

## **What is Unique About the Vincentian Vocation**

*Contributed by:*

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### **In Re: The Rule, Part 1, Paragraph 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.

Paragraph 2.2 makes clear a core objective of the Society is for Vincentians to make a journey towards holiness. Specifically, the International Rule says "[Vincentians] grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and one another." Ozanam and friends had this novel insight, specifically that Vincentians grow spiritually in the personal encounter with our neighbors in need. This same paragraph says "[Vincentians'] journey towards holiness is primarily made through: 1. visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live..." Three other ways of achieving holiness follow, but #1 on the list of "primary" ways Vincentians achieve holiness is to encounter the poor.

This, along with the clear intent of our founders and the history of the Society, is I believe why the International Mission Statement describes our main mission as the spiritual growth of Vincentians through encounters with the poor: "Our mission, inspired by the Radiant Flame of Christ's Love, is to grow spiritually through seeking and finding individuals and families who are forgotten, suffering or deprived and through personal contact, to offer practical help to anyone in need."

And why the U.S. Mission statement similarly reduces to this: "Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic organization, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering

person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering, in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.”

So much has been written about SVdP’s unique mission. Not just in the Rule, but also the Manual, the mission statements (which are clearly intended to reduce the Rule to its essence), the voluminous writings of Ozanam, and so forth.

It’s easy to lose track of our mission as we try to help our neighbors in need. Exactly 100 years ago, the then International President-General reminded us we need to always bear in mind what makes SVdP so special, first and foremost is the spiritual growth of Vincentians: “The Society has two aims: to do a great deal of spiritual good to its members through the exercise of charity, and to do a little spiritual and temporal good to a few poor families in the name of Jesus Christ. If it did not continually seek to combine these two aims, it would lose its reason for being. If it were to seek only the holiness of its members through pious exercises, there is no lack of Confraternities and Third Orders to meet that need. If, on the other hand, it were to seek only the relief of the temporal miseries of the poor, it would only add one more to the list of public and private institutions founded for that purpose.” Notice he says the primary objective is the spiritual growth of Vincentians.

*“Whenever I explain our unique mission to people, they are fascinated and interested to learn more. We’re not a relief agency. We’re something much more than that. I’d like for us to express that more clearly.”* – President John Denniston