such families are often urged to leave school prematurely to earn money. A poor person with cash in hand will usually spend it quickly rather than save it. Bank accounts are rare, as you know, among the poor and they have to pay more and work harder to cash checks and settle their bills. Their feeling is that money will be lost, stolen, or taken away from them so they had better enjoy it quickly before it goes. This leads to a feast or famine type of existence.

Poor people are often depressed. They do not sleep very well. Their appetites are impaired. And either too much or too little food is consumed. They suffer from many more physical and psychosomatic ailments than their wealthier brothers and sisters. Their energy and initiative are diminished, especially their capacity to care for others. Suicide, alcoholism, criminal behavior and all forms of mental illness occur much more frequently in the poor. Studies will document this clearly.

Poverty is not the blissful, carefree life that some writers and philosophers have described. It is a painful state of insufficient resources. The mood of the poor person, in addition to being depressed, will usually be either apathetic or angry. The apathetic person will appear dazed and indifferent, as a defense to diminish personal anxiety or distress. The angry poor person, on the other hand, is demanding and resentful of any resistance to what he or she wants. Such poor persons often appear at the parish rectory at night or on a weekend to insist on money — sometimes for quite dubious projects. They are resentful — at times even menacing — when certain questions are asked and everything requested is not forthcoming.

These various characteristics lead to certain kinds of negative behavior. Relationships and communication are usually poor, because of mistrust, passivity and either anger or apathy. Work behaviors are vastly impaired. Authority figures cannot be tolerated or satisfied. Rules cannot be followed or schedules kept. Self-improvement by further education and rehabilitation programs rarely are attempted due to the pervasive pessimism, passivity, and depression. Even needed medical care or surgical procedures, when readily available, will not be obtained.

A distinctive behavioral problem of the poor, of course, is their inability to acquire and accumulate money. Acquisition problems are related to the work difficulties already mentioned and the lack of good vocational skills. The frequent crises in spending, and the lack of hope in the future — all these combine to prevent the accumulation of any wealth,

I have a theory about all of this. A universal thesis, if you will. Poverty is only one of the many possible problems in living. Financially comfortable people also are often spiritually and mentally impaired. But their problems, of course, do not involve the earning and saving of money. In my life till now as a Christian, a psychiatrist, and a member of the St. Vincent DePaul Society, I have concluded that there is a universal principal underlying all human and spiritual problems. There are other principles, undoubtedly, but this is one.

This thesis has three parts:

A) Each person is created by God to realize his or her identity and potential as fully as possible. Life's goal is for each of us to be whatever we can be or have the potential to be. Jesus died that we might have life more abundantly (John 10:10). A full life is an expression of the individual person's uniqueness and not a life of compliance and adaption to another person's wishes.

B) Each growing person requires acceptance, respect and affirmation from his parents and the people who interact with him. This is real love. But such love is very difficult for human beings to give. When

realized, it is the reflection of the love of the Creator who wants all of His creatures to actualize this special potential.

C) When this love is not sufficiently available to the growing child and to the adult, various problems and defects result. These include inability to accept, respect and love oneself or another. Therefore, isolations and broken relationships permeate the person's life as do various self-destructive behaviors such as addiction, irresponsible and/or illegal behavior, poor mate selection and neglect of one's health.

Self-defeating behaviors dominate the lives of such poor persons as these wounded people gravitate to each other. They procreate and deprive their children, and the generational cycle continues. They are like plants perennially deprived of sunshine, water, and good soil. And their offspring are likewise stunted.

The Psychology of the Volunteer

The volunteer who works face to face with the poor is in a difficult position. On the one hand, he or she realizes how generous God has been to him or her throughout life. We wish to pass on and share these gifts. On the other hand, the volunteer has learned to perform the tasks of society, to hold a job, to get ahead. In consequence, the hopeless and defeated poor person is often a source of puzzlement, anxiety. The poor often do not say "thank you" or reciprocate favors.

Theirs is a culture of dog-eat-dog rather than quid-pro-quo. So the contrast between our usual world and the universe of the poor is so unnerving that few Christians wish to join in our work. Donations are generous but actual troops are rare. In large congregations of loving, educated believers, the St. Vincent DePaul Society often is fortunate to recruit four or five members.

The general response to the strange world of the poor is to try first to explain it. There are usually two opposite explanations of poverty, both of which are erroneous and harmful. The first is to be harshly judgmental, critical; to blame the poor as self-indulgent, lazy, dishonest. How many times have we heard that the poor are too lazy to work. The implication that the poor enjoy their poverty is as fantastic as any conclusion can be.

The other response of the volunteer is to be naive and to see the poor person as totally virtuous and the helpless victim of the world. Out of this viewpoint, the volunteer gives excessively, without asking questions and without using much judgment at all.

The first viewpoint — that of criticism — keeps a high balance in your treasury; the second viewpoint, which altogether avoids making any reality judgments, depletes your treasury very quickly.

What Can Be Done?

If you agree with my descriptions of the abjectly poor and the volunteer, how then are we as Vincen-tians to do our work in a more effective, growth-promoting way? First, we must be realistic about the magnitude of the poverty problem. In addition to the complex psychological dimensions, there are massive sociologic, economic and racial aspects to poverty. These aspects are not relevant to this paper but need to be kept in mind.

The poor of whom we speak are badly broken people. If improvements in their lives occur, they will be very gradual and require many years of assistance. The band aids we often put on their wounds are only temporary. They do not begin to deal with the fundamental problems.

If we can realize the depths of poverty, we will not be impatient or angry or especially disappointed when another failure or crisis afflicts the poor persons we are trying to help or when they continue to behave in characteristic ways. We will endure over the years as their friends and servants. Secondly, we should try to love and accept the poor person as God accepts us. In relation to God, are we not all abjectly

poor? God gives us life, consciousness, an amazing mind and body, sunshine, food, drink, and a wonderful universe to explore. Even though we are mere creatures, He respects us and takes us seriously. He gave up his Son to die on the cross for us.

God tells us in many ways that we are important. Yet he does not suspend the rules of nature for us. If we poison our bodies and our lives, we become physically and mentally ill. He points out the limits of reality; and if we wish to grow and prosper, we need to pay attention to these limits. The liver of the alcoholic can only tolerate so much intoxication before it fails. There are many other examples available. Ignore the laws of God and nature at your own peril.

But God is patient with us. He does not strike the unbeliever dead. Nor does he punish sinful behavior on the spot. He gives us all many chances to learn the lessons and laws of life. And all of this generosity is not our entitlement. It is pure gift.

We should meet the poor in the same way. We must respect them and treat them as important. We must be patient and try to point out the limits of the real world but with kindness and love. We should make ourselves available, such as God is always available to us. We should never close the door and shut off the poor person from any further contact with us. God never quits on us. And I refer you to Romans 8:38-39.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is easy for most Christians to accept because the Samaritan does not seem to bring trouble on himself. He is an innocent victim. In the case of the poor person, however, his troubles often seem to be self-imposed. But we should reject an attitude of blame, and likewise try to bandage his wounds and set him up in a healing place without condemnation. We need to do this with all the varieties of people we serve; all including the felon, the alcoholic, the addict, the sexually different. If we can do this, we will truly be worthy to follow the footsteps of St. Vincent DePaul and Frederic Ozanam.

(The foregoing was taken from "*The Ozanam News*," April 1985 and was a talk given by David J. Muller, M.D., on May 19, 1984. Dr. Muller is a practicing psychiatrist and former president of the Denver/Metro Council.)



CHAPTER IX

Recurrent Cases

When to say "no"

Many Vincentians come across individuals/families who, while not deliberately or consciously trying to "swindle" the Conference, do not seem to be trying hard enough to help themselves out of their current problem.

The following material was adapted from the Milwaukee SVDP and sheds some light on when to say "no" while still bringing Christ's love to people whom Vincentians visit.

In some situations, families/individuals who have so few marketable skills, are limited in education or emotional maturity, etc. may be included in the Biblical axiom "the poor will always be with you." These families, no matter what kind of agency help, Conference suggestions are given, are not capable of growth and periodic help may have to be given. The challenge to Vincentians is to pray for wisdom to be able to discern which families/individuals can be helped (nudged, pushed, etc.) to help themselves and to have the courage and perseverance to follow through.

WISDOM IN SAYING "NO"

God is calling us to become artists in meeting the needs of people skillfully. He is calling us to receive a new gift of wisdom through the experiences of our St. Vincent DePaul work. It is time for us to realize that a "no" that flows from true love and concern is a greater "yes." Our "no" as Vincentians is never an absolute "no" but it is a "no" to indiscriminately dishing out assistance.

These words of Fr. Donald Sass of St. Michael Parish during a Milwaukee SVDP workshop are important ones for both needy and affluent Conferences to consider. For whatever the neighborhood, every Conference at some time encounters a situation in helping where the circumstances are so doubtful that the visitors sincerely wonder whether financial assistance is the answer. This is especially true when a family repeatedly returns for help and seems to rely on regular supplementation of the Conference rather than on their own resources.

The old axiom, "when in doubt, it is better to err on the side of charity" is still true in times of genuine doubt. But we cannot use this principle to perpetuate doubt, to excuse ourselves for repeatedly failing to make a decision. The Milwaukee Archdiocesan Spiritual Advisor, Msgr. Joseph Springob, suggested using a new principle in all our aid: "Help them until you can see it is hurting them."

FOLLOW-UP VISITS IMPORTANT

Sometimes we hurt a family or individual by making them dependent upon us. We misuse the funds donated to the Society when we fail to probe repeaters for the cause of their problems and to lead them to sources of specialized help. Nor is it really being truly Vincentian to simply refuse to help repeaters

without at least trying to work with them for a short time. Conferences do an equal injustice to individuals by encouraging them to come for handouts unless the Conference makes a simultaneous commitment to make a follow-up visit and probe the continuing needs and causes. Factual information is absolutely necessary to help. A danger on the opposite end is to be so miserly that help given is not enough to assist them out of their current problem.

Despite a deep sense of generosity needed to become a devoted servant of the poor, Vincentians have to make judgments on how Conference funds can best be used to accomplish good. This is a most critical question in needy Conference areas where funds frequently do not stretch until the end of the month; but it applies also to all Conferences. Giving help unwisely on the grounds that "we've got the money" is not a good principle of operation. The traditional principles make much more sense: refer people to the Conference in their neighborhood (don't encourage shopping from rectory to rectory). Support those Conferences more needy than your own. Keep records of contacts with all the families you help. If a family moves out and it has been an on-going case, send a note to District Council or to the Conference where the family is moving.

Even when forced to deny financial help, Vincentians must never be vindictive. Even though people at times must be given strong counsel, visitors must make it clear that they are interested in the welfare of the family and not in classifying them as "unworthy." Vincentians should always have alternative suggestions for solution. They should teach through encouragement, not through harshness. They must convey sympathetic understanding and a willingness to help, even though further financial help is impossible. Vincentians should never sell themselves short by looking upon helping only in terms of a handout.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING

Handouts are too frequently the easy way out. Actual help should mean the following:

1. We have to spend more time with people and make follow-up visits.
2. We have to listen better and be sensitive to identifying problems that are under the surface.
3. We have to keep abreast of the many services available in our community for problemated people. This was the Society of Frederic Ozanam. This must be the Society of the 80's.
4. We have to realize that SVDP help given to recurrent or problem cases can sometimes be used as a "carrot on a stick" to gently persuade some families who are ambivalent about seeking outside help to solve their problems. Help in such situations would be given contingent on their following through on the sincere, well thought out suggestions and plans arrived at by Conference members at their regular meetings.
5. We have to pray to receive God's wisdom and Christ's love in our Vincentian work.

CARING EVEN WHEN SAYING "NO"

As Fr. Sass said: "What a beautiful impression you can have on a family when you leave them with the feeling that you care for them, even though you may not give them what they want. Your presence in a home can give hope and heal wounds that they never tell you about. But you have to care."

FOR YOUR LOVE ALONE

"It is for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give to them." (St. Vincent DePaul).

Our contacts with the poor should set in motion a chain of activity, much like ripples formed by dropping a stone in the water. This chain of activity should set off a general movement bringing about better

neighborly relations and coordinated activity so that there will be a continuous and ever-enlarging increase of charity and justice.

The poor man wants more than our help in solving quickly his most urgent problems. He needs us sometimes to be his secretary, advisor, agent and lawyer in every way and circumstance, until his rehabilitation is complete, with perfect justice to him. He imposes one condition only — generally unconsciously, nothing is to be done without him; he counts. The program will succeed only in so far as he participates actively in it.

When a poor man is helped, he must be shown that he is considered useful and capable. He must never be asked to reimburse what he has been given by way of assistance, or for anything he might see as reimbursement. But he should be asked to help others, to help another poor person affected in a different way — for instance, a handicapped, old, lonely, or sick person. **IN OTHER WORDS, WE SHOULD HELP HIM TO HELP HIMSELF, TO RID HIMSELF OF THE FEELING OF BEING USELESS, TO DRAW HIMSELF OUT OF HIS APATHY FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS.**

This will show him that if he is less favored than others in one way — materially speaking, for instance — he is also better off than others in physique, the power to move about and even success in doing things. We should understand the effect of this in the person by way of increased encouragement, the will to do things, the educational effect of promoting interest in others, gratuitous service, the feeling of unity which all human beings should share, without distinction of rank and future. “Do to others as you would they should do to you” — this was addressed to all.

(This article was taken from the SVDP French Bulletin)

RESULTS IN OUR ST. VINCENT DePAUL MINISTRY

Do not depend upon the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work may seem worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start to concentrate more and more, not on the results, but on the value, the truth of the work itself. And then you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything.

The big results are not in your hands or mine, but they suddenly happen, and we can share in them; but there is no point in building our lives on personal satisfaction which may be denied us and which, after all, is not that important. The great thing after all is to live not to pour out your life in the service of a myth. If you can free your life from the domination of causes and just serve Christ's truth, you will be able to do more and not be crushed by disappointment. The real hope then, is not something we can do but in God who is making something good out of it in a way we cannot see.

Thomas Merton

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT MARY?

Mary could be counted on to call the church once or twice a month for help, whenever she ran short of rent or food, or couldn't meet a utility bill. The Conference in this suburban parish, having a treasury that was regularly replenished, was understanding and generous for a number of months. Eventually their frustration reached a point, however, when they called me for professional assistance to help Mary see the light at the end of the tunnel. Her dependency on the church to supplement her income was clearly no good for either her or the Conference.

I am gradually coming to realize that there are Marys in every Conference area. Hardly a week goes by without my getting a call to solve the financial problems of their Mary.

Mary is a victim of continuing government cuts. Her supplemental AFDC was eliminated and she found she just couldn't make it on the income of her part time job alone.

After several hours of identifying her outstanding bills and obligations and reviewing her spending patterns, it became clear to Mary and to me that she consistently runs short about \$150 each month. So something doesn't get paid, or the church or relatives step in. Then we have to help Mary explore her options, none of which seem very pleasant or immediately acceptable: move to a cheaper rent, or a place cheaper to heat; give up her automobile (bus service is poor to her neighborhood); cut down on food; find a full time job (and pay a baby-sitter); etc. Yet Mary has to realize that certainly not the church and probably not the relatives, can be counted on to continue supporting her monthly shortage.

The Conference serving Mary was right in their identification of a bad pattern in her requests and the mistakes of continuing to bail her out without confronting the problem. They were right in using their aid as a lever to make Mary agreeable to work with me. As Mary faces the hard choices needed to adjust to some changes in her lifestyle caused by loss of an income source, the Conference still remains cooperative and occasionally helpful to Mary. But now they do it with a goal and will continue gently prodding Mary in this direction.

In this period of economic hardship, there are many cases of Mary (and John) who face painful options as they are laid off or otherwise lose income sources. Many people need help to adjust to these realities. The Society, in its concern for the poor of all neighborhoods, must be responsive.

WHEN IN DOUBT

South Florida is unique in certain of the clients often found seeking assistance on the doorsteps of our Rectories. The many transients who yearly migrate south to escape the harshness of the cold winter months in the north, stop along the main Federal Highway #1 which stretches from Maine to Key West to ask for some form of material assistance so that they may continue their "snowbird" sojourn or return home in the Spring.

In most cases their needs are genuine — automobile failure or promised employment non-existent, illness strikes, ran out of money, etc. Most of all, they are in need of someone who cares about their problems. As non-residents, area social services refuse to assist them. These services are already overwhelmed with area clients and unable to provide for them due to continuing government cutbacks. Transients in need have no one to turn to. In fact, law enforcement of the vagrancy laws on the books in Florida for many years is now being effected. Recently, more than one hundred vagrants were arrested in one day.

What is unique about some of the SVDP clients in Florida along the transient route is the fact that they are infiltrated with the nomadic area professionals who survive throughout the year on the compassion of any and all charitable organizations. Our beloved Clergy are often victims of their wiles. These pros make the Vincentian's task more difficult when they work the Federal highway churches during the winter months.

It is the Vincentian's task to respond with love to all in need without knowingly perpetuating a way of life for the nomadic professionals living in our area. He is able to do this more effectively with the knowledge that all Conferences work with each other to communicate such matters concerning professionals who are active in the area, their old and new aliases, modus operandi and past activity. District Councils are particularly effective in communicating information on known professional alms seekers to each other.

Even with good communications, lots of prayer and love, every Vincentian, even after handling many transient cases, retreats unto himself with questions and doubts — "Did I do right on this one? Was that client for real or a pro?"

Dear Brothers and Sisters, when in doubt, take heart in this prayer by Thomas Merton that you may then know you did right!

"MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself and the fact that I think that I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope to have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, You will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust You always. Though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death, I will not fear, for You are ever with me and You will never leave me to face my perils alone."

(District Council of Pompano Beach)



CHAPTER X

The Unemployed

JOB SEARCH

Importance of an organized job hunt

Job hunting can be a very frustrating and time consuming activity, requiring a great deal of effort. You should look at job hunting as your full time job to get a job. There is nothing wrong with you if your job hunt takes a long time. A well-planned job hunting campaign may lessen the frustration and the length of time. Planning your job hunt puts you in control. Your reward for planning and organizing your job hunt will be a job that is satisfying to you.

JOB HUNTING INCLUDES FIVE BASIC STEPS:

1. **PERSONAL ASSESSMENT.** This is a self-evaluation of your skills, interests, abilities and goals. These are factors to consider when choosing a job.

Through self-exploration you get to know yourself better. You will be able to identify your unique interests, values, skills and personality.

Some questions you can ask yourself are:

- What do I do well?
- What do I like to do?
- What are my interests?
- What are my values?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?

You should try to answer these questions in terms of specific experiences. After you know something about yourself, you should begin to research careers. Make a list of all the jobs that interest you the most. To find out if a job might suit you, you will compare your abilities, education, interests, values and personality to the description of these same factors given about an occupation.

2. **THE RESUME.** The resume is a brief summary of your education, experience and skills. It's purpose is to land you a job interview.

A resume is an advertisement for yourself. Its purpose is to get you a job interview. It is a summary of your education, skills and experience. Each resume should be aimed at an individual employer. You must show the employer, in concrete terms, what you can do for him.

Resumes are usually used to apply for managerial and professional positions. However, everyone can benefit from the preparation and writing of a resume. First, it helps you define, for your own benefit, how your education, skills and experience relate to this specific job. Secondly, a well-prepared resume will impress a prospective employer.

3. **IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS.** People contacts are your most important source for discovering job openings. Library resources such as specialized directories and journals with classified ads are good sources of information on companies for which you might like to work.

There are many ways to find out about job openings. Some of these methods are listed below. You will probably not use all of them. Use those that are most helpful to you.

a. Personal Contacts or Networking

About 80% of the jobs available are never advertised. The only way to find out about this hidden market is through personal contacts.

b. You Have Many Contacts

Tell everyone you know (friends, relatives, pastor, doctor, dentist, and everyone else you can think of) that you are looking for a job. Explain your qualifications and what kind of job you want. Give them your resume. If they don't know of an opening, they may be able to refer you to someone who does.

c. Make Your Own Contacts

(1) **Referrals** — Talk with people who know the field you're interested in and ask for leads.

(2) **Printed Sources** — business and occupational directories, etc. in libraries (also yellow pages of phone book).

(3) **Employment Agencies** — Public, private.

(4) **Placement Services** — agencies, college, professional associations

(5) **Want Ads**

Newspapers — Very few jobs are found through want ads. Help wanted ads will give some idea of the types of jobs open and where.

(6) **People Sources**

People are another source of information about a company. Talk to a current or former employee. Call the public relations department or a secretary or receptionist. Try to find out who is in charge of the department where you would work.

4. **THE INTERVIEW.** The purpose of the interview is for the employer to get a view of the applicant and for the applicant to get a view of the employer. Practicing answers to possible questions is one way to help yourself. Address your answers to the employer's problems and needs and what you can do to solve them. Be specific. At the end of the interview ask when the decision will be made.
5. **THE FOLLOW-UP.** Following an interview, periodic letters or telephone calls may impress a potential employer with your determination or persistence.

LAY-OFFS

(Assistance that may be available)

The ideas in this information sheet are meant to be of assistance to St. Vincent DePaul members when they come across situations in which the breadwinner has been recently laid off. These ideas could also be consolidated and distributed to parishioners via the Sunday bulletin for their own personal and family information. In times of high unemployment, SVDP Conferences must take stock to see if their resources are adequate to meet the potential needs. If the finances are not sufficient, a special fund drive in the parish should be considered in order to serve people adequately. Remember: SVDP resources (1st - person to person; 2nd - financial) are aimed at helping people help themselves and not only to pay bills. As soon as the lay-off occurs, the family has to take stock of their present situation, see what assistance is available now and in the future, study other employment opportunities and plan their budget and life style accordingly.

AVAILABLE ASSISTANCE

Assistance is available. The type and amount depends on the family's own financial situation:

Unemployment Compensation — Those out of work and eligible can qualify for unemployment pay and weekly payments vary depending on circumstances. The County Bureau of Employment Services should be contacted for information.

Food Stamps — Along with unemployment compensation, a family may qualify for food stamps depending on their costs for housing, transportation, medical expenses, money in the bank and other variables. The County Welfare Office should be contacted for information.

Welfare — If unemployment benefits and most of a person's savings have been exhausted, the family may qualify for help through the County Welfare Department or Soldiers and Sailors Relief (if they are a veteran). Eligibility requirements are stricter. Certain requirements have to be met. The Local County Welfare office should be contacted for information.

JOB POSSIBILITIES

Registering for work at the local State Employment Services Office is one of the first things to be done, even if a person is not eligible for unemployment compensation. Looking at want ads in the paper, placing applications with employers in areas where there are openings or turnovers in jobs, friends, Yellow pages, etc. are also areas to actively pursue.

Jobs are available in certain fields at the present time. These might require changing fields or undergoing brief training. The money will probably not be what a person may want.

Job Hunting Pointers: When searching for a job, common sense and some preplanning are required. A person has to present their very best side — they have to be prompt, dressed neatly, courteous, etc. They should put themselves in the position of the employer and try to determine what he is looking for. They should know something about the product or service provided by the employer so they can explain how their being employed would benefit the employer and show how they would fit in. Instead of just explaining they need a job, they have to show the employer they are the type of person he wants and needs. Reliability and honesty count more to many employers than experience.

BUDGETING

The family must take stock of their situation immediately: how much in savings they have, what benefits are available now and in the future and must budget accordingly. They must trim all unnecessary expenses. Electricity, gas, etc. should be conserved whenever possible. Meals can be made simpler and less expensive, if necessary, yet remain nutritious and balanced through the many books and articles available in the store and libraries. A realistic budget must be made and followed to be successful.

DEBTS — If the family has outstanding debts, they have to make arrangements with the stores or institutions to pay less each month. If help in budgeting is needed and they have problems working out arrangements with their creditors, or they desire to get information about bankruptcy filing, help must be sought.

ST. VINCENT DePAUL STORES — If SVDP Thrift Stores are nearby, suggesting to people that household items, clothing, etc. may be available at low cost at the Store may do them a service. Also remember to mention the Stores in your Parish Bulletins to make sure sufficient merchandise is available.

IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY AID — Other forms of immediate emergency aid such as food, may be available through the local parish St. Vincent DePaul Conference, Salvation Army or other groups in a family's local community.

EMOTIONAL BACKGROUND — SVDP members should not forget that the people experiencing lay-offs, job hunting, long lines at unemployment bureaus, food stamps, welfare, etc., come to the local parish SVDP Conference out of desperation, frustration, in fear, at a time in their life when the entire world seems to be closing in on them. They are embarrassed at having to admit they are unable to help themselves, their families and that they need someone else's assistance.

Sometimes, because of the tensions mentioned above, they are angry at themselves and may take it out on their family and on the SVDP members who are trying to help them. These situations tax an SVDP member's charity the most. These periods are usually short lived when the one being helped realizes that the SVDP member is sincere and does not look down on him and is a friend. Patience is what is needed most and these families should not be written off as "ungrateful." Each member should place themselves in that person's place and visualize his own reactions in the same situation.

If the tensions and stresses in the family do not subside, an SVDP member may suggest that the family talk with a local priest or a local family counseling agency (e.g., Catholic Community/Family Services) to help the family through their feelings and frustrations that they are experiencing because of the lay-off. Understanding and patience is needed between the husband and wife if the whole family atmosphere is to remain healthy and reasonably happy during this stressful period.

OTHER — Periods of high unemployment may be a good time to involve the jobless by organizing programs of services to others who are also suffering (e.g., at inner city parishes, etc.) or as volunteers for existing non-profit programs. This would keep unemployed people from being unoccupied with all the possible negative results.



CHAPTER XI

Helping Families Manage Their Money

FINANCIAL COUNSELING REQUIRES TACT

Economic conditions, inflation, federal budget cuts, unemployment, have played havoc with many household budgets, for those on low income and especially those who have improper spending patterns. How can we help people? Vincentians can do more than simply locate people with money management problems and motivate them to seek help. Vincentians can be an important part of the whole process, providing on-going encouragement and direction.

An obstacle arises, however, almost immediately in the budget counseling process. Most of us have only our own personal experience — balancing our own family budget — to draw from in developing a realistic budget. Are we open to the many personal options that people choose and still have a manageable budget? In our own neighborhood, families on the same income live differently: one drives a Buick, one a Chevy; one pays \$100 more for rent, one likes to eat out, another goes bowling. In our Vincentian work, great delicacy must be used in advising someone else how to live. This is one of the hardest ground rules to follow when working with people. It is easier to do for someone else, to assert our own choices than it is to enable people to make their own choices.

We learn best from our own experience. When we learned how to ride a bike or drive a car it was helpful to observe someone else doing it. But it was not until we actually got behind the wheel or pumped the pedals ourselves that we were able to understand how to do it. Others can be helpful in our learning but they don't learn for us.

A key to working with people who have money management problems is to avoid making judgments. Values are highly personal. Negative comments will result in a reluctance to participate. Furthermore, it is not really Vincentians' purpose to change values. What is desired is to help families decide what is important to them and prioritize their importance. This will help them to see whether their spending behavior is helping or hurting their achievement of what is important to them. The purpose of financial counseling is to encourage families to make their own judgments.

The commentary to the Rule states clearly the principle involved: "The demand upon Vincentians that members are not to impose their own values and preferences on families assisted. Even good and well intentioned advice — if not prudently offered — can make one who needs help feel trapped into submission. Christianity aims to free people for choosing good; it does not make people good by first enslaving them."

So, "You spend too much for rent!" might be an accurate identification of a problem but would certainly be received as an insult. During a Vincentian visit such a remark might flow from an attitude: you can't expect the church to support your lifestyle! Wouldn't it be better to say: "Let's take a look at your income and expenses. Let's see if we can help you find a way to make them balance." You then become a true helper, not a judge.

Financial counseling, like our help with food and clothing, can be used to put people down instead of enabling them to lift themselves up. Often it must be applied in small doses, gently and with respect. Without loving care, this service can become a weapon. Let's use it right!

(Adapted from the SVDP in Milwaukee)

FINANCIAL FITNESS

(The following was taken from the SVDP Milwaukee Newsletter and deals with helping a family budget their existing income.)

Imagine this situation: Your Conference receives a referral from the District office to visit the John Doe family. The request is for help with rent and food. Upon talking with the family you obtain the following information: Mr. Doe's net monthly income is \$1200 and Mrs. Doe does not work as she cares for their three children. Expenses are as follows: Rent \$400, food \$350, electricity \$35, gas company \$150, telephone \$50, loan payment \$100, gasoline \$100, recreation \$100, clothing \$75, miscellaneous \$50. Upon totaling, the expenses were \$1,410. Comparing the net monthly income of \$1200 with expenses of \$1,410, it is apparent that the Does are living above their means.

Do you shake your head and somberly tell the Does that "things will have to change?" Do you leave them simply with the advise that in order to balance their budget they must trim expenses by \$210 a month? Or, do you sit down with the family and try to explore some common-sense money saving alternatives? Some families like the Does know that they spend too much money but have no idea where they could begin to economize. By taking the time to explore possible cost cutting measures you could be doing them a much greater favor than paying their rent and leaving a food voucher.

Some possible ways to reduce the Doe's expenses could include weatherization to reduce gas usage and consequently the gas bill. A fifty dollar phone bill could be reduced by returning extra phones, switching from touch tone to a dial phone, reducing long distance calls and cutting out any deluxe phone features. Use of public transportation could help reduce the gasoline expense. Recreation expenses could be trimmed to help close the budgetary deficit.

Food costs could be reviewed to determine if additional savings could be found here. If you take the time to review a family's finances and find expenses greater than income, try and help the family develop possible solutions. Sometimes that family may honestly not know about how to trim expenses. Share some of your money saving hints with the family. By your willingness to share, the family will feel good knowing that you really care about them.

In giving hints or advice remember to keep a "sharing-caring" attitude and not a "do it or else!" stance. Also remember that each person is entitled to his or her individuality and the right to choose their own way in life. As much as we may want to, we cannot force people to spend their money our way. By taking the time to explore cost cutting measures, we've given the family some choices as well as the knowledge that we care enough to spend the time and effort necessary to help them through a troubled time. In the long run our money saving hints could be more helpful than any food voucher. Isn't it better for us to help others to help themselves? In this way we are empowering families to manage on their own rather than creating families who are dependent on our monthly assistance.

FINANCIAL FITNESS — CASE RECORDS

(Identifying information)

Some Vincentians may feel that the completion of the financial data entries on the standard case record form provided by the National office goes beyond their duties and responsibilities as Vincentians. Is it

an invasion of privacy to ask a client for financial information such as wages, salaries and income of other members of the family? What bills they owe? Rent — car payments?

In truth, these forms are designed to help us do a better job of helping others. When we go to the doctor complaining of a head cold, not only does he examine the head area, but he also listens to our heart and sometimes seems to ask us unrelated questions concerning our condition. Has the doctor lost his medical sense? No, of course not. He knows that when dealing with medical problems, all the facets of the human personality need to be considered, mental as well as physical. By treating one aspect of a problem and ignoring the others, the problem is likely to reoccur again and again.

In our attempts to help heal families as completely as possible, we need to be sensitive to the signs of the deeper root problems of financial need. To help us pinpoint the cause of the problem, we need to ask questions. We need to employ our best "bedside manner." To be useful, these questions need to concern the personal and sensitive areas of the family's finances. If a family is always running short of food, is the problem one of not enough income or is it high costs in other areas? Does high rental expense cause the family to run short of food each month? The real cause of the problem may be hidden from plain view unless the family's monthly expenses are reviewed.

By examining the family's expenditures, problem areas may become more apparent. Once the problem areas are identified, steps can be taken to alleviate the problem. If a family has high utility costs, maybe an energy audit program along with low-income weatherization could cut utility costs. We won't know unless we ask. If housing costs are too high for the family's income, maybe helping the family move to less expensive housing would be the best way to truly help them.

Without looking at a family's monthly patterns, we could be missing our greatest opportunity to really help the family. By looking at expenses, we can obtain a good feel for where the real problem lies. Once the problem is identified, concrete steps can be taken to solve the problem.

As Vincentians you are called upon to do your best to relieve human suffering. The case record forms are designed to help make us more effective at relieving suffering by correctly identifying the true problem. The forms are a valuable tool in helping us obtain maximum results from our limited time and talents. As always we are striving to do a better job of helping others. Doing a better job of helping may mean asking more questions and taking a little more time with each family to document a picture of their financial fitness. Hopefully the results will be worth the extra effort.

(Adapted from the Milwaukee SVDP)

CONFIDENTIAL
CASE RECORD — IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

Last Name		First Name		Middle	SVDP Record No.			
Address			Tel. No.		Parish		Incoming Date	
Source of Application			Tel. No.		Circle Marital Status Married Single Divorced Widowed Separated		Income Status	
							___ New To Agency ___ Service Last Terminated - Prior Year ___ Service Last Terminated - This Year	
Family	Birthdate	Occupation Or School Or Whereabouts If Away		Birthplace	Race	Religion	Citizen Yes No	Resident Yes No
(1) Man								
(2) Woman								
Names Of Single Children (3)	Sex			Family	Education	Marriage Date	Religious Status	
(4)				(1) Man				
(5)				(2) Women				
(6)				Employed Family Members By No.	Employer	Salary		
(7)				(1)				
(8)				(2)				
(9)				()				
(10)				()				
Others In Household (A)		Relationship to Head		Other Income				
(B)				SVDP Visitors				

PROGRESS REPORT (IF MORE SPACE IS NECESSARY, CONTINUE ON BACK SIDE)

TERMINATION SUMMARY		
Primary Focus Of Service 1. ___ Marital or family relationships. 2. ___ Financial difficulty. 3. ___ Physical illness or handicap. 4. ___ Mental illness. 5. ___ Religious difficulty. 6. ___ Other: Specify _____	Reason For Termination 1. ___ Referred everywhere. 2. ___ Service terminated by plan. 3. ___ Family withdrew or terminated service. 4. ___ Future service not possible.	Date Terminated Contacts From Opening to Termination ___ Tel. Or Corr. Only With Fam. ___ One In-Pers. Interview With Fam. ___ 3 - 5 In-Pers. Int. With Fam. ___ 6 Or More In-Pers. Int. With Fam.
	Financial Assistance Given ___ No ___ Yes	Comments

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL FAMILY MONEY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Family Name _____

Date _____

Address _____

Parish Conference _____

Phone No. _____

TOTAL TAKE-HOME INCOME FOR WHOLE FAMILY

Source	Weekly	Bi-Monthly	Total Monthly	
1.				
2.				
3.				
4. Food Stamps				
Total				A

ADDITIONAL INCOME NOT TAKEN HOME (Not to be included in "A" above)

Source	Weekly	Monthly	
1. Payroll deductions a. Savings Accounts etc.			
b. Loan repayments			
2. *Vendored payments a. Rent			
b. Utilities			
3. Other			
Total			B

*(Vendored means sent directly to Landlord or company)

TOTAL EXPENSES NOT VENDORED NOR PAID BY PAYROLL DEDUCTION

Item	Weekly	Monthly	
1. Rent/Mortgage			
2. Gas/Fuel Oil			
3. Electricity			
4. Water			
5. Total Food (including amount purchased with food stamps)			
6. Clothing & personal needs			
7. Medical (not covered by insurance)			
8. Transportation			
9. Telephone			
10. Other (specify)			
a.			
b.			
c.			
d.			
Totals			C

Adjusted Budget

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
a.
a.
c.
d.

INCOME VS. EXPENSES

Total Monthly Income (A)	
Total Monthly Expenses (C)	
Total Monthly Surplus (deficit)	

Adjusted Balance

RESOLUTION OF (DEFICIT)

If the deficit will be ongoing and substantial, the Conference workers should discuss with the client what adjustments can be made. An adjusted budget should then be set up and implemented. The Vincentians should help the family set up a regular payment schedule and decide where the income cash should be put to cover the basic monthly obligations. If the family is on Public Assistance, the amount in their budget for heat, rent, etc. should be set aside strictly for the purpose for which it was designated. One way to set aside the money is to put certain amounts immediately after receiving a check into envelopes marked "rent," "heat," etc. or, the client may decide to pay a certain bill in full after receiving a check.

The main objective of a budgeting plan is to make sure money is set aside each month to cover the basic living necessities. Additional expenditures for other things that may not be as basic, should be made only with funds that are available after the basic living expenses are covered.

Clients could also be counseled by the Vincentians that clothes, furniture, etc. could be obtained more readily and less costly through our St. Vincent DePaul Stores (either by purchase or by Conference order). If families spend a large amount on new clothes or new furniture, they may not have enough for their other basic needs.

Special Problems

1. Because of rapidly increasing utility costs, many households cannot cover their basic needs. This is a problem that may be beyond the control of the client, or may be within the control of the client. Vincentians are recommended to:
 - A. Check the monthly bills to see how much gas or energy is being used. See if the client can lower the thermostat, obtain weatherization assistance or contact a utility company for an energy audit.
 - B. Check to see if the family has applied and is eligible for energy assistance from HRS during the winter months. Also have them check with the local information and referral agency for other resources.
 - C. Try to assist with a grant if a budget plan is being followed and they can get no more assistance from "A" or "B" above.
 - D. Refer the client to an appropriate counseling agency (Catholic Social Services, etc.) for special professional help if the client's problems are serious enough.
2. If the rent or mortgage payment is high compared to the client's income and causes a large continuous monthly deficit, the possibility of the client relocating should be addressed. Sometimes different kinds of housing can be obtained in different locales that is cheaper but still adequate. This is a tough choice but one that may have to be faced.
3. If food costs are high, economical methods of food purchasing and food preparation could be explored with the family. County extension offices may be able to supply you with economical nutritious menus for the families you work with. They may also have staff who can work directly with people.
4. If the family does seem to have an adequate income but still cannot seem to make ends meet, they may benefit from financial counseling. Agencies may be available in your area to help with this.

(Adapted from the SVDP in Detroit.)

CHAPTER XII

Community Resources

FINDING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

SVDP members, because of the input from other members at meetings, experience, and the Holy Spirit's inspiration, many times are ingenious in finding solutions to complex problems presented to them or in finding ways to look at problems from different angles.

Some problems though, are beyond the capacity of the local parish Conference, and Vincentians need to be knowledgeable about other community resources and adept at searching out and working in a collaborative manner with other organizations that can help.

A. KINDS OF PROBLEMS

One way of approaching this search for potential resources is to list the kinds of problems that could present themselves to the local parish Conference and see what course of action might be taken by the members and what agencies they think should be approached, etc. During this discussion realistic ways of responding would surface. Members could then personally approach these agencies discussed to learn more about the agency and what it is able to provide.

Developing a personal relationship with agency personnel is suggested so that you can help them and they can help you when needed. This would be especially helpful with Catholic Charities/Diocesan Agencies. A quick way of finding the names of agencies in your area is to look in the yellow pages of the phone book under "social services." See also the School of Charity pamphlet provided each student.

If your community has an information and referral agency, this would be one of the first agencies to learn about. They have a listing and an understanding of local agencies and their services plus small groups that are not listed in phone books.

The kinds of potential problems are many and should be discussed as to what the Conference would do if presented with a specific problem. Pre-planning and discussion is much better than operating in a crisis.

The kinds of problems that Vincentians become involved in are usually related to the following areas:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Advocacy (making sure people receive the services they are entitled to) | 6. Emotional/Mental Problems — Counseling |
| 2. Budget/Money Management Advice | 7. Evictions |
| 3. Clothing | 8. Furniture |
| 4. Disaster (fire, etc.) | 9. Handicapped |
| 5. Drug addiction/alcoholism | 10. Health/Medical Related |

11. Homelessness/Low Cost Housing
12. Legal
13. Loneliness (shut-ins, nursing homes)
14. Referrals
15. Spirituality
16. Stranded/transient family

17. Transportation (shopping, doctor, etc.)
18. Unemployment
19. Utilities
20. Youth (child abuse/neglect runaways, etc.)

B. KINDS OF AGENCIES

Another aspect to be addressed is to begin to understand the kinds of resources and services available according to sponsorship, funding, administration, etc. This will help in understanding the social service system, what to expect, who to call, etc.

1. Government

Federal — such as Social Security, Veterans Administration, Immigration

State — Adult Parole Commission on Aging, Employment Services, Health Department, Legal Services, Mental Health Department, Mental Retardation, Rehabilitation and Correction, Vocational Rehabilitation, Welfare, Workers Compensation.

City/County — local offices similar to state, depending on need.

2. Voluntary — non-profit

Agencies that are part of United Way, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army sponsored by churches, private groups, etc., where no cost or only a partial cost of services is requested.

3. Private — Profit/proprietary

These would be services, provided by people who own the agency, etc. in which the actual cost of services is paid for by the client. Proprietary nursing homes, nursing care, counseling services.

C. COLLABORATION/COOPERATION

Another dimension to be understood is that in some areas, because of its population makeup, organizations, agencies, etc. that are in existence, will need to collaborate and cooperate together (networking) to solve problems that are beyond the capacity of any single agency to meet.

Most areas are local federations and councils, to which service organizations may belong, which provide information and hold periodic meetings. It would be encouraged that SVDP Conferences Councils participate in these.

KNOWING AND USING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Vincentians, in their enthusiasm to do charity, sometimes overlook the cause of a person's need. Our help keeps people from starving, being evicted, etc. but reflection on the life of Christ, St. Vincent DePaul, and Frederic Ozanam would show that more is required. It means involvement of one's self on a continued basis with families. It means looking and searching for permanent solutions to what is causing the problem if at all possible.

The newsletter of the SVDP in Seattle focused one of their issues on "*Information and Referral Work — Knowing and Using Community Resources*" and gave the following practical example to show what was meant. It took the simple case of a person needing funds for rent to prevent them from being evicted from his/her home. The simple approach is to give financial assistance for the rent to prevent them from being evicted. Charity has been performed and continues to be so long as the Conference pays the bill, but this does not solve the problem.

Further involvement through interviewing might indicate that the cause of the problem was insufficient funds from a small monthly pension most of which was going towards food and medical expenses. This problem could be lessened by recourse to community services and resources (e.g., Food Stamps and Medicaid) for which he/she is eligible because of their low income. If this person were to begin receiving these two programs, the rental problem would not exist.

This example is a very simplified example but brings up the question: should the Conference continue to pay the rent or take steps to help eliminate the cause by further involvement and becoming more informed about local community services and resources?

Simply put, "Information and Referral" is identifying, knowing, and using the resources of the community to resolve some of the problems causing the need in the first place. There are numerous community and neighborhood resources available which include local, state, and federal government agencies as well as private groups and agencies.

REFERRALS

The role of the SVDP member in the area of referrals is to listen together with the client, form an objective opinion of the client's needs, and when it is judged that the needs are beyond the Conference's resources, to make an appropriate referral to a social service agency. During and after the referral, until the client's situation reaches some point of stability, your support and encouragement is essential to the client.

HOW CAN YOU GIVE THE BEST SERVICE?

1. **Have your SVDP Conference members knowledgeable and active in its work with the needy and suffering in your area.**
2. **Know the other Parish Organizations that can give or lend assistance and under what circumstances.**
3. **Be aware of the services that can be given in your county and also your local neighborhood:**
 - a. County Welfare, Social Security, Soldiers and Sailors Relief Commission.
 - b. State Employment Services and Unemployment Compensation Office.
 - c. Neighborhood Community Information Services.
 - d. SVDP and other Thrift Shops.
 - e. Legal Aid Services.
 - f. Clinics and pharmacies which honor Welfare Department health cards.
 - g. Food stores which will accept food stamps.
 - h. Counseling and Mental Health Services.
 - i. Hospitals and special Health Services.
4. **Understand your client's problems and resources: Before making a decision about how to refer your client you should ask some basic questions. Learn to listen to the client's answers rather than supplying the answers you feel are appropriate. All information received should remain confidential.**
 - a. Name, address, and age.
 - b. Condition of physical health. Are there any disabilities? Deaf? Blind? Maimed? Mental Problems?
 - c. The extent of the need and the ability of the client to seek and use resources.
 - d. Is the father and/or husband present in the home?
 - e. Is the client a widow and are there children surviving?
 - f. Was the client, husband, or father a veteran?
 - g. The client's work record, in general, and his right to Unemployment Compensation.
 - h. Will the need tend to be permanent or temporary?
 - i. Is the client presently being served by an agency?

5. What to do?

- a. It is preferable that clients make direct contacts with agencies whenever possible. In certain circumstances, it may be to their advantage to have a member of the local SVDP Conference make the contact on their behalf and with their permission.
- b. If the client is presently being served by an agency, the worker (or supervisor) should be contacted and the new difficulty explained.
- c. If the client is not presently being served by an agency, refer to the School of Charity pamphlets provided regarding agency services or to other appropriate community resources. Discuss with them the reasons for the referral and realistic expectations. In regard to counseling services, people must be aware they have problems and sincerely want to do something about them. Agencies can do little with people who do not think they have a problem and are uncooperative or do not know why they were referred.



CHAPTER XIII

Perspectives on Conference Operation

The following has been adapted from the SVDP Council of Milwaukee and contains many good thoughts on preventive maintenance and self-evaluation for members and Conferences. There is also an excerpt from the American Manual on *"The Faithful Member."*

CHECKLIST TO TROUBLE-FREE OPERATION

One of the concerns of auto manufacturers has been the increasing lack of routine under-the-hood checks by car owners due to the popularity of self-service filling stations. We note some similarity to the case of Vincentians in these days of the self-service Church (lay responsibility) during which lay persons are challenged to rise to a higher level of responsibility for their own spiritual development.

As with the self-service gas customer, the new responsibilities of checking our own oil and water require self-imposed discipline and adherence to a regular maintenance schedule. Also like our automobile, those pesty noises under the hood may be a sign of something going wrong, the sluggishness and hesitancy of accelerations, our decreasing enthusiasm or fear of getting involved. Before it refuses to start altogether or breaks down on the highway, we suggest taking a look at the following checklist to prevent our life-time warranty from becoming invalid due to lack of preventive maintenance.

- ☐ **Make your visits faithfully.** Every Vincentian should make at least one visit per week. It is the foundation and lifeline of the Vincentian vocation. (Caution: Do not substitute checkbook charity for giving of yourself.)
- ☐ **Do not neglect the elderly and sick.** The materially poor are rare in many parishes. Visit former parishioners now living in nursing homes and the sick in hospitals. Most nursing homes would love to have you establish a regular visiting program.
- ☐ **Do not forget the spiritual.** Spiritual reading remains important to Vincentian life. Prayer should come from our hearts as well as our lips. Show concern over the spiritual welfare of the people you visit.
- ☐ **Do not hoard funds or salt them away for a rainy day.** The Conference treasury should contain no more than 6-12 months projected expenditures. Be responsive to appeals for funds for both local and overseas needy Conferences.
- ☐ **Have at least three members not counting the Spiritual Advisor.**
- ☐ **Hold regular meetings, at least monthly; weekly is ideal.**
- ☐ **Have a collection taken up among the members at each meeting.**
- ☐ **Have an elected President whose term of office is limited to two-three-year terms.**
- ☐ **Attend all meetings of the Conference.** Do not excuse yourself lightly. Vincentians charity springs from and is sustained by the group.

- ☐ **Make sure that someone represents your Conference at Council and Quarterly Meetings.** Keep these lines of communications open to your Brothers and Sisters. Seek to learn from them and share your experience with them.
- ☐ **Make use of opportunities to develop your ability to help.** Helping is a skill which is acquired by a combination of practice and reflection. Attend educational sessions offered for Vincentians.
- ☐ **Remember: the future is in your hands.** Before it is too late, invite more men and women into your Conference. Keep them interested by keeping them busy. Do not become an ingrown exclusive club of old timers.

THE FAITHFUL MEMBER

(From: *The American Manual*, p. 86)

“A genuine Vincentian is characterized by fidelity both to the ‘laws’ and spirit of the Society. The marks of a genuine Vincentian vocation are:

1. Deepening awareness of the Society as an opportunity for loving God and fellowmen;
2. An abiding good will toward all men and a real giving of self for others, more especially the poor for whom the member and his Conference are responsible;
3. Faithful and active attendance at the meetings of the Conference;
4. Regular and prompt visitation of the poor assigned to the member as a Conference visitor or worker;
5. Participation in the SVDP general meetings in religious observances sponsored by the Society in the area or diocese;
6. Generosity in sharing one’s resources, that is, sharing one’s financial means, time and talent on behalf of the poor;
7. Earnest study of ways to become a more effective Christian helper personally and to improve the Conference as a helping agency; and,
8. A working desire and will to grow in the spirit of the Gospel, willingness to accept additional responsibility in the Society as may be requested by Vincentian colleagues, if such duties are compatible with the member’s personal and family obligation.”

CONFERENCE MEETINGS

The following was adapted from the Milwaukee SVDP and has many fine things to consider to help your Conference have better, more productive, more spiritually enriching meetings.

Introduction

We are so used to attending Conference meetings that, perhaps, we take them for granted. We should not, of course, look upon meeting together as a necessary chore, rather it should be the highlight of that day. Some members carry out their visits but will not attend the meeting. This is a pity because the meeting should be seen as a chance for spiritual growth, sharing with members, discussing visits and learning how better to serve the needy. It should be noted that Conferences are required to meet at least once a month. Spiritual growth is the reason for this. Now let us take the Conference meeting step by step.

Opening Prayer

The Opening Prayers often leave a lot to be desired, at least the way we say them. How many times do we rush through them at the speed of sound without a thought of what we are saying? Prayer is the

lifting of our mind and heart to God and there are no prizes for record-breaking speed attempts. Our Lord has said that where two or three have gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them. Let us be courteous then of Our Lord and pray them at a reasonable pace. If the regular prayers become too familiar, have Vincentians take turns at composing their own prayers at the meeting.

Spiritual Reading

The Spiritual Reading follows and this is most important. Generally, responsibility for choosing the material rests with the President unless delegated to a member. Some Conferences have its members take turns at picking a reading. At times we might feel that the Reading should be hurried through and put out of the way before the "real" business is tackled. This is wrong thinking. If we listen intently to the reading, then we will be in a better frame of mind for the business that follows.

An excellent habit, which is recommended, is for each member to give an opinion on the reading and then take part in a general discussion. This need only take 5 or 6 minutes but it is time well spent. Conferences who do a good job discussing the spiritual reading usually are the Conferences who do the best work. One other thing: while the Spiritual Reading is being given, do we listen or is the Secretary entering the names of those present into the Minute Book, the Treasurer organizing the finances, or the President casting an eye on the agenda? Common courtesy demands that we pay attention.

Minutes

After the Minutes of the previous meeting have been read and the President asks if they are correct, let us say so. Sometimes there is an embarrassing silence. Minutes should be brief but sufficient to recall what happened at the last meeting.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report takes a little time to present and we owe a debt of gratitude to the members who look after Conference finance. We all know what it is like when we lose a treasurer, nobody wants the job!

Reports

It is inevitable that most of us fall into a stereotyped form of reporting Home Visits, but we should try to give the important facts which may enable us to help our poor friends even more — they must be our greatest concern. Incidentally, do we still talk about our "cases" or do we call the poor our "friends"? In our reports, there is nothing wrong with mentioning humorous things that have happened. A laugh can make the meeting relaxed and enjoyable and experience has proved that a happy Conference is a good one.

Discussion of cases includes what the emergency seemed to be on the first visit and what the two Vincentians were able to do to help.

1. Also included in the discussion should be the suggested steps for putting the family on a more secure basis.
2. Immediate attention is given to the physical/material situation of the family but, in time, thought should be given to the spiritual dimension.
3. A progress report should be made at each meeting on the family, on the Vincentian home visits, until the family is back on its feet.
4. Preventive steps should be considered in forestalling future emergencies.
5. Referrals to other agencies should be discussed because of the need of additional resources, more professional or specialized services that are needed.
6. The above process and Conference discussion revolves around four areas:
 - a. What is the problem?
 - b. What are the options/solutions the family should be considering?

- c. What has to be referred?
- d. What remains questionable?

Other Business

Under the heading of Other Business, the President should announce Council Meetings, etc. Do we make a note immediately to ensure that we will be there? Sadly, the attendance at these meetings is not what it should be and we ought to do something about it.

If we are fortunate in having a priest at our meeting, we should invite him to play a full part in our business and we will be the better for it.

Secret Collection

The Secret Collection is a matter for our conscience, is it not? It is not an option that can be dropped. Members are required, like the first Vincentians of Frederic Ozanam's time, to not only spend their time but also give of their resources to assist the poor. If your Conference does not do this at present, please begin this as a regular practice.

CONFERENCE MEMBERS

Being A Good Influence On Each Other

(The following is from the SVDP in Milwaukee.)

Biographers of Frederic Ozanam record how his father maintained a medical practice in Lyons, France which was more of a ministry than a business. Half of his patients lived in six or seven story tenements and were unable to pay. Dr. Ozanam and his wife, even in their old age, were commonly seen entering the tenements together, resting frequently on the rickety staircases on their way to care for the poor. It was on one such occasion that he met his death when he made a misstep on dark stairs and fell.

Identifying some of the influences of Frederic Ozanam in his lifelong commitment to the poor is not very difficult. His personal history showed the influence of many good people in his early years. Like all of us, he was also the product of his culture, education, religious background, and so forth.

At times, it is important for all of us to recall the elements in our lives that have led us to take on the role of helper. For some of us, it has been our parents whose love and care for others has rubbed off on us. For some, it has been our spouses who have led us closer to the Church. For some, it has been someone else, such as a chaplain we knew in the Army or one of our teachers. For a few, past experiences of need, such as during the Depression, has led us to greater sensitivity to the pain of others.

Some of the influences on us have also been negative. Who has not felt outraged after learning that we had just fallen for a line? Sometimes when we have had a particularly hard day, the last thing we want to hear is a call asking us to make a SVDP visit that night. Sometimes the hostility and bitterness in a family we assist can leave us depressed.

Being an effective helper and an inspired healer in our day is not easy. It is through prayer and reflection alone that we can see through the negative influences on ourselves and find renewed strength to carry on. The support of our faith community, particularly of our fellow Conference members, also comes to bear. Are we as supportive to each other as we should be in our Conference? Can we really care about the poor if we cannot care about each other?

FUND RAISING

Introduction

The primary purpose of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul is person-to-person service; sharing the love

of Jesus that has enriched our lives with others through our presence, concern and ministry. A secondary purpose is to relieve the suffering of people through material assistance and this takes money.

Ideas

The majority of parish Conferences rely on the secret collection at meetings and the poor box for the majority of their Conference income. The following, which include the above ideas, are ideas that some Conferences have used successfully. They all need some publicity ahead of time along with an explaining of the work of the SVDP. The only caution which comes from the International Council in Paris, France is that "all methods that have broad community aspects or involve several parish areas should be avoided by an individual Conference. For the sake of good order, the individual Conference should confine appeals to its own parish area of neighborhood."

1. **Conference Meeting Secret Collection** — An essential part of each meeting is the secret collection in which members give their own resources to assist the poor.
2. **Poor Box** — This has been the main source of funds for the SVDP. Many times, people need to be reminded of its presence and the continuing need. Conferences should regularly put something in the weekly parish bulletin which explains the need. Thank You's should also be done regularly to show appreciation.
3. **Monthly Envelope** — Many Conferences, after discussing this with the pastor and parish staff, have begun including an envelope in the monthly envelope pack sent to parishioners. Many parishioners fill their envelopes after payday and this envelope reminds them of their responsibility to assist the poor. This has raised two to three times the amount collected by Conferences through the poor box. Conferences also explain that not only has the regular parish collection not gone down, but in some cases has gone up.
4. **Special Parish Collections** — Some Conferences who have a poor box, supplement this income with a yearly, semi-annual, or fifth Sunday special collection at Mass.
5. **Food Collection** — Conferences sometimes collect food for their own pantry or for the needs of poorer SVDP Conferences in areas of high need. This also becomes a more concrete and visible way for parishioners to see what is the result of their efforts. Do not forget to involve the school children who are at the parish grade school or the CCD (Parish School of Religion) classes for public school children in the parish.
6. **Clothing/Furniture/Bundle Sunday Collections** — For a Conference's own needs or for the needs of the SVDP Thrift Store.
7. **Other** — Local circumstances and the ingenuity of members have come up with different ways to raise money. These are to be encouraged as long as these efforts are aimed at their own parishioners and are in keeping with our traditions.

Conclusion

Conferences that were diligent to prayer, the SVDP person-to-person rule and Vincentian service have always found that money and resources were available when needed. Members need to do their Vincentian work, be knowledgeable of the need to keep their parishioners informed, and then trust in the providence of God.

IMAGE OF THE SVDP

(The following has been adapted from the Council of Milwaukee and contains many good ideas for reflection about how parishioners and the general public view the St. Vincent DePaul Society.)

Is it possible that the reason that more people are not flocking to the Society's ranks as we would like, is that they have gotten the idea that we do not want or need them?

Picture, if you will, a Conference that has shrunk to three or four members. It has been caught up for some time in the "no work - no members" syndrome. It cannot accept any charitable work because of lack of members and it cannot attract any members because it does not do anything. Conference meeting night seems to take on some of the characteristics of a "night out with the boys." Meetings are cut to a minimum. Prayers and reflection are empty formulas (Father has not come around in months!). Visits become infrequent. The poor are looked upon with suspicion. And after the meeting, the cards are brought out or the latest parish gossip is reviewed.

To such a Conference, the need to recruit does not seem very pressing, although it is most obvious to others. Potential members drawn to charitable service are put off by "careful screening," disqualified by sex or age, discouraged because of lack of activity. The Conference has become possessive of its charitable mission, the President acting more like its owner than its steward. Satisfied with being "on call" in case someone appeals for financial help through the rectory, the needs of the elderly, sick, and homebound are overlooked. Council appeals for help in special works are ignored.

And then, one day, the new pastor calls the Society's Council Office and asks that the Conference books be picked up. They have disbanded, the members tired, no parishioners interested in reviving it. But there are several couples interested in forming a helping organization, unfortunately not affiliated with St. Vincent De Paul ...

This may be a faulty image of the Society but there are enough elements that are true to make us think about ourselves a bit. How are we contributing to a positive or negative image of the Society? Are we a tired yet tightly knit "club" interested more in our own needs than in God's poor? If good men and women are not drawn to us, perhaps it is because we feel we own the Society to the point where we make our own rules the way we like them.

But if the Society fails, it will not be because of its philosophy or structure; it will not be due to the lack of clergy support, lack of money or lack of work. It will fail because of us. How heavy, then, the responsibility of each of us to look beyond the status quo. SVDP challenges the best in us to be really caring and spirit-filled people. So let us rebuild while we can. The most fitting tribute to Frederic Ozanam is to make sure that the work he started is handed to others.

What can I do?

REFLECT on the Rule of Commentary of the Society. Capture the spirit of Ozanam by reading *Apostle In A Top Hat*. Both are available through the National Office.

DISTRIBUTE promotional literature about the Society to parishioners and potential members.

REPORT your Conference's activity in the parish bulletin through use of yearly statistics.

DISCUSS with your priests:

- (1) What additional ways the Conference can serve the materially or spiritually needy, troubled or lonely of the parish.
- (2) Who might be a good potential member whom you can contact to help in this work.

ASK YOUR PARISHIONERS to consider becoming a member, to refer needy people they know to you and to pray for your work.

BE FAITHFUL in your visitations and attendance at Conference and Council meetings.

DO NOT SKIP SPIRITUAL READINGS at meetings. The spiritual reading and discussion is the most important part of the meeting.

PRAY that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide the Society as a whole and each of us in our special ministry to the needy and suffering.

SETTING UP YOUR SVDP NURSING HOME VISITATION PROGRAM

A. The Gathering of Facts

1. Make a list of the nursing homes and institutions in your parish area.
2. Find out what parish groups already visit in these places (e.g., Legion of Mary, Holy Name, parish staff, etc.). How often do they visit? What services, ministries do they provide, etc.? Are there things they would like to do but cannot do now?
3. Contact the nursing homes and find what they see are the unmet needs for their residents. Listen to their input.
4. Discuss among your other Vincentians what role or roles the parish SVDP can play in meeting these unmet needs.

B. Communications

1. Discuss the above information with your pastor/parish staff to get their input/support/approval.
2. Meet with the pastor and other heads of parish groups who presently help in nursing homes to discuss the unmet needs and how the SVDP might be able to help.
3. Get a consensus to go forward with SVDP involvement in nursing homes outside your parish area where there are few volunteers and great need. This would be a kind of "twinning" as is done with SVDP Needy Conferences. Contact the SVDP District Council for leads on where the needs are greatest.

C. Action

1. Recontact the nursing homes in your area. Discuss again the specific needs of the institution, how SVDP volunteers on a practical level could be involved on a regular basis, the home's policies regulating the visiting, etc.
2. If needed, recruit and interest other parishioners in this SVDP program from your parish.
3. Provide volunteer training which could include the following:
 - a. Policies, procedures and regulations of the institution
 - b. Institutional schedules (i.e., times when residents are involved in treatment, meals, or other activities).
 - c. Special information related to serving the physically handicapped or senile resident.
 - d. A tour of the institution.
 - e. Go over and discuss the list of do's and don'ts.
4. Discuss and pray over nursing home visits at regular SVDP Conference meetings.

PARISH BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

Introduction

One of the best ways (after the personal witness of doing good works) for Conferences to become better known is through the use of the local parish weekly bulletin. Conferences should discuss this with the spiritual advisor and then regularly give a small selection to be included. The following were taken from a series developed by John McCormack, St. Andrew Avellino Conference from the SVDP in the Brooklyn Diocese and can be adapted for each season and special local needs. These may even generate ideas for others.

Conferences should also have included in the bulletin itself, or as an insert, a yearly report telling parishioners of the Conference's activity. Thank You's should also be included regularly.

Possible Announcements

1. **Do Not Pass Us By** — We are at the doors of the Church. We are the poor boxes ready to receive your contribution to put bread on the tables of our Needy — St. Vincent DePaul Society.
2. **For Whom Do You Do It?** — Jesus identifies Himself with the needy person you assist. As you approach the poor boxes, remember His words: "I was hungry and you fed me." The poor boxes are the bread boxes of the poor.
3. **To Live and Let Live** — To live and let live is fine. But to live and help live is better. You help others to live by sharing your coins in the St. Vincent DePaul Poor Boxes.
4. **Need Knows No Season** — Nor does almsgiving. We thank you for continuing, season after season, to share your coins in the St. Vincent DePaul Poor Boxes.
5. **Guests** — Isn't it a nice feeling, when you have gathered a few friends around your table, to hear their comments on your hospitality and their appreciation of the food you serve? Of course, it is! It gives you a warm glow of satisfaction. There are other guests of yours and even though you do not hear their remarks of appreciation, you should have the same glow of satisfaction. They are the guests who enjoy your hospitality because of the money you share in the Poor Boxes. Thank you. Your St. Vincent DePaul Society.
6. **Thank You** — is the simple statement that we wish to express. Who is being thanked, by whom, for what? You are being thanked for your sharing. The poor, the needy are thanking you. Food is what you are being thanked for and clothing and many other needs. The St. Vincent DePaul Society thanks you for permitting us to be a channel for your almsgiving.
7. **Loving** — Loving is the art of caring. Caring is the art of sharing. Sharing is the art of living. Living is the art of loving. Live, share your loving care with the needy by your contributions in the St. Vincent DePaul Poor Boxes.
8. **Praying** — As you share your donation with the St. Vincent DePaul Society, please say a prayer for the well-being of those you are assisting through the Society.
9. **Need Help?** — There is a St. Vincent DePaul group in this parish. If you are in need of help, contact the Society through the parish rectory.
10. **SVDP Stores** — The SVDP Thrift Stores have many needs and these should be included periodically in the parish bulletin. Check with the local SVDP Thrift Store to see what special needs they have.

PARISH COUNCILS AND THE SVDP

(The following has been adapted from the Council of Milwaukee and contains many good thoughts for consideration about the SVDP parish Conference's relationship with the parish Council.)

The St. Vincent DePaul Society Conference and the Parish Council

The establishment of a parish Council brings up the question of how the SVDP Conference should relate to the new parish structures (if at all). Related questions also arise: Will the social concerns committee take over SVDP work? Will we have to tell the Council the names of the families we help? Will our spiritual advisor have the time to continue attending our meetings?

With several years of experience, during which time the majority of Conferences have had to face these and other questions, the answers have come out differently depending upon the parish and the Conference.

In most cases, SVDP members have been part of parish Councils during their formative stages, simply because they are already recognized parish leaders. This has prevented a lot of problems from developing. We have learned that Conferences need not feel threatened by the Church's efforts to give parishioners a greater share in responsibility for the parish and for its ministry. In fact, SVDP historically has stood for the same things — giving laymen a share in the pastoral ministry of the Church.

Healthy Conferences have far less to fear from a parish Council than Conferences that exist in name only. At the point when a parish Council asks itself whether the human needs of people in the parish are being addressed, a weak SVDP Conference is more likely to be overlooked and its role given to others. Regrettably, several Conferences have been lost in precisely this manner.

A more common occurrence is for a Conference to ignore the new parish structures, to claim independence and to continue in self-satisfied isolation. What this does is to ignore the fact that the Conference is an expression of the charity of the parish, and ultimately to say that there is no accountability to the faith community that supports and sustains it. In this situation, the Conference may be cutting off its lifeline.

It is true that a great deal of patience is needed with new parish Councils as they develop their manner of leadership, work out roles and relationships with existing parish organizations. But patience should not be confused with aloofness. Society members should be as concerned over the development of their parish as they are their Conference.

Social Ministry In The Church

Vincentians have no monopoly on social ministry, even though they may have been carrying the ball almost alone in many parishes for years. There are many needs which they are not addressing. Social Concerns committees have taken up many useful services: helping at free meal programs, providing telephone reassurance for the elderly, transporting the handicapped, etc. In addition, public issues, such as abortion and legislative matters, are an aspect of social ministry which the SVDP is not well suited to address.

The traditional strength of Vincentianism is still in demand today: its ability to attract dedicated men and women into long-term service, its model of regular meetings, spiritual reflection and home visitation, its adaptability to most parish situations, city or suburb, its linkages to other SVDP groups and social service agencies, its diocesan-wide reporting system, and its training, formation and continuing education. The thousands of families quietly touched each year by some SVDP activity stand as witness of the continued need for its existence.

Vincentians not only have an important part in the social ministry of the Church but should also feel a sense of ownership of this ministry. But ownership should not mean "possessiveness." It should mean a joy at the development of new avenues of service within the Church. It should entail a commitment to help the parish grow in this long neglected field.

In the fact of the many problems and pressures we experience every day in our technological society, the Church cannot afford to be torn into factions in serving God's poor. Conference should always seek representation on Social Concerns committees, to help them develop their role in parish ministry as well as to keep them aware of the SVDP presence.

Possible Guidelines

The following may be the basis of a successful relationship between a Conference and its parish Council:

1. **Cooperation** — The goal of the SVDP and the parish Council is to increase the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in a parish. It is important that the SVDP Conference establish a channel of communication to the parish Council for the Society to flourish. In most cases Conference have found it to their advantage to have their president as an ex-officio member of the parish Council or the Human Concerns/Social Concerns committees. In this way, communication in years to come will be assured and duplication of effort avoided.

2. **Accountability** — SVDP Conferences traditionally raise their funds from both contributions of members and donations of parishioners. The parish is, therefore, entitled to at least a brief report of Conference activities, and Conferences should feel a sense of this kind of accountability. However, Conferences are autonomous and are free from strict fiscal control of the parish Council.
3. **Confidentiality** — Families approaching the Society for help have always been assured that their situation would be held in strict confidence. Conferences should be asked to do nothing to jeopardize this privileged relationship by providing specific information on the families they help to any organization or person other than the pastor or spiritual advisor.

Many Conferences feel that their relationship to the parish Council has been mutually beneficial. Once an understanding is reached with the Council, there may develop a potential for increased membership, funds and activities for the Conference.

PLANNING PROCESS

Steps In The Planning Process

1. **Goal Setting** — Set your goals after some thought and realistic study regarding the problem in your area or the type of sufferings you feel should be alleviated. These would be general, long-term goals such as to alleviate the suffering of hunger, to alleviate the suffering of loneliness, to extend the SVDP into new parishes, to recruit new members, etc. Define the problem you want to help alleviate.

Prioritize Goals — Set these goals in order of importance and tackle them one at a time. All problems cannot be solved at one time and some are easier to solve than others.
2. **What Means Are Needed To Get To The Goal?** — You need to consider such things as: manpower, resources, committees, training, surveys, cooperation of agencies, pastor and other churches, funds, public and government support, study of the real needs of the area, consider if you would be duplicating the efforts or is it unique, etc.
3. **Develop Sub-Goals** — Sub-goals are short-term and to be accomplished within a limited time, e.g., to have a Conference emergency food program functioning within two months; to have a survey of talents of parishioners for possible SVDP benefactors or auxiliary assistance; to have an emergency transportation service functioning by Christmas; etc.
4. **Evaluation of Resources** — How can you do it? Do you have the necessary support and resources? If not, can you develop them? Would you be duplicating what another group does? Should this be delayed and another goal set?
5. **Specify Short-Range Objectives** — Once you have evaluated resources you are better able to tell what needs to be done first, e.g., food program — type of assistance (canned goods, cash, certificates), members who will handle, build up funds and parish support, etc.; talent survey — Pastor agreeable to it, what questions will be asked, how will it be handled, who will summarize it, how will the information be used, etc.; emergency transportation-type of assistance (emergency only regular basis, members who will handle and coordinate, auxiliaries who will be used, etc.).
6. **Set Priorities For Action** — What steps need to be done first and which ones follow?
7. **Select Specific Action Step(s)** — Set up some sort of implementation plan including a schedule preferable in writing. What is going to be done, who will do it, and by when will it be done?
8. **Alternative Steps** — Are there different ways to accomplish the same objective? Which one is best for now?

9. **Implement Action Step(s)** — Do what was planned.
10. **Evaluate The Action Step(s)** — Find out why it worked, what was good, why it did not work.
11. **Re-Cycle** — Begin again at one of the above steps to accomplish the original goal or to begin action on another goal.

AGGREGATION OF CONFERENCES

The National Council of the Society strongly urges Conferences to review their official status; and if it is found that they have not been formally accepted into the Society, to take immediate steps to rectify that oversight.

The Rules and practices of the Society have always been insistent in requiring that Conferences take the necessary steps to become membered in the Society. Some — we think unfortunately — dismiss this process as of little consequence. They seem to say: "We do the work, so what difference does it make whether we fill out the formal papers."

May we suggest that the experience of people everywhere points up the need for application procedures whereby units are admitted to organizational membership. If any group can independently declare itself a partner in a given organization, that organization's qualifications for membership and its very purposes can easily become obscured.

Aside from these practical considerations, we draw attention to the deeply symbolic meaning which attaches to Aggregation. From the very beginning, members wanted to retain toward one another the closeness of brothers. For this reason, they were hesitant about subdividing and forming numerous Conferences. When, in the end, the early Vincentians were persuaded of the need for extension, they nevertheless wished to preserve, wherever Vincentians might be organized, a sense of common unity and solidarity with one another. For this reason, official enrollment in the Vincentian family has always remained a function of the Council General itself.

It is the Council General which is approached and which announces a new affiliation. It is our hope, therefore, that the importance which attaches to the aggregation of Conferences will be recognized and that steps will be taken to bring all Vincentian units into the official family. When a newly organized Conference has completed a probationary period of six months, it should apply for aggregation. Application forms can be obtained from the national office.

To be membered in the Society of St. Vincent DePaul, a Conference must apply for affiliation and be formally admitted or "aggregated" by the Council General located in Paris.

Enroute to Paris, the application must be approved by the intermediate Councils which link the Conference to the Council General; approved to wit, by the District Council and the Diocesan Council to which the Conference is directly united; then by the National Council: finally, by the International Council (Council General).

Conferences in a diocese having neither District nor Diocesan Council send their petitions directly to the National Council, headquartered in St. Louis.

After Paris has approved an application for aggregation, the Conference is notified through a reverse chain of command communication: Council General to National Council to Diocesan Council to District Council to Conference.

Along with the letter affirming the fact of admission, the Council General provides an appropriately worded Certificate of Aggregation. Many Conferences arrange to have the certificate framed and displayed in the regular meeting place of the Conference.

IS YOUR CONFERENCE AGGREGATED?

PUBLICITY AND THE SVDP

Many people, especially Catholics, are unaware of the St. Vincent DePaul Society and what it does. The majority believe the SVDP is made up only of stores and pick-up trucks and know close to nothing of the vast organization, the network of Conferences, or the person-to-person services that are available to the needy and suffering.

Before looking at some practical suggestions on how Conferences can help the Society overcome this problem, we should reflect on some thoughts our former National President, Howard Halaska, shared with members at a Mideast Regional Meeting. Halaska said that the SVDP is set up to serve three major groups of people:

1. The poor, the needy and suffering, who have no one else to care about them, physically or spiritually.
2. Those who use the SVDP as a channel for their donations to help others.
3. Ourselves — a way to bring ourselves closer to God through Christian service to the needy and suffering.

With his thoughts in mind, publicizing the works of the SVDP regularly, especially at the parish level helps:

1. Those in need find where help is available.
2. Those who wish to help, find a channel for their donations.
3. Those who may be potential members learn of SVDP works and see that it may be a channel to bring themselves closer to God through Christian service.

It also is a way that our works will bear witness to Christ and the Church.

The Society has and will continue to use various means such as radio and TV spots, newspapers, etc., to get the general message of the SVDP across.

Some ways that members and Conferences at the local parish level can help while maintaining strict confidentiality would include the following:

1. Print a brief annual or semi-annual report in the parish bulletin or newsletter on their activities; this helps the parishioners feel that the money they contribute is being well spent and may help them to be more generous if they know where it is going.
2. Have regular blurbs put in the parish bulletin or newsletter on the SVDP Store, on the parish Conference services (e.g., "Need emergency financial assistance or other related services? The St. Vincent DePaul Society at (parish) may be able to help. Call the rectory at (phone). All information will be kept confidential."
3. Ask for help in the parish bulletin or newsletter for specific needs (e.g., wheelchair, painting a house, etc.).
4. Make sure other parish groups and the teachers in the school know about the Society and what your Conference does to help.
5. Announce your regular Conference meeting in the parish bulletin.

Some members may be afraid that there will be "a run" on Conference funds if some publicity is done at the parish level. Being prudent in doing this and trusting God will help minimize the dangers that may be present. It could mean reaching somebody who otherwise would continue to suffer only because they did not know that help was available through the parish SVDP Conference.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR VINCENTIAN "ROOTS"

Communicating Our Love Is The Best Public Relations

(Adapted from the Seattle, Washington St. Vincent DePaul Society)

Those who have read a biography of Frederic Ozanam should be familiar with the dynamics of the foundation of the first St. Vincent DePaul Conference. It was because of the accusation that Catholics relegated their concern for the poor to the clergy and religious orders that Frederic and other students at the Sorbonne University banded together for the purpose of "going to the poor." They did it in an organized way, to establish a consistent and enduring witness of the participation of the laity in the Church's ministry to the poor.

If "witness" was paramount in the original goal of the Society, the question inevitably arises whether the Society today fulfills that goal of providing to the world a clear sign of the Church's love for the poor. Two issues are included in that question: Do we communicate to the world what we are doing? And, if we do communicate, is it the message of love that gets across?

There is a temptation at this point in history that, if we accept that, we have to do more in the area of witness, to start talking about a massive public relations effort. Public relations has certainly been neglected by most of us, perhaps because of the character traits of many Vincentians which have led them to shun publicity. But now, in correcting this situation, we must not fall into common error. To be an effective witness is not simply a matter of spreading propaganda. It demands a total disposition to sharing what we are and what we have.

To a world filled with a lot of "hype" (to use the jargon of the day) and exaggerated claims, the general public now greets most advertising with a deeply rooted cynicism. Entering the competitive arena for public attention demands a great deal of honesty and sensitivity. One of the best images of the Society, in our experience, is a quiet and effective organization not seeking to "blow its own horn." As we try to tell our story, care must be taken to preserve the best of our traditional image. The trust of our current supporters and the people we serve is at stake.

One of the best ways to increase our witness is to increase our personal dedication. Instead of thinking about impressing the millions, are we impressing the people close to us with our self-sacrifice? They are the ones who will not believe anything we publish or televise about our efforts because they know us too well. Witness must start on this level and flow from this source.

And that leads to the second question posted earlier: What message are we communicating? If it is anything other than the love the church for the poor, it is useless. That love cannot be replaced with any cheap substitute, such as money. Our material assistance, our time spent in listening and our emotional investment in helping are all empty if they are not backed up by love.

If we do not communicate love to the ones we help, who will believe that the Church loves them? Our witness can sometimes be a countersign. To the degree that we are unable or unwilling to love the people we help, our statistical data on money spent, visits made and hours of service offered will all ring empty. And loving is no easier than it was in the time of Vincent DePaul or Ozanam. All the political rhetoric today about the "truly needy" and "worthy poor" may give many an excuse to ignore the poor who are hardest to love. Who of us does not have a long way to go before love is perfected in us?

Our witness, it seems, will always fall short. But it must be challenged to grow. Efforts to communicate with the modern world means more than adopting its technology of communication. For a world looking for a message behind the fancy public relations, let us make sure we have something to give!

REACHING OUT VS. ON CALL

A parish Conference must reach out like Frederic Ozanam and not wait for the calls to come to the rectory.

I. Expansion of the Term "Poor" to Understanding of St. Vincent DePaul and Frederic Ozanam

- A. "Poor" — The needy and suffering in general, not just the financially "poor"; "no work of charity is foreign to the Society."
- B. Consult booklet, *"Serving People Thru Parish-Centered Conferences of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul"* for range of possible SVDP services.

II. Reaching Out vs. On Call — Where Do Needs Exist?

A. Publicity

- 1. List SVDP services in Church bulletin and who one should contact.
- 2. Periodic report of activities to parish.

B. Finding Needs

1. Parish Level

- a. Ask your parish priests and staff — What services are frequently requested but cannot be filled? Can the SVDP do anything in these areas?
- b. Talk with the nuns and teachers at the parish school and CCD programs.
- c. Parish census — Has there been a recent one? Could one be held to uncover not only spiritual but social needs? Would SVDP help with it?
- d. What services do other non-Catholic churches in the area provide? Is there a need to provide them for your parishioners?
- e. Ask those you presently serve — What ways can you be of help? Who knows better what their needs are than the poor.
- f. Ask your parishioners — What further services are needed?
- g. Do an informal survey of your parish — Are there nursing homes, institutions, agencies, etc.? Keep your eyes and ears open for ideas.
- h. Think of all the different types of emergencies that can come up in your parish (death, sudden sickness or accident, penal incarceration, etc.). Can you be of help in these areas?
- i. Are there parishioners who are too embarrassed or proud to come forward? Think of ways to make it less embarrassing or of soft-selling the fact you are giving one charity.
- j. Consider twinning with a poorer parish financially and in other ways.

2. Agency and Governmental Level

- a. Government statistics and United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census — Libraries or local planning groups.
- b. Consult with agencies and other groups for any special problems they get requests for but for which they have no program or services.
- c. What new programs are being funded by the United Way or government agencies? This usually indicates where the problems exist.

III. Prerequisites or Supports Needed for Members and Conferences to Help Them Serve the Needy and Suffering in a Better Way

A. Preparation of Members and Conferences

1. Proper orientation, continued education and training.
2. Relationships between neighboring Conferences and Councils should be promoted so that sharing of ideas, etc., takes place.

B. Meeting and Internal Functioning

1. Regular meetings are essential.
2. Meetings should be interesting and fruitful, dealing not only with current problems but future planning.
3. Good morale which is based upon: good leadership, worthwhile services being provided to the needy and suffering; all members feel welcome, are active and participate not only in the planning but also in the implementation of services; some social functions and some recognition by priests and officers.
4. Rotation of officers — Could have different perspectives, ideas and insights. Strict enforcement of two 3-year terms for presidents.
5. Spiritual aspects — Last but not least.

C. Providing Services

1. Time given — One hour a week on the average by each member.
2. Attitudes toward the poor — Do not become hardened.
3. Use of auxiliaries or benefactors for specialized needs. Many people are willing to help once in a while but do not want to be tied down to regular meetings and responsibilities. Might be a source for future recruitment.
4. Referral Procedures
 - a. What procedure is used? How are cases referred to the SVDP? Analyze it and see if it is efficient. A weak link can mean the difference between service and no service. Does the parish staff really know what you do? Is this discussed and updated periodically? Will you accept a challenge if it is something you have not tried before? In regard to parish staff, do not forget the secretary and housekeeping; they can screen out calls if they do not know about the SVDP.
 - b. Response time to calls — How long does it take between the time the call is made and when the first visit is made? Many volunteer groups are successful because they have a 24-hour phone line and people available to respond immediately. A phone line is not necessary if the referral system through the parish or to members is efficient.

RELATING TO SPIRITUAL ADVISORS

One of the most ticklish matters in the operation of a Conference, and an area seldom confronted directly, is the role of the spiritual advisor. There are beautiful statements about the fruitfulness of the relationship between a Conference and its spiritual advisor, but there are few practical guidelines. Enough problems surface that justify some time in reflection on this issue.

From earliest times, the Society of St. Vincent DePaul has been a lay organization. It is 'lay' not because of any distrust or dislike of the clergy (the opposite is true!) but because it endeavors by its charter to lead Christian men and women, living in a secular and often materialistic world, closer to God and to

the Church through personal, loving contacts with the suffering. Recognizing this 'vocation' as primarily lay, the Sacred Congregation in 1920 affirmed its independence "except in matters of faith and morals."

In our Society, a fine relationship with the clergy has generally been maintained. Vincentians of wisdom have always sought to understand the mind of the Church, realizing that their activities carry its name. Priests and bishops have recognized their role as primarily spiritual and have overseen the spiritual development of men and women in their parish Conferences. A great debt is owed to the many priests and religious who have given of themselves for our spiritual guidance.

The delicately balanced relationship between a pastor and the parish Conference is based upon recognition of the Conference's right to its own administration and fiscal control, and the spiritual advisor's responsibility to point out where practices do not conform with Christian charity. Practical decisions must be entrusted to the Conference, yet its good judgment should be influenced by the formative input of the clergy. Stimulating challenges of the spiritual advisor should be a regular part of the meeting, leading to reflective growth in the understanding of the meaning of charity and its application.

The success of the relationship between the parish Conference and its spiritual advisor depends upon the willingness of the priest to promote lay responsibility and of the Conference to be open to growth. The difficulties that arise all seem traceable to abuse of these two principles. Priests who seize initiatives in helping misunderstand their role leading to lessening of responsibility and ownership by the lay members. On the other hand, Conferences that do not show a willingness to grow in their attitudes and involvements often wind up without a spiritual advisor. As it is wrong for a Conference to relegate the spiritual advisor only to leading the prayers, it is wrong for a spiritual advisor to treat Conference members as delivery boys.

Despite all the potential for disharmony, the Society has generally enjoyed the loyal support of the clergy. The delicate balance of roles has most frequently been a healthy one. Mature lay leaders have risen to serve their Church and give witness to its healing mission. They have simultaneously developed a mature esteem for the priesthood and religious life.

In the midst of a debate at the Sorbonne in 1833, Frederic Ozanam defended the record of the Church's concern for the poor throughout the ages. But he was struck by one argument of his antagonist: "You Catholics put all the burden of relief for the poor upon your religious and then wash your hands of the job. Don't try to impress us with what priests and sisters are doing for the poor. What are YOU doing?" These words haunted Ozanam and led to his response: "Let us go to the poor!" That challenge gave birth to the Society. That tradition, as developed internationally and as spelled out in our Rules and Commentaries, adapted from generation to generation, is the reason why we have survived.

RECRUITMENT FOR CONFERENCES

The following has been adapted from the National Committee on Extension, Council of the United States.

To say that a Conference needs members is obvious. Each Conference can expect to lose between 20% and 25% of its members in a year for one reason or another. Accordingly, each Vincentian should be aware of the necessity to constantly recruit members and do all that is possible to hold them.

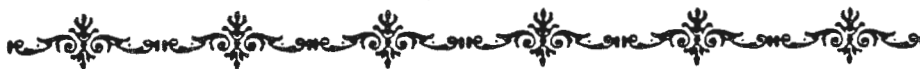
Recruitment

1. The Conference should once a year check over the parish directory or census report with the pastor and draw up a list of names of likely prospects for membership and arrange to have a Vincentian call on them.
2. The most successful way to get new members is to visit prospects in their homes and explain the Society to them.

3. The Society offers many benefits to its members. No one should be selfish about it and should ensure that as many people as possible will have opportunity to join.
4. Members should be encouraged to bring friends along to a meeting and encourage them to join.
5. Members who have left the Conference or who may have been previously contacted can always be asked at some later date to rejoin.
6. Look to the shifting population (school teachers, company officers, public servants, etc.) when recruiting members. Many of these people are quite zealous and want to fit in with the community as soon as possible. Joining the Conference gives them status and something to do.
7. When a Vincentian moves away from the area, advise the Conference in the town to which one is going so that one can be contacted. Often this is an easy way for that Conference to get a new member.

Retaining Active Members

1. The first rule for keeping active Vincentians together is to make sure the meetings move along efficiently and all are given something to do.
2. No member has ever left the Society from overwork, but many have been bored with trivia and lack of real purpose. Accordingly, the President must guard against doing too much him- or herself or letting one eager beaver take over.
3. New members bring new ideas to a Conference, most of them worthy of consideration. That Society is a progressive one which tries to keep up with changes in the community. Accordingly, welcome the new ideas and evaluate their usefulness to the service the Society can perform.
4. When a new member joins, make him or her feel welcome. Often it is good to appoint another member to look after the newcomer and explain what is going on in the Conference.



RECRUITMENT BROCHURE

You: a Vincentian?

Your Parish Conference of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul invites you to join it in silent works of charity:

- quietly, discreetly aiding needy families.
- personal visits to homes, hospitals, institutions.
- seeking and serving the distressed.
- growing spiritually through a gift of self to others.

The purpose of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul is to fulfill the two great Commandments, love of God and love of neighbor. We seek out God's needy, both materially and spiritually, and help where we can. No need is too great or too small. Sometimes great resources are needed; we have them. Sometimes we can do no more than listen and comfort; we are very good at it.

In coming closer to the needy, you are coming closer to God!

Outside the Society itself, no one knows which families are being aided, or what material and spiritual help has been provided. Vincentians are doctors, office workers, lawyers, factory workers, housewives, students, retirees, people just like you. Your next door neighbor could very well be a Vincentian and you would never know it. We like it that way; it protects the needy and makes our work more effective.

Vincentians are not professionally trained social workers. The important thing is the desire to serve as Jesus served.

All of us have a great deal of expertise in various areas and, by working together, we can move mountains. Many Vincentians have raised families, run a household, built buildings, repaired autos or done just what you do so very well. The needy have need of your talents, your know-how, your concern, your love.

Anyone who is willing to lend a hand is welcome to join the Society. Even a few hours of your time are very precious to the needy and the distressed. You can be an apostle right in your own parish.

The Society is formed into parish Conferences consisting of two to ten persons. They meet weekly, pray together and discuss current cases being handled.

All calls are made in pairs to avoid scandal and to help the recipients feel more at ease. Wherever there is a need, the Vincentians go two by two and do what they can to ease the suffering of their fellow human beings.

Conferences work with and through the pastor and the parish council. Every parish has some people in need either spiritually or materially. Lay people, in many instances, are better able to reach people than a priest.

The Society is not just an "emergency food order giver." Vincentians are also concerned with the needs of the aged, lonely, handicapped, permanently sick or housebound and of persons in convalescent nursing homes and hospitals.

Persons to be aided are to be met "on an equal basis," at their level, never looked down on and always with the thought that they are our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

When making calls, Vincentians determine first the immediate needs, which frequently are food, clothing, shelter, or medical care. Material assistance is given on an emergency basis.

In subsequent follow-up calls, Vincentians attempt to eliminate the underlying causes of the distress. In this area, they are able to call on a vast number of people who are able to open doors in the medical, legal and business fields. **WE GET PROBLEMS SOLVED!** Follow-up visits continue as long as the needs are present.

In conclusion, may we say that Christ has just knocked at your door!

SPIRITUAL READINGS FOR MEETINGS

The Spiritual Reading is the most important part of the Conference meeting. The responsibility for choosing the material rests with the president unless it is delegated to a member. Some Conferences have its members take turns at picking a reading that deals with some aspect of ministry or service to the poor. Each member picks something that appeals to them or is assigned to them the previous meeting, reads it, then shares their thoughts on what the reading meant to them, then the other members give their comments. This usually takes five to ten minutes and very often puts members in a better frame of mind for the business that follows.

SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL READINGS

While there should be flexibility in picking spiritual readings, some Conferences have found the following sources to be helpful:

1. *Spiritual Readings For Conference Meetings* — book published by the Council of the United States.
2. Sacred Scripture
3. The following are available from National Office, Council of the United States, 58 Progress Parkway, St. Louis, MO 63043:
 - a) *Rule of Society St. Vincent de Paul* or *Rule and Commentaries*
 - b) Biographies of Frederic Ozanam such as: "*Life in Letters*" by Joseph I. Dirvin, CM, "*Apostle in a Top Hat*" by James P. Derum, "*Frederick Ozanam Story*" booklet
 - c) *United States Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul*, 1995 Edition
4. **Members Own Personal Collections** — Everyone collects sayings, articles, prayers, etc., that have given them inspiration at one time or another. If these can related to spirituality, service to others, etc., these can have greater meaning when shared with other members in the context of the Conference meeting.
5. Check local religious book stores for materials and other resources.
6. Periodically new or revised materials will become available from the Spirituality Committee — made available through National office.

CONCLUSION

The above suggestions have been given to assist Conferences in planning the most important part of the regular Conference meeting, the spiritual reading. It is meant to be a help and a suggested beginning for Conferences looking for good spiritual readings.

SPIRITUALITY

(Back to the Basics)

(The following is from the SVDP in Milwaukee.)

A little over three years ago, the first *VIEWPOINT* appeared in our Bulletin. It dealt with the spiritual renewal required of Vincentians if the Society was to continue to fulfill its aims in our community. The unbroken chain of monthly *VIEWPOINTS* ever since have always drawn on that basic theme, whether we talked about our attitude towards the poor, issues on justice, Conference administration and finances or becoming better helpers. Making our Conferences more efficient, developing skills of listening and advising, becoming aware of the issues affecting the poor are all important matters but secondary. The real question is, and always has been, one of personal holiness.

There are those who become disinterested at the mention of spirituality, reminding us that they did not join the Society to belong to a prayer group. Most Conferences in our experience do not reflect very well on the beautiful prayers they start and end meetings with, or on their spiritual readings. And so questions are rightfully raised whether a certain stagnancy of some of our Conferences has set in because they view holiness as a state obtained rather than as a life-long process of growth to know the Lord and what He expects of us.

The fruitful activity of the Society depends most of all on its members becoming people of deep faith, people who grow to realize through their Vincentian experiences what being followers of Christ implies. Being a member of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul is not an achievement but a commitment to grow in personal holiness. Spiritual formation is a necessary condition for the success of our work.

How can we detect whether we are sincerely growing closer to the Lord or whether we have consciously settled for a same and unchallenging substitute? One sign is whether our meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy, with an absence of bickering, jealousy and distrust. Another sign is our attitude towards the poor. Cynical or sly remarks should never be heard. Each family or person should be discussed, as they should be treated, with respect due to a brother and sister in Christ. Another sign is our aggressiveness in seeking out those in need. Too many Conferences say they have nothing to do and somehow are deaf to the silent cries of the lonely, elderly, sick and forgotten within their parish and outside it.

If our work finds its inspiration in our close union with Christ then we will see the people we call on as persons, not just hands open for financial help. We will give them time and listen to them. We will see through attitudes that are sometimes awkward, selfish and demanding. We will not become discouraged by suffering caused by broken homes, excessive drinking, or lost faith in God. Our reliance on our fellow Vincentians at Conference meetings will be our source of strength and isolation, renewing us to approach these problems again and again with prudent, patient efforts.

An Irish Bishop, Francis G. Brooks, recently addressed an assembly of Vincentians on this matter, and his conclusion will be ours: "In emphasizing the necessity of a genuine spirituality, I hope I have not made you say to yourselves, 'If that is the case, I am no use in the St. Vincent DePaul Society. I am no saint.' In the marvelous ways of God, brothers and sisters, in giving, you will receive far more in return. It is in and through your work that you yourself will grow in the love of God — you will share in the wonderful vivid faith of many of our people. Your everyday work and your work in the Society are not merely the objects you have to sanctify, but the very instruments of your own sanctification."

THOUGHTS ON TWINNING

Introduction

The following was adapted from the SVDP Council of Milwaukee and has some very important ideas to think and pray over on "Twinning." It is most timely now (the Pompano District Council has recently begun a comprehensive Twinning Campaign) and into the future for any new Conference to realize that a main part of the Vincentian message, the Gospel message, is that "human needs transcend parish and national boundaries, and that the whole body feels pain when one of its parts hurts."

Spirit of Sharing/Twinning

Most parents know what a difficult task it is to teach their children a sense of sharing. Although this lesson might be learned more easily in large families, the current day emphasis seems to be on individual rights, and a good many people seem to be growing up never really having learned the important lesson of sharing.

Sharing is also an important element in the Vincentian family especially regarding "twinning." Unfortunately, the size of this family does not always guarantee that the lesson is learned because it is so easy to slip into the shadows and thrive in isolation, never seeking the contact and friendly support of the rest of the family. Yet from the beginning of the Society, the founders drew such consolation from their experience of life in common that they regarded each other as truly brothers.

Opportunities for sharing abound in the Society, proportionate to the unmet needs of many Conferences and Councils. Help is continually requested by our SVDP Conferences working among the desperately poor in our older urban areas, both in manpower and in funds. Emergency appeals are made regularly by the National SVDP when there are large, natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, whose victims are being helped by Vincentians. On-going support of Vincentian Conferences in Third World Countries is asked for under the Foreign Twinning Program. Vincentian projects operating with the approval of the Council General in poor countries require our help to continue.

But excuses for not sharing also abound: "The funds must stay within our parish." "We must put something aside for future needs." "How do we know that the money is going for a legitimate need?" "Our local needs are too great to help elsewhere." "Charity begins at home."

Sharing is not purely a question of the 'haves' and the 'have nots.' Time and again it has been demonstrated that the way a Conference shares within the Vincentian family is also the way they share with their poor. Even Conferences with little in terms of financial resources can also excel in sharing, in the manner of the widow of the Gospel whose mite took on exceptional value because of her sacrifice. The spirit of sharing really is the spirit of poverty; the will to use everything at our disposal for the betterment of all. It is to feel our wealth and talents are unconditionally appropriate to the service of our neighbors, the poor.

Without exceptional heroism, every Vincentian, even the neediest, can take part in sharing. By doing so, he or she will gradually and freely learn that human needs transcend parish and national boundaries, and that the whole body feels the pain when one of its parts hurts. Charity does begin at home. It is learned there, but true charity gets its strong foundation at home and must of its very nature grow outward.

One thing is clear, the Society can flourish even without money. (Our young student founders funded their works from their poor pocketbooks.) But the Society cannot exist without the spirit of sharing. For how we treat the needy is reflected in the way we treat each other. It is the way we will be treated on that day when we are called to account.

USING THE SVDP NETWORK

“The Sting”

In a recent issue of the newsletter of the SVDP in Denver, Colorado, the movie “*The Sting*” was shown to have relevance to Vincentians and others whose mission is helping the poor and needy. There is a small number of people whose purpose in life is to avoid work, avoid taking responsibility for themselves, and sponge off anyone who will supply their needs (food, shelter, alcohol, etc.).

As always, each Conference has cases of this kind and as previously mentioned, we advise all members to be skeptical when receiving calls from people living outside your parish area or who need immediate help at the rectory and cannot wait a few hours for a home visit. This procedure does not preclude charity, it helps insure it for those who truly need it.

This problem is one of the best reasons for each parish to have its own St. Vincent DePaul Society. The network insures quick, confidential interchange of information and help to those who need it. Attempts at evasion, refusal to identify themselves, the insistence of cash by the person, and a highly emotional approach are but a few clues pointing to the need to be prudent and patient in granting help.

It is suggested that any calls received from outside your parish area be referred to the proper local SVDP Conference, or if there is no Conference, call the rectory. If there is still no help, make a personal home visit to evaluate the situation and judge if help is warranted.



CHAPTER XIV

Miscellaneous

ALCOHOLISM

Advising The Spouse

The following is from the Alcoholism News of the Ohio Association For Alcoholism Program and can give some valuable insights to Vincentians on how to help the spouse of an alcoholic understand alcoholism and how the spouse should react to the problem:

1. Learn about alcoholism. Attend Al-Anon and open A.A. meetings. Read the literature. If alcoholism is the problem, give up and accept it.
2. You do not have to blame the alcoholic. Concentrate on your own actions.
3. You do not have to control the alcoholic's drinking. Let him drink as often and as much as he pleases; he is going to anyway. Each time he drinks to excess, suggest treatment when he has sobered up enough to listen. Do not offer it when he has pulled himself together. That is too late. If he agrees to treatment, get him there at once.
4. You do not have to rescue the alcoholic. Let him suffer and take responsibility for every consequence of his drinking. When you bail him out or protect him from consequences of his drinking, you prolong the problem.
5. You do not have to be concerned with the alcoholic's reasons for drinking. There are not any — just excuses.
6. You do not have to reject outside people. Renew friendships. Rejoining the world forces the alcoholic to compare his sick behavior with the more normal behavior of others.
7. You do not have to threaten. Say what you mean and do what you say.
8. You do not have to accept or extract promises. He cannot keep them, and broken promises heighten his sense of inadequacy.
9. You do not have to nag, coax, or preach. Report his inappropriate actions each next day when he is sober. Then drop the subject.
10. You do not have to be a puppet. The alcoholic is forced to respond to your healthy changes with changes of his own; maybe even sobriety and health for himself.

ALCOHOLISM — AVOID BEING AN "ENABLER"

The following is from an Ann Landers column in the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

Dear Ann:

I have been married for fifteen years to a man who drinks too much. In my heart I have known for

a long time that he is an alcoholic, but I never wanted to face it.

Recently I read in *The Chicago Sun-Times* an article by a woman. She said: "If you reach in to help a drowning man, you rescue him. If you hold him while he tries to drown himself, you are an 'enabler.' People who bail the alcoholics out of drunken-driving charges, lie to the boss about his absence or do his work for him are called 'enablers.' Until they stand back and make the alcoholic responsible for his actions, there is little chance that he will make an effort to save himself."

The question "Are you an enabler?" can be answered by reviewing the following questions. Have you ever:

- Completed the work of a co-worker too hung over to do his own?
- Called your husband's boss to say he had the flu when he was really in bed sleeping off a binge?
- Cooked dinner for your father, brother and sister because your mother had passed out on the sofa from booze?
- Called it "youthful exuberance" when your teen-ager came home drunk night after night and never discussed the matter with him?
- Kept an alcoholic employee on the payroll because he had been with the company so many years?
- Climbed into a car with a drunken driver — since a challenge might start trouble?

People are bound to ask, 'Are you nuts? How can you let someone who is near to you fall on his face?' The answer according to experts, is that he will never seek help unless he falls on his face and has to get up by himself and admit that he is powerless against alcohol.

Please, Ann, print this. It could help a lot of people.

Signed,
Been There

Dear B.T.: It's right on target. I am in total agreement with this approach. Thank you for sharing. There are times when we have to be 'cruel' to be kind.

(Reprinted with permission. Ann Landers, Creators/Los Angeles Times Syndicates.)

DESERTION

The ideas on this information sheet are meant to be of assistance to St. Vincent DePaul members when they come across situations in which a woman with children has been deserted by her husband.

Members should try to understand how traumatic desertion is to the wife and children and be as supportive as possible. The woman should also be made aware of to whom she can talk and what resources may be available.

The following are areas of concern that could be discussed with the wife by the Vincentian team, if appropriate. Putting her in contact with the agencies or people who can help may be the one, most important act that a Vincentian can do to assist in the situation in addition to their prayers. Conference members, during the regular discussion of cases, may locate other additional appropriate resources. For appropriate phone numbers, look in the phone book or call your local Information and Referral Service.

Emergency Financial Assistance

Many times when a husband deserts, he takes whatever funds are available and the family is left without anything. The local SVDP Conference should assist to the extent possible and appropriate under the circumstances (food, mortgage, rent, utilities, etc.) and be supportive to the wife until she can contact agencies and other resources in the weeks following the desertion. Some time is needed for her to get over the initial trauma until she can get her thoughts together and help herself.

Other resources for emergency assistance could be the local County Welfare Department, other community agencies or the wife's relatives and friends.

Legal Assistance

Legal assistance may be one of the more important aspects to be dealt with early because of its implications. Problems of ownership (house, car, stocks, savings accounts, etc., which may be in the husband's name), outstanding bills, charge accounts, support, alimony, etc., all have to be looked at. If the woman does not have an attorney, the following local resources may be suggested to her and can be found in the yellow pages of the phone directory under 'Attorneys': Legal Aid Society; Attorney Referral Service of the Local Bar Association.

Vincentians should not give advice on legal matters because of the very complex legal situation in which the wife may find herself. The best action is to put her in touch with a lawyer who will advise her as to whom she should contact (e.g., Bureau of Support, Court of Domestic Relations, Juvenile Court, etc.).

In regard to the arrest of the husband to try to force him to pay, it is sufficient to say that this does not usually help because the husband may lose his job as a result and then there is no income at all.

Regular Financial Assistance

The St. Vincent DePaul Society is not set up to provide regular monthly financial assistance to people so appropriate resources should be suggested. If her resources are limited, the woman may be eligible for a regular check (A.D.C.), food stamps, or medical assistance (Medicaid). The County Welfare Department or Soldiers & Sailors Relief Commission (if the man was a qualified veteran) should be contacted.

General Finances, Budgeting, & Housing

Wives find themselves facing a situation where the amount of money coming in has changed drastically and may force a dramatic change in lifestyle. There may be outstanding bills which require monthly payments. The best thing for her is to anticipate what is coming up. Do not wait for arrears to mount up. As soon as she realizes she is going to miss a payment, she should contact the company, bank, utility, etc. While it may take some courage to make the first phone call, it may well spare her the ordeal of a foreclosure, utility shut-off, or repossession.

Assistance and advice in adjusting in this area may be available in a person's local community from Consumer Credit Counseling.

Regarding housing, seeking lower cost housing may be necessary to keep within the limits of income.

Employment

One area that the wife will have to consider is the area of employment. She may have had employment years ago before the children were born, but now possesses no marketable skills or lacks confidence in what abilities she does have.

Child care centers or relatives will have to be considered if there are pre-school children involved and employment is found.

Personal Counseling

The wife and children may also need to talk with a professional person (priest, social worker, etc.) about their own feelings concerning the desertion. Guilt feelings that they were primarily responsible (even in children!) for the desertion, anger, loneliness, confusion, frustration, lack of confidence and hope are some of the negative feelings that must be worked through before many wives can really be in a position to help themselves.

The following may be possible resources for counseling: Parish Priest; Catholic Charities Deanery Office; United Way Counseling Agencies; and Mental Health Centers.

HOSPITAL SOCIAL SERVICE DEPARTMENTS

Purpose

Every hospital should have a section that functions as a social service department. The purpose of a hospital's social service department is to assist patients in non-medical problems that might interfere with their medical recovery.

Services

In general, the hospital social service department provides guidance, understanding of problems, utilization of community agencies, practical help, counseling and serves as a liaison with the hospital, medical staff, and community resources for patient and family.

Specific services may include:

- Helping the patient with personal and family problems created and aggravated by illness, disability and the anxiety of hospitalization or home care.
- Providing guidance and counseling to patients and their families having social problems, both environmental (other people, living conditions, lack of food, etc.) and psychological, that interfere with the process of recovery from physical illness.
- Assisting the patient in planning for discharge to a home, to a nursing home or to another facility.
- Advising the patient and his family about community resources available to them during and after hospitalization and, when needed, to make referrals.

Eligibility

Services are provided without fee to both inpatients and outpatients of the hospital.

Referral Procedure

Have the patient or outpatient contact the local hospital social service department directly, or, with their explicit permission, SVDP members could call directly.

Other

Vincentians usually become involved in situations involving the hospital social service department when a person who has been released from the hospital, calls the local Conference for help, and it appears the local hospital social service department has made a poor discharge plan. After gaining the needed information and the patient's explicit permission, the Vincentian should call to clarify the situation with the social worker at the hospital social service department to see what appropriate help is available from other resources and how the local Conference can be of help.

ST. VINCENT DePAUL THRIFT STORES

At various times the comment comes up "You mean my clothing/furniture is going to be sold by the St. Vincent DePaul Thrift Store? I want it to be given free to the poor, not sold."

This comment shows a misunderstanding of the St. Vincent DePaul Thrift Store and how it works. Perhaps

a few comments will help Vincentians assist others to understand this special work of the Society in a different light.

SVDP Thrift Stores have been in existence in the United States since the late 1800's. They came into existence because Parish Conference and their "clothes rooms" were found to be inefficient — some had too much clothing, others had little, storage became a problem so a centralized operation was needed. District Councils are an extension of Conferences and exist to perform those special works which Conferences are unable to perform.

Some St. Vincent DePaul Thrift Stores depend on the local Conferences to pay the cost of the requisitioned material when they are able. The needy referred to the Thrift Store with a requisition by a Parish Conference are given furniture and clothing free.

The Thrift Store truly reaches the poorest of the poor by making available to low income people and thrifty shoppers items at low cost. With low costs, the dignity of the poor is honored and maintained.

In summation:

1. Furniture and clothing donated to the Store benefits needy people directly or indirectly, either by being given free clothing or by being given the opportunity to purchase clothing and household items at low cost in St. Vincent DePaul Stores available to them.
2. Even though furniture and clothing are given free to the SVDP Store, it costs the store money to make the pickup, to sort the items, to store them, to give them away free and to sell them. Although SVDP Stores pick up only useable furniture and clothing, it is not uncommon to receive clothing which is appropriate only for rags. At best, rags can be sold for a cent a pound. Some items prove to be unsaleable upon arrival at the store and are not worth giving away. Such are relegated to the trash bin and must be hauled away — an additional cost.
3. The SVDP Thrift Store makes convenient home pickups. Clothing which is given to local parish Conferences may not be needed in their area and the Thrift Store acts as a central collection place where people can be referred. This saves donors the time and expense of delivering these items to shelter centers, prisons, hunger and detention centers, etc., that handle clothing.

Furniture items are difficult, if not impossible for local parish Vincentians to handle or transport without large expense. The Thrift Store picks these up and when needed, delivers the items to the homes of the poor.

4. Families referred to the SVDP Thrift Store have a better selection of clothing and furniture available to them than would a local parish Conference clothing room.
5. Emergencies for clothing and furniture items can be responded to better by SVDP Thrift Stores because the Store has these items on hand while a local Parish Conference may have to send out an appeal to parishioners.
6. The Thrift Stores may be able to provide job opportunities for unemployed men and women referred by the parish Conference.

SVDP DISASTER INVOLVEMENT

GENERAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR COUNCILS

1. Read National SVDP-ARC Agreement.
2. Commitment by District Council to this effort.
3. Appointment of Disaster Committee Chairman and recruitment of interested committee members. If an SVDP Store exists, involvement of manager is essential.

4. **Define General Goals and Objectives** of committee.
5. **Inform Diocese** of plan to avoid duplication of effort, insure ongoing cooperation and coordination of effort. Perhaps SVDP can be the leader/convenor for this diocesan effort. Confer with Catholic Disaster Relief Committee materials on their recommendation for a diocesan plan.
6. **Approach American Red Cross** to discuss developing a statement of understanding/agreement on what the SVDP will attempt to do in the event of a disaster and what the needs of the local American Red Cross are.
7. **Redefine Goals and Objectives** of what realistically can be accomplished with SVDP resources; set time frame for accomplishment (e.g., number of volunteers, number of shelters and geographic location, etc.).
8. **Approach SVDP Groups** to solicit volunteers and shelter sites (church/school facilities).
9. **Provide General Disaster Training** (orientation and initial information) in cooperation with the American Red Cross.
10. **Offer Advanced Courses** (e.g., Shelter Manager, Damage Assessment, Family Services, First Aid, etc.), through the American Red Cross to those interested.
11. **Keep In Touch** with volunteers yearly to let them know of continued need (mail, general meeting, etc.), church shelters, and American Red Cross.
12. **Yearly Assessment** of efforts by committee — what worked, what did not work, what needs to be changed, etc. Redefine Goals and Objectives for coming year.

MYTHS ABOUT SUICIDE

1. **Do not worry about the person who talks about suicide, worry about the one who does not.** People who talk about suicide do not follow through.
(Eight out of ten people who commit suicide clearly announced their intentions.)
2. **Suicide tendencies 'run in the family.'** They are inherited.
(Not so!)
3. **People who attempt suicide are possessed with a 'death wish' and want to die, so it is useless to try to stop them.**
(Suicidal people generally cannot make up their minds and waver back and forth up to the very end.)
4. **Once suicidal, always suicidal.**
(People who are suicidal are only in that condition during a short phase of their lives.)
5. **Suicidal people are crazy.**
(Unhappy, for sure, but not mentally ill in the vast majority of cases.)
6. **Once saved from suicide, a person is cured of the impulse.**
(Out of every five suicides, four were 'repeat attempts'.)
7. **Most suicides are caused by a sudden, traumatic event.**
(Most suicides follow prolonged periods of dejection and feelings of helplessness or low esteem.)
8. **Suicide victims are mostly women.**
(Although twice as many women attempt suicide, twice as many men succeed in killing themselves.)

HELPFUL HINTS FOR PEOPLE WHO COME ACROSS A PERSON THEY BELIEVE IS SUICIDAL

1. The first priority is to determine how serious is the threat. If the person has already attempted suicide and is in physical danger, this is a medical emergency and medical help must be sought.

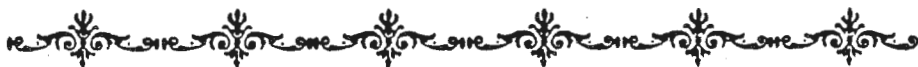
If there is no medical emergency, you should try to determine how specific the person's plan is by asking, "How do you plan to kill yourself?" Always use the terms of death, no euphemisms. Use "kill yourself" instead of "do yourself in." Use "death," not "pass away." You are trying for as much shock value as possible now, trying to sober a suicidal person with the ugly, unseemly aspect of what he/she is contemplating.

If the person replies he/she has not thought that far ahead, the threat is minimal.

If he/she has the plan thought out (time, place, how, etc.), the threat is serious.

2. After determining the seriousness, begin immediately to look for the reason. "Why do you want to kill yourself?" This should bring the precipitating stress out into the open.
3. Then begin to collect alternatives from the person. "What would help solve this problem other than suicide?" Keep replying "Okay, that is one possibility. What else would help solve it?" The person has to be forced away from their conclusion that suicide is a good solution to his/her problem.
4. The person should be left with a jointly agreed upon plan of action which he/she intends to follow after the contact is ended. This would be their promising to make an appointment and taking them to the local mental health center, allowing you to call a relative or friend to stay with them overnight, letting you call the appropriate agency, etc. You should assure yourself that the person has the resources he/she needs to get through the immediate crisis.
5. Finally, extract a promise that he/she will not kill himself/herself without calling you back in advance. In this way, you are more sure about getting help again for the person if the situation gets worse.

(From Romaine V. Edwards, *Crisis Intervention and How It Works*, Chapter Eight — *Suicide and Homicide*, 1977. Courtesy of Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, Springfield, Illinois.)



CHAPTER XV

Council of the United States — Resources

Materials listed and described below are available from the Society of St. Vincent DePaul,
Council of the United States, 58 Progress Parkway, St. Louis, MO 63043-3706,
Phone: 314-576-3993 • Fax: 314-576-6755.



Council Records/Meeting Supplies

- | | |
|---|--|
| A. <i>Secretary's Minute Books</i>
Available with or without binder. | F. <i>Combination Meeting Agenda and Prayer Card</i>
Available in English or Spanish. |
| B. <i>Treasurer's Manual</i> | G. <i>Spiritual Readings for Conference Meetings</i>
Available in English or Spanish. |
| C. <i>Family Case Sheets</i> | H. <i>Ozanam School of Charity Manual</i>
Selected Readings |
| D. <i>Weekly Minute Book Sheets</i> | I. <i>The Young Vincentians Handbook</i> |
| E. <i>Prayer Leaflets for use at Meetings</i> | |

Basic Informational Sources

- | | |
|--|--|
| A. <i>United States Manual of the
Society of St. Vincent de Paul</i> | G. <i>Recruitment Manual for
Christian Personal Service</i> |
| B. <i>Pocket-sized Rule</i> | H. <i>Congratulations — You Are The
Conference President</i> |
| C. <i>Rules and Commentaries</i> | I. <i>Around the Clock</i> |
| D. <i>Rules and Commentaries
in Spanish</i> | J. <i>Guidelines for Spiritual Advisors</i> |
| E. <i>Serving People Through
SVDP Conferences</i> | K. <i>SVDP Store Manual</i> |
| F. <i>SVDP — What It Is, What It Does</i> | L. <i>SVDP Disaster Manual</i> |
| | M. <i>The Vincentian Family</i> |

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