



# **PART I:**

## **THE RULE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

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

##### **1.1 Origins**

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

- 1.2 The Vincentian Vocation**
- 1.3 Any form of personal help...**
- 1.4 ...to anyone in need**
- 1.5 To Seek Out the Poor**
- 1.6 Adaptation to a Changing World**

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

- 1.7 Prayer Before Personal Encounters or Visits**
- 1.8 Reverence for the Poor**
- 1.9 Empathy**
- 1.10 Promotion of self-sufficiency**
- 1.11 Concerns for deeper needs and spirituality**
- 1.12 Gratitude to those we visit**

#### **2. VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND VOCATION**

- 2.1 Love in Union with Christ**
- 2.2 The journey together towards holiness**
- 2.3 Prayer in Union with Christ**
- 2.4 The Spirituality of Blessed Federic Ozanam**
- 2.5 The Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul**
- 2.6 A vocation for every moment of our lives**

### **3. MEMBERS, CONFERENCES, COUNCILS—COMMUNITIES OF FAITH AND LOVE**

- 3.1 Membership**
- 3.2 Equality**
- 3.3 Meetings of the Vincentian members**
- 3.4 Fraternity and simplicity**
- 3.5 Preserving the spirit**
- 3.6 Councils**
- 3.7 Young members**
- 3.8 Aggregation and Institution of Conferences and Councils**
- 3.9 Subsidiarity and freedom of action**
- 3.10 Democracy**
- 3.11 Presidents as servant leaders**
- 3.12 Formation of members**
- 3.13 The spirit of poverty and encouragement**
- 3.14 The use of money and property for the poor**
- 3.15 Communication**

### **4. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE VINCENTIAN AND CATHOLIC NETWORK OF CHARITY**

- 4.1 Twinning**
- 4.2 Emergency assistance**
- 4.3 The Vincentian Family**

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

- 5.1 A Close relationship**
- 5.2 Autonomy**
- 5.3 Moral recognition**

### **6. OTHER RELATIONSHIPS**

- 6.1 Every member should foster ecumenism**
- 6.2 The Society is committed to ecumenical and inter-faith Cooperation**
- 6.3 The adoption of practical initiatives**
- 6.4 Ecumenical and inter-faith membership**
- 6.5 Preserving the Catholic credo and ethos**
- 6.6 Affiliated groups can work very closely with us**
- 6.7 Relationships with state agencies and other charities**

## 7. RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY—WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

- 7.1 **The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions.**
- 7.2 **A vision of the civilization of love**
- 7.3 **Vision of the future**
- 7.4 **The practical Vincentian approach to social justice**
- 7.5 **A voice for the voiceless**
- 7.6 **Facing the structures of sin**
- 7.7 **Striving to change attitudes**
- 7.8 **Political independence of the Society**
- 7.9 **Working with communities**





## **THE RULE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

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

#### **1.1 Origins**

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

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

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

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

#### **1.2 The Vincentian Vocation**

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **1.7 Prayer Before Personal Encounters or Visits**

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

### **1.8 Reverence for the poor**

Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God's image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ.

Members observe the utmost confidentiality in the provision of material and any other type of support.

### **1.9 Empathy**

Vincentians endeavor to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve. Rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.

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

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

### **1.11 Concerns for deeper needs and spirituality**

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

Vincentians serve in hope. They rejoice in discovering the spirit of prayer in the poor, for in the silence, the poor can perceive God's Plan for every person.

The acceptance of God's Plan leads each one to nurture the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace in themselves, their families and all those whose lives they touch. Vincentians are privileged to foster these signs of the presence of Risen Christ in the poor and among themselves.

### **1.12 Gratitude to those we visit**

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

## **2.VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY & VOCATION**

### **Faith in Christ and the Life of Grace**

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

### **2.1 Love in Union with Christ**

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

## **2.2 The journey together towards holiness**

Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity.

Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their ideal is to help relieve suffering for love alone, without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves.

They draw nearer to Christ, serving Him in the poor and one another. They grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and one another.

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

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

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

## **2.3 Prayer in Union with Christ**

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

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

The spirituality of one of its founders inspires Vincentians profoundly. The Blessed Frederic Ozanam:

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

## **2.5 The Spirituality of St. Vincent**

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

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

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

### **2.5.1 Essential virtues**

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

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



## **2.6 A vocation for every moment of our lives**

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

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

### **3.1 Membership**

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

### **3.2 Equality**

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

### **3.3 Meetings of the Vincentian members**

The members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide Community of Vincentian friends.

#### **3.3.1 Frequency of the meetings**

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

#### **3.4 Fraternity and simplicity**

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

### **3.5 Preserving the spirit**

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

### **3.6 Councils**

**Conferences are grouped under various levels of Councils.**

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

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

### **3.7 Young members**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3.10 Democracy**

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

### **3.11 Presidents as servant leaders**

Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavor to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.

### **3.12 Formation of members**

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

### **3.13 The spirit of poverty and encouragement**

Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Adviser is very important.

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

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

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

### **3.15 Communication**

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

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

### **4.1 Twinning**

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

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

#### **4.1.1 Prayer as the basis of friendship**

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

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

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

#### **4.2 Emergency assistance**

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

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

**Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help, form a single family. Gratefully remembering the support and encouragement the first Conference received from Blessed Rosalie Rendu, the Society maintains and develops close relationships with other branches of the Vincentian family, while preserving its identity. It cooperates with them in spiritual development and common projects, as well as with the Church's charitable pastoral initiatives at every level, whenever this may be mutually enriching and useful to those who suffer.**

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

#### **5.1 A close relationship**

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

## **5.2 Autonomy**

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

## **5.3 Moral recognition**

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

# **6. OTHER RELATIONSHIPS**

## **ECUMENICAL & INTER-FAITH RELATIONSHIPS**

### **6.1 Every member should foster ecumenism**

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

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

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

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

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

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

In some countries, circumstances may make it desirable to accept as members Christians of other confessions or people of other faiths who sincerely respect

and accept the Society's identity and its principles insofar as differences of faith allow. The Episcopal Conference should be consulted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **7.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions**

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

## **7.2 A vision of the civilization of love**

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

**As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and the civilization of love. In this way, the Society shares the Church's mission to evangelise the world through visible witness, in both actions and words.**

## **7.3 Vision of the future**

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

## **7.4 The practical Vincentian approach to social justice**

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

## **7.5 A voice for the voiceless**

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

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

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

## **7.7 Striving to change attitudes**

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

**The Society strives, with charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, so that all are able to understand, recognise and defend the right**



**of each person to be responsible for his or her own life. The Society promotes understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.**

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

**The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a non-violent approach.**

**It is good that some members follow and fully participate in their political vocation in such a way that they bring Christian values to political matters. Those members who hold political offices will be asked, always with charity, not to hold any mission of representation in the Society during their term of political office.**

### **7.9 Working with communities**

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