



# Vincentian Spiritual Advisor

Training and Formation



Welcome to this day of Formation and Training for the role of Spiritual Advisor in the SVDP Conferences and Councils

Thanks to the hosting Council/Region etc,...

Purpose is to create an environment for learning and sharing and the development of friendships among those called to the Spiritual Advisor ministry

Any housekeeping around the facility and location of bathrooms etc

## We Heed the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit



“Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of Thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.”

“Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created.”

“And the whole face of the earth shall be renewed.”

- Opening prayer by Bailly at first meeting



The prayer on the slide was offered by Emmanuel Bailly, the first Conference President, who is also considered to have been the first Spiritual Advisor.

Suggested centering meditation and call the presence of the Holy Spirit into our midst:

- Call the participants together and begin with some cleansing breaths and then have the group say the prayer a first time.
- Deep Breaths and then talk about the importance of the holistic approach to our ministry: mind, body and spirit
- More deep breaths and ask folks to do a body scan and find places where they might be uncomfortable or distracting and spend a few moments more in deep breathing. Note: the relaxation response is elicited with deep abdominal breathing. Mostly this is a welcoming of the body and any distractions. Then have group read the prayer again
- More deep breaths and ask folks to search any thing they have brought in their minds that might be troubling or distracting. Continue with the breaths and have folks welcome those intrusions, acknowledge them and suspend all the striving. Then have group read the prayer again
- More deep breaths and ask folks to check in with their spirit, and the same exercise of deep breathing and welcoming and nurturing themselves. Then have group read the prayer again
- Should take around ten minutes

## Today's Objectives



- Discuss the dimensions of Vincentian Formation and the implications for Spiritual Advisors
- Discuss Spiritual Advisor roles and responsibilities in supporting the journey together to holiness.
- Utilize the resources and tools available to promote spirituality and create a reflective environment
- Promote the use of Vincentian Discernment in the creation of a culture of consensus in the conference



Review objectives

Optional to ask folks if these are the objectives they had in mind

Are there others? Perhaps write on white board or flip charts

Introduce a “parking lot” to assure we capture important feedback and questions while staying focused on a pretty ambitious agenda

# Agenda



- 9:00 - 9:15 Centering and Opening Prayer
- 9:15 - 9:20 Objectives and Agenda
- 9:20 - 10:20 What is Vincentian Formation?
- 10:20 - 10:30 Break
- 10:30 - 11:30 Spiritual Advisor Roles and Responsibilities
- 11:30 - 12:00 Resources and Reflections
- 12:00 - 12:45 Lunch
- 12:45 - 1:45 Resources and Reflections
- 1:45 - 2:00 Break
- 2:00 - 2:55 Vincentian Discernment and Consensus
- 2:55 - 3:00 Closing Prayer



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Review the agenda for the day, entertain any questions or concerns



# What is Formation?

A Journey, not a Destination



During the next hour, we will examine Vincentian Formation, as expressed through a paper called “Vincentian Formation, A Foundation Document.”

## Formation is a Process of Becoming



- Rooted in the Sacraments
- Our missionary Church
- Our call to Pastoral Charity

***They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor.***

Lumen Gentium



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Formation is ongoing – it is not a thing that we do or a thing that happens separate from our vocation. It is not an event but a process; a process of becoming.

Becoming what?

Formation is rooted in the sacraments of our church, beginning with our baptism, through which we are bound to the Holy Spirit. As Catholics, we receive sacraments throughout our lives. Our living, our sacraments, our very being, all are part of our process of becoming; of becoming what?

Our church is by its nature missionary, and our mission as Vincentians is evangelical – to bring Christ’s saving word to all mankind. “The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God.”

“Vocation” comes from the Latin *vocare*, “to call.” Our Vincentian vocation calls us to works of Pastoral Charity. We are called to serve Christ’s poor. Our Vincentian Formation also is rooted in a very specific call to holiness. The Gospel of Luke expresses it this way:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Therefore, he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.”* (Luke 4:18)

Pope Paul VI, in *Lumen Gentium*, describes the apostolate of the laity, explaining that we all are called to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity.

## Our Vincentian Vocation



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.

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.



Our Rule describes the Vincentian vocation in this way:

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This short passage encompasses not simply the “what” (serving the poor,) nor the “how” (person to person,) but the **why**:

### **For love alone.**

Not the love of marriage or romance, not the love of friendship or brotherhood, but something more; something deeper; something that forms us – something that transforms us.

## Apostolate of the Laity

### *The Whole of Life*

“Spirituality is *life in Christ* and *in the Spirit*, which is accepted in faith, expressed in love, and inspired by hope...not a part of life, but the whole of life guided by the Holy Spirit.”

Pope Saint John Paul II



### Lay Spirituality

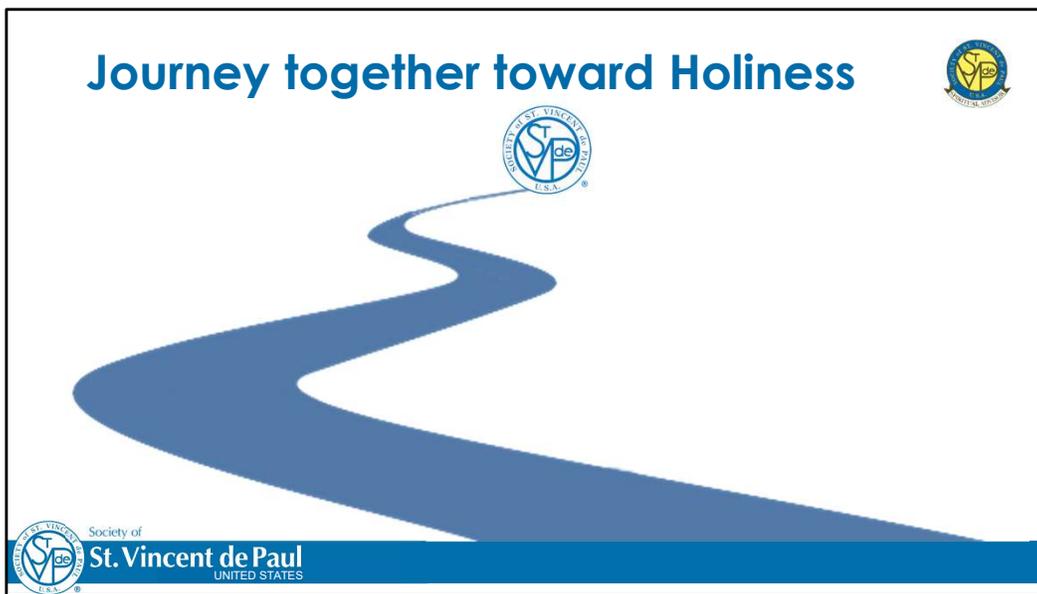
Pope Saint John Paul II taught that: “There cannot be two parallel lives in your existence as lay men and women: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility ... is the occasion ordained by Providence for a ‘continuous exercise of faith, hope, and charity.’”

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a lay association. Our church’s *Decree on Apostolate of the Laity* teaches that: “...lay spirituality should take its particular character from the circumstances of one’s state in life (married and family life, celibacy, widowhood), from one’s state of health, and from one’s professional and social activity. All should not cease to develop earnestly the qualities and talents bestowed on them in accord with these conditions of life and should make use of the gifts which they have received from the Holy Spirit.”

Vincentian spirituality applies to lay persons of varying vocations and professions, social and economic status, and talents and skills.

Our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam is our primary role model. He was one of us: layperson, husband, and father. Frederic was like us in all things. We can admire and imitate his person, spirit, and spirituality.

The genius of Vincentian spirituality is that it transcends age, sex, language, culture, color, and generations.



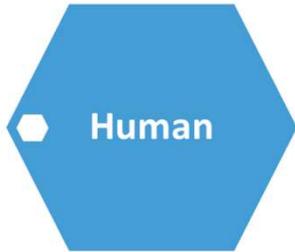
As we know, the primary purpose of the Society of St Vincent de Paul is the spiritual growth of its members.

We travel this pathway, this Vincentian Pathway, together.

This pathway carries us on our process of becoming...

*...of becoming what?*

## Dimensions of Formation



We can conceptualize our Vincentian Formation in four dimensions; dimensions that encompass our human form, our gifts, our calling, and our spirit.

We'll examine each one, beginning with Human Formation.

## The Basis of All Formation



- What if God were one of us?
- To be *authentically* human
- To be “newly created!”

***Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself."***

Redemptor Hominis



Human formation is the basis for all formation. Ordinarily human formation is thought of as one's "natural" side as contrasted with one's "spiritual" side. *However, what makes a person distinctively human is the spiritual dimension.* Within each person is a transcendence dynamic which calls us to realize our spiritual dimension. This realization is the work of grace.

In the 1990s, there was a song called "What if God Was One of Us?" The lyrics include:

*What if God was one of us  
Just a slob like one of us  
Just a stranger on the bus  
Trying to make His way home?*

In *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope St. John Paul II, writing of the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption, touches on this exact theme:

*Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself".*

What a remarkable insight! There has only been one perfect person, and He is Christ. Christ incarnate could have come to us as a warrior, a king, a man of wealth, but he did not. He could have made it look easy, but he did not.

He calls us to Himself by becoming a slob like one of us – a stranger on a bus; He teaches us that to be *authentically* human is not only to sit on a bus; that man does not live by bread alone. It is through love that we are newly created. John Paul continues:

*If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself.*

Formation is a process of becoming; of becoming what?

## Virtues: Foundation of Behavior



Cardinal	Theological	Vincentian
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prudence</li> <li>Justice</li> <li>Temperance</li> <li>Fortitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faith</li> <li>Hope</li> <li>Love/Charity</li> </ul> <p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; text-align: center;">αγάπη</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simplicity</li> <li>Humility</li> <li>Selflessness</li> <li>Gentleness</li> <li>Zeal</li> </ul>



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In the Aristotelian view, we are formed by our behavior. “If you want to become a builder, you build.” By extension, he argued, if we behave with virtue, we become virtuous.

The Cardinal Virtues, also known as the Human Virtues, predate the Church, and are nearly universally held. They help us to be a gentlemen, or ladies; to be respectable; to be good.

In his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul taught us the three theological virtues, which arise deep in our hearts. Without them, he taught, all else is “nothing.”

Our Patron St. Vincent de Paul offered the Vincentian Virtues, defining behaviors that help us to answer the call to pastoral charity; to form ourselves in answer to Christ’s calling to serve “the least among us.” The Vincentian Virtues express not only our *doing* but our *being*.

But Paul also told us very clearly that the “greatest of these” theological virtues was **love**.

In the Greek, the Scriptures use three different words that we translate as “love.” *Eros* (romantic love,) *philia* (brotherly love, or friendship,) and *agape*, sometimes translated as “charity.” *Agape* is not an emotion, but an act of will, and an act of faith; it is putting the needs of another before our own.

This is the love our Rule refers to when it says that we are called to serve “**for love alone**.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines *agape* this way:

**1822**

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.

*Agape* is God’s love, expressed through our devotional actions towards Christ in the person of His poor.

## Two Dimensions of Grace



### Joyful

“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Matthew 25:31-46

### Transformative

Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace...

They draw nearer to Christ...

They grow more perfect in love...

Rule, Part I, 2.2



Behavior – actions – are the center of Human Formation.

As Vincentians, we receive God’s Grace in the course of our Home Visits – the heart of our Vincentian ministry.

Through this work, through these actions, we receive God’s grace in two important dimensions.

First, we feel the joyful grace of knowing that we are fulfilling His will.

*“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.”*

St. Vincent often reminded his followers that Christ Himself had told us we would be judged by our actions to His poor as if it were done to Christ Himself. We receive this joyful grace of knowing we serve Him exactly as he asked us to serve.

Yet there is an even greater dimension of grace that we receive. When we pray with those we visit, when they – and we – are sometimes overwhelmed to the point of tears, we feel His presence among the “two or three” of us who, through prayer, are explicitly gathered in His name and in His will.

This grace forms us – and transforms us. It carries us along in this process of becoming.

Of becoming what?

## Dimensions of Formation



Let's turn now to the next of our four dimensions of formation: Spiritual Formation.

## Written on Our Hearts



- Made in God's image
- Called to live in community
- Formed by relationships

***"[F]ollowing the example of the Blessed Trinity, we must have but one heart and act with one mind as do the three divine Persons." - St. Louise de Marillac***



As we discussed, our spiritual dimension is what makes us fully, and uniquely, human. It is written on our hearts, even before we are born. It is in this spiritual dimension, not our arms and legs, that we are made in God's image.

It is also written on our hearts that we are to live in community; that joined with others – wives, husbands, children, friends, neighbors – we live and grow and are formed. We define ourselves through our relationships with others; we are formed by those relationships.

Blessed Frederic, in a letter to his friend Leonce Curnier in 1837, described the relationship of friendship as a cornerstone of our formation, explaining that it is strengthened by *"bonds stronger still than words: actions. I do not know whether you have observed that nothing creates intimacy between two men than to eat together, travel together, and work together..."*

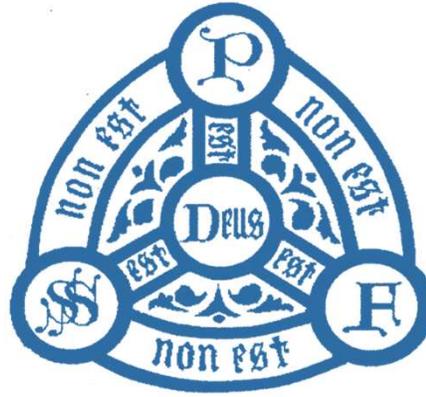
Indeed, we do grow closer to our friends when we go to a movie, eat lunch, or have a beer together. But Frederic goes on to explain that there are other sorts of actions that define and strengthen another character of friendship. Frederic says:

***"...if purely human acts have this power, moral acts have it even more, and if two or three come together to do good, their union will be perfect. Thus, at least, He assures us who says in the Gospel: "Truly, when you are gathered together in my name, I will be in your midst?"***

In this letter, he echoes St. Louise, who reminds us that the original example of a moral communion – a human communion, in St. John Paul's telling – is given to us by the Holy Trinity.

Louise taught that we are called to act, like the Trinity, with one heart.

## The Divine Life is a Shared Life



In this way, we see that the divine life is a shared life. We understand then, that our pathway towards this divine life also is shared.

Our Society, and our Conferences, and our relationships with those we serve, must define for us a true Community of Faith.

## A Community of Faith



Our Community of Faith in our Conferences is defined by our Essential Elements of Spirituality, Service, and Friendship.

For our spiritual formation, friendship is the basis of our community – our Conference; not just socializing or “hanging around” with each other, but:

- Moral friendship
- Spiritual friendship
- True friendship

## Formed by Relationships



“Vincetians 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.”

The Rule, Part I, 1.9

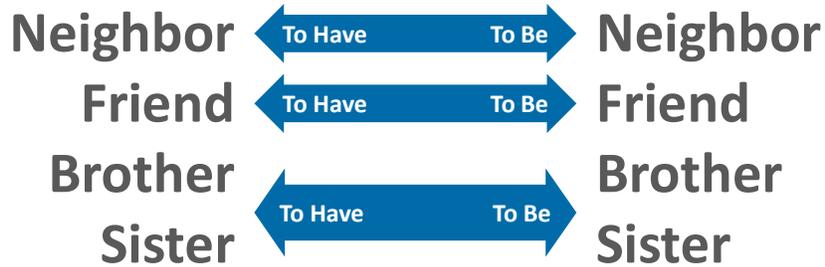


Our Community of Faith, our network of friends, includes those whom we serve. Our Rule reminds us that our relationships with the poor are based on trust and friendship.

We, and they, are truly formed through this shared life; this “connectedness” that is hardwired into our very humanity; into our hearts; into our souls.

We are formed through the communities of our conferences, but also, and more importantly, through our communion with those whom we serve – they, who are Christ to us, in spirit and in reality.

## Mutuality: “Help Which Honors”



Bl. Frederic wrote a famous essay entitled “Help Which Honors.” In it, he explained that **“help is humiliating when it appeals to men from below, taking heed of their material wants only, paying no attention but to those of the flesh, to the cry of hunger and cold, to what excites pity, to what one succours even in the beasts. It humiliates when there is no reciprocity, when you give the poor man nothing but bread, or clothes, or a bundle of straw, what, in fact, there is no likelihood of his ever giving you in return. . .”**

True friendship is mutual, not one-sided.

**“Help then becomes honourable, because it may become mutual, because every man who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation to-day, may to-morrow stand himself in need of a kind word, an advice, or a consolation, because the hand that you clasp clasps yours in return, because that indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves towards you when the old man, the mother, the little children shall have prayed for you.”**

Words matter. There is a reason we do not use the word “client” to describe those we serve. The Rule describes our relationship with those we serve as “friendship,” saying that we seek to understand them “as we would a brother or sister.”

To *have* a neighbor, you have to *be* a neighbor.

To *have* a friend, you have to *be* a friend.

To *have* a brother or sister, you have to *be* a brother or sister.

Clients do not have clients. It is a one-way relationship. It does not honor. We do not grow in spirit through that relationship.

## Spiritual Practices

- Prayer and meditation
- Spiritual reading and study
- The Liturgy and the Eucharist
- Service to others



Our Spiritual Formation is strengthened and encouraged through specific practices.

As Vincentians, we pray regularly at our meetings; before, after, and during our home visits; and most importantly, when we are alone. God speaks to us in the silence.

We take the time to read not only the words of the sacred Scriptures, but the writings of St Vincent and Blessed Frederic, whose wisdom guides us on this Vincentian Pathway towards becoming....becoming what?

We participate regularly in the Liturgy and partake of the Eucharist. Frederic made time daily for the Eucharist.

Finally, we must continue in our service to others, not merely as a duty; not merely as a distribution of material assistance; but as a spiritual practice, performed, as our Rule teaches, “for love alone.”

## Dimensions of Formation



It is easy to forget the importance of the Intellectual dimension of our Formation.

## Formation and Information



- The words and deeds of Jesus
- Skill development; education and training
- Strengthens spiritual integration by forming mind *and* heart



Through our intellect, our formation is built by information we learn through reading and study.

If we think of our intellectual formation as “studying for a test,” we soon realize that in His deeds and words during His time spent on earth, Jesus gave us the answers to the test!

Our study should begin with the words and deeds of Christ, set down in scripture. Recall Pope St John Paul’s teaching that “Christ fully reveals man to himself.”

As Vincentians, we also have a wealth of resources available to us not only in written form, but through person to person training and formation events. We grow together in spirit and holiness by teaching, learning, and studying together.

There is a Vincentian principle that recognizes the holistic nature of our formation; mind, body, and spirit together. Intellectual formation explicitly connects the mind and heart.

## The Gospels

Luke 10:25-37-

“Who was neighbor to him?

The one who treated him with compassion.

Then go and do the same.”



From a Vincentian point of view, few of Christ’s teachings could better represent our vocation than the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Christ asks, after sharing the story, “who was neighbor” to the injured man? Just as Blessed Frederic explained the importance of mutuality in our relationship with those in need, Christ also chose this term of mutuality: neighbor.

To have a neighbor, you have to be a neighbor.

More importantly, Jesus gives us the answer to the test!

**“GO AND DO THE SAME.”**

## The Rule is Our Way



*“Take your Rule seriously. All the parts of it. But especially the parts that call you to pray and grow closer to Christ. This Rule is a great gift precisely because it keeps you from becoming **mere social workers**. You are **followers of Christ**.*

*And this Rule is your Way.”*

Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, CM



One of the central documents we are given to read and study as Vincentians is our Rule. As Americans, we have a proud cultural tradition to react to rules by shaking our fist and saying: “You can’t tell me what to do!”

We think of a “Rule” as some bossy, bureaucratic set of instructions; of speed limits; of curfews.

But it isn’t! Our Rule is a spiritual document, not a legal document. Father Dennis Holtschneider once put it this way:

*“Take your Rule seriously. All the parts of it. But especially the parts that call you to pray and grow closer to Christ. This Rule is a great gift precisely because it keeps you from becoming mere social workers. You are followers of Christ. And this Rule is your Way.”*

May God bless social workers and the work they do! Vincentians are not social workers.

Father Dennis went on to explain that ours is a Rule in the exact same sense as the Rules of religious orders. The Congregation of the Mission has a Rule; the Daughters of Charity have a Rule; the Jesuits, the Franciscans...

In an earlier age, these rules were transcribed and copied by hand; perhaps only one or two copies might exist, and with a single mishap – water or fire, for example – you might lose even that one copy. The idea of the Rule was that, if everybody in that order is living by it, it could easily be rewritten simply by observing them.

It is just so with the Rule of the Society! It is not meant so much to be *prescriptive* as to be *descriptive*.



So rather than considering what our Vincentian Rule may be instructing you to do, try to read thinking:

“Is this a sentence an outside observer would write after watching my Conference?”

Do we “*try to understand (our neighbors’) problems as we would a brother or sister*”?

Do we, on our home visits, form “*relationships built on trust and friendship*”?

The Rule is less prescriptive than it is descriptive. – but does it describe you?

Consider deeply your own actions, your own heart, and ask: could an outside observer rewrite the Rule just by watching you?

## Dimensions of Formation



This fourth dimension of formation, Ministerial Formation, involves our call to *Pastoral Charity*.

Pastoral charity is “the virtue by which the Vincentian imitates Christ in his self-giving and service.” It is not just what the Vincentian *does*; it is his gift of self.

Pastoral charity determines one’s way of being, thinking, acting, and relating to people, especially to those who are poor and in need. Pastoral charity makes special demands on a Vincentian.

**“...as I have loved you.”**

- More than *concerned* with service!
- A visible sign of Christ's church
- Open to all possibilities for service



***“I am among you as one who serves.”***



We are more than simply *concerned* with service; it is, in the holistic sense, *who we are*. This poem, written by Mae Rush, a lady raising 10 children on a farm more than 100 years ago, expresses this idea beautifully. Close your eyes and contemplate these words:

### **WHAT GOOD HAVE I DONE?**

I often gaze at the western sky  
At the rays of the setting sun,  
And, I think that now as the day is o'er  
What is the good I have done.

What have I done to help a soul  
That was steeped in dark despair,  
Did I pause in the busy stride of life,  
For that soul to say a prayer.

Have I soothed the sobs of a weeping child,  
Who grieved for a broken toy.  
Was I there to console the mother,  
Who had lost her only boy.

Have I brought a little sunshine,  
To a drear and clouded life,  
And stayed the feet that were straying,  
Or the hand that held a knife.

If I can answer yes to myself  
As these thoughts go through my mind,  
I can wait with joy for the day to come  
I'm at peace with the hours behind.

We also recognize that a vital part of our vocation, and of our formation, is Servant Leadership. We are open to all possibilities to serve, including this. Again, Christ gave us the answer to the test, saying “I am among you as one who serves.”



In our culture, we usually associate the word “leader” with military commanders, heads of state, titans of industry. People who are “**large and in charge!**”

Christ modeled the behavior of a servant leader most memorably in the Gospel of John, when he knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. He explained that: “I have given you a model to follow, so that **as I have done for you, you should also do.**”

He could have taken human form as a warrior or a king or a man of wealth, but he did not. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus explained His (and our) model of leadership, saying:

“...the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In Luke (a passage we are told was especially inspirational to St Vincent de Paul, Jesus settles an argument as to who is the greatest among the disciples, explaining:

"I am among you as the one who serves."

Servant leaders are not “**large and in charge,**” but are “**small, and for all.**”

All Vincentians are called to servant leadership as part of our vocation; as part of our call to pastoral charity.

Do You Have What It Takes?



# AVAILABILITY

“When we show up, He shows up”



*(Formator: click when you say the word “availability”)*

You may question whether you have the ability to fulfill the call to servant leadership,. Or even to service of the poor. One of the best answers to that doubt comes from a young man named JD Douglas, who said:

All of us have a choice...as to how we'll follow Jesus' exhortation to care for “the least of these.” One of the biggest revelations I have had, which has really been foundational to everything I have done [in this ministry,] is that God is far more interested in our *availability* than He is in our *ability*. There is much freedom when you realize that it doesn't matter if you think you have a lot of gifts and abilities or none at all, because God is looking for us to come to Him just as we are to be the change in others' lives.

I don't have to be the world's greatest singer to be a worship leader; and you don't have to be the finest fill-in-the-blank to change the lives of others through serving in the ministry He has called you to.

When we show up, He shows up – and incredible things happen through us and to us.

# Personal Formation Plan



Formation Plan		
Dimension	Area for Personal Improvement One Step I can Take to Improve	How Can I help my Conference with This?
Human		
Spiritual		
Intellectual		
Ministerial		



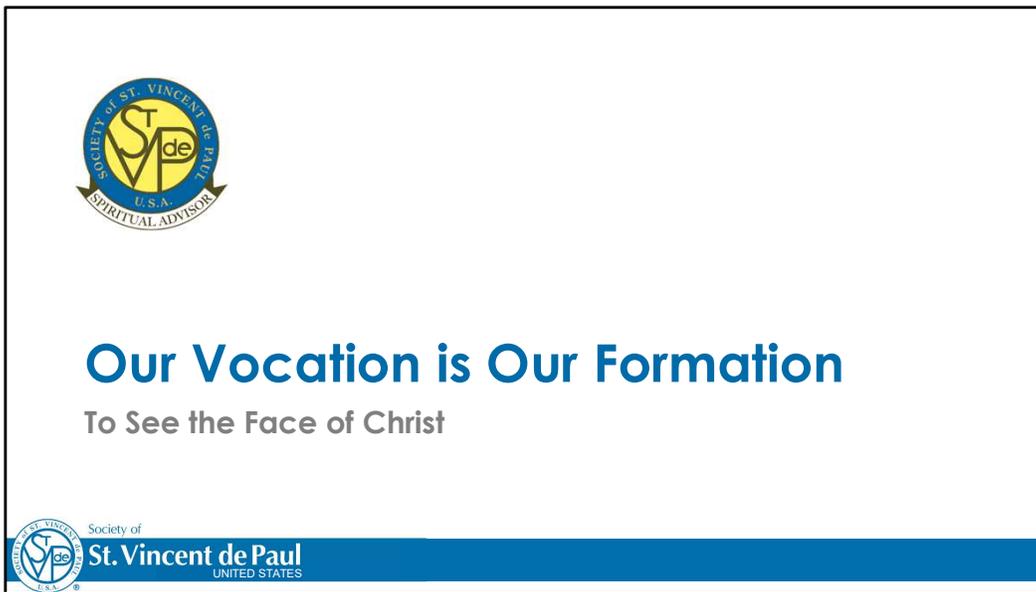
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Please take ten minutes to put some notes on the left column of the handout indicating one step you can take towards growth in each dimension of your personal formation.

For example, you might commit to reading from the Rule or Frederic's letters once per week; to pray a rosary daily.

But think of one specific thing you can do for each dimension.



Formation, as we have discussed, is a process of becoming. It is a lifelong process, and all of us choose the path we will take towards becoming...

...becoming what?

For Vincentians, our pathway is not separate from our mission or from our actions; our pathway of formation *is* our Vincentian Vocation.

## Vincentian Formation



- Charity is a means, not an end
- We are visible signs of Christ's Church.
- Be willing and open to practicing servant leadership.
- Formation prepares us for communion with Jesus.



We choose charity, love, *agape*, as our vocation, understanding that our works are a means, not an end.

We seek to be visible signs of Christ's church on earth; to answer the challenge posed to Blessed Frederic: to prove the worth of the Church in this modern world.

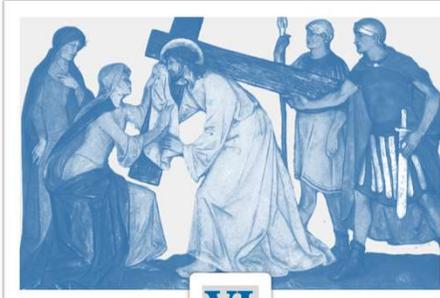
As part of our vocation, we accept the call to servant leadership.

We understand that our Vincentian Pathway leads us ultimately to communion with Christ.

## “Tu es Dominus et Deus meus”



V



VI

To Serve Christ and to Share His Burdens



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Frederic reminds us that because “we see with the eyes of the flesh,” we only can see the bloodied person before us. For Frederic, the suffering of the poor was a reminder that we serve the scarred and bloodied Christ. When we see the poor man, we should therefore throw ourselves at his feet and say, with the Apostle, “Tu es Dominus, et Deus meus” – you are my Lord and Master.

Yet it is so easy to become discouraged; to know that even as we help with an electric bill, a rent payment, some food, that this family will next month face the same hardships - or worse – and we may not be there to help.

We don’t always, or even usually, change the material circumstances of those we serve in a permanent way.

It is easy to say “I did not eliminate hunger, I only gave a meal; I did not give a home, but only temporary shelter.”

But we are reminded by the Stations of the Cross that Simon of Cyrene helped bear Christ’s literal cross, *and still He was nailed to it that very day;*

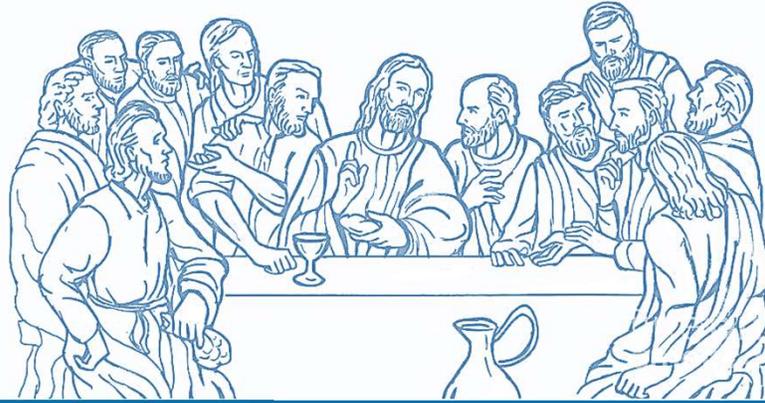
Veronica offered a cloth for Christ to mop his face, *and still he bled on the cross that very day.*

We do not serve the poor merely to fix problems. We serve the poor because they ARE Christ. We serve to share their burdens **for love alone**; to walk with them on their *via crucis*.

Veronica is a Saint for having done so. We seek, through serving Christ in the same way as she did, to become...

...to become what?

“...through you, to Me.”



At the last supper, Christ prayed that his disciples not only would be joined with God through Him, but that others, through them, would also be joined together in eternal life.

“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you ... that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.”

John 17:20-23

Christ reminds us here our journey is a shared one; that the divine life is a shared life; that we serve Him by serving one another; that by following our pathway, like his disciples, we may also bring others to Him.



So be perfect, just as your  
heavenly Father is perfect.  
Matthew 5:48



Formation is the process of becoming...

...perfect.

To be perfect, as St. Paul tells us, is to be complete; it is to be, as Pope St. John Paul explains, “authentically human.”

We are called to union with Christ, which we achieve, as Vincentians, through service of His poor.

If you are perfect, your journey is complete.

If you are human, this Vincentian Pathway leads to perfect union with Christ.

## Ten Minute Break

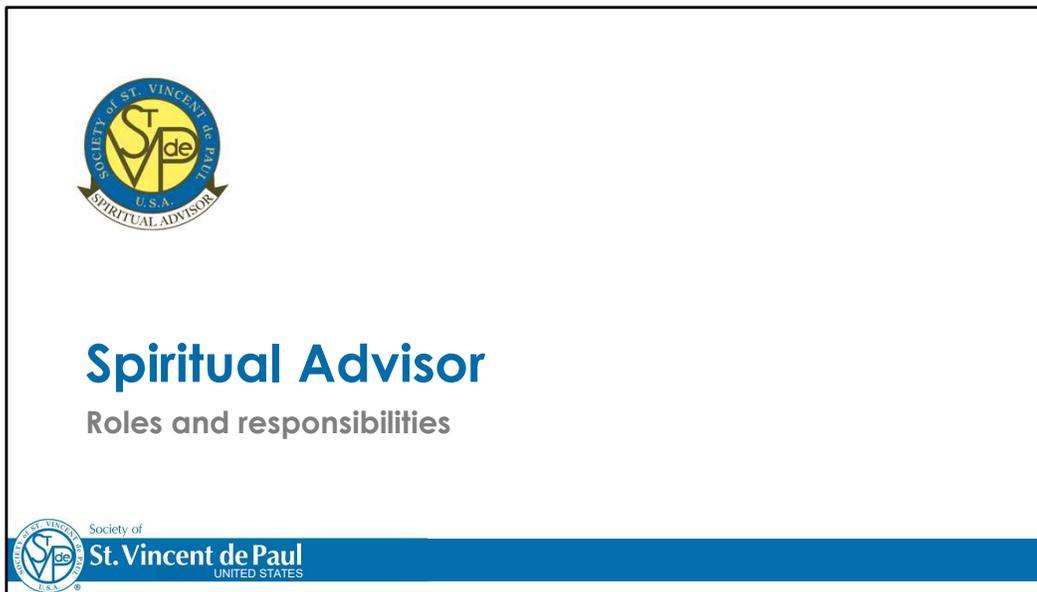


0:00



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Timer counts down in ten-second increments, and starts automatically.



How do spiritual advisors in the society support the ongoing formation of Vincentians?

What are the roles and responsibilities?

Spend the next hour discussing the unique calling and ministry of the spiritual advisor. Ask questions, take notes for discussion.

# What is our Vocation



**Vocare:** to be called

## **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.



It all starts with our Vocation.....Vocare.....to be called.

Have someone read this segment of the rule

A special ministry of presence to our brothers and sisters in need

All based in relationships with our neighbors, inspiring ourselves and those we serve grounded in faithful Hope

## What is our Vocation



### **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.



The Vincentian Vocation impacts all aspects of life and inspires us to be kind and compassionate in all we do.

Have someone read this segment

Opportunity to consider balance in life, with the ministry of family and professional life given the appropriate focus.

A sense of the Vincentian Vocation inspiring all aspects of our lives

## A Vocation of Love



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.

Rule, 2.2, The Journey Together Towards Holiness



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A vocation of LOVE. Focus on the primacy of the love of Jesus Christ in our practice with those we serve

Have someone read the Rule segment

Focus group on the way Love shows up in almost every sentence.

Introduce the spirituality of emptying of “self” to fill with divine love and charity, outpoured to those we serve and those that we serve with through the power of the Holy spirit

## Mutuality



In 1836, Frederic wrote, “We rejoice that the number of families that we are going to visit is growing, because it seems to us that they form, with the members who visit them, two parts of the same society. Those who are helped provoke and revive the charity of those who help them; In this way, they assist each other, they live in the same spirit and all find shelter under the mantle of St. Vincent de Paul.”



**Mutuality:** The importance of the aspiration that we can establish mutuality with those we serve, and in that space we feel the gratuitous giving and receiving of divine Love. A gift for Vincentians as well as our neighbors:

Read the slide and help folks to see how mutuality is created in this giving and receiving and we give and receive “in the same spirit and all find shelter under the mantle of St. Vincent de Paul”

And how does this happen? (tee up for next slide)

## Mutuality



“Help becomes honorable, because it may become mutual, because every man who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation today, may tomorrow stand himself in need of a kind word, an advice, or a consolation; because the hand that you clasp clasps yours in return; because the indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves toward you when the old man, the mother, the little children shall have prayed for you.” Frederick Ozanam. (October 21, 1848)

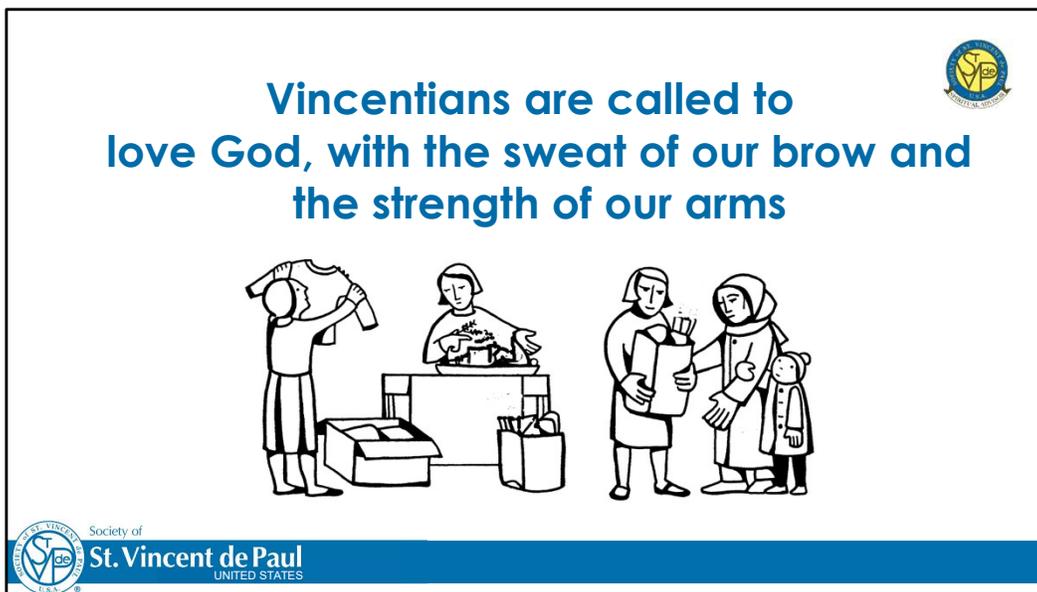


Read this powerful quote from Frederic

This is about meeting and honoring neighbors where they are, honoring their dignity, giving and receiving love.

Might ask: How does the spiritual advisor encourage mutuality and friendship in the conference?

- Recognize it and name it when it shows up in home visit sharing and in the relationships among conference members!



The call to love God through service

Vincetian vocation includes both action and contemplation/prayer

Many of our Vincetians might have a bias towards either action OR contemplation but the practice is a spiritual journey that includes BOTH

Spiritual Advisors have a central role in the encouragement to integrate spirituality throughout the meeting, modeling it through their participation

## We love God with the Sweat of our Brow



“Religious ideas can have no value whatever if they are not practical and positive. Religion is meant for acting more than thinking.”

– Frederic Ozanam 1834



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“Sweat of our brow...” St Vincent

Quote from Frederic is read by facilitator,

Encouragement of the importance of living out the gratuitous love we are imitating through person to person service

## We love God with the Sweat of our Brow



“Never have I prayed so well as in the street.”

- *Blessed Rosalie Rendu*



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“Sweat of our brow...” Bl. Rosalie Rendu

Focus here on the both/and. The importance of the ministry of care for those in need, and the way it is supported by our prayer life.

Role of Spiritual Advisor of holding the tension when folks have a bias for action or prayer. Many of us are “doers” and it is important to know that the “doing” has got to be spiritually grounded

## We love God with the Sweat of our Brow



“Knowledge of the reform is to be learned not so much by pondering over books or by discussions, as by going to visit the garrets in which the poor live, by sitting at the bedside of the dying, by feeling the cold which they feel.”

– *Frederic Ozanam*



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Read Quote.

Comment that this was part of an essay on the origins of socialism, written by Frederic in 1848

Encouragement of the importance of living out the gratuitous love we are imitating through person to person service

## We love God with the Sweat of our Brow



“It is Jesus himself we are going to serve. What respect and devotion we must have toward his suffering members! What patience and kindness must we not have toward these poor people.”

-*Sister Rosalie Rendu*



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A final quote by Rosalie about loving God with our actions:

Here Rosalie perfectly describes the spirituality of serving Jesus in the person of the poor

Respect and devotion, patience and kindness in relationship flows from the service grounded in the essential Charism of the Society, the imitation of Jesus' gratuitous love for all our brothers and sisters

## A Ministry of Love and Presence



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.

**Rule, 1.8 Reverence for the poor**

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.

**Rule, 1.9 Empathy**



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The ministry of love and presence at the core of our vocation and ministry

Have a person read 1.8 and focus on the grounding in all brokenness, the mutuality there, it is the suffering Christ we see and have compassion for.

Have a person read 1.9 and focus on our consciousness of our own frailty and weakness which makes it harder to judge others and helps to establish mutuality

How does the spiritual advisor encourage this embracing of humility? Lift it up during the meetings when it shows up in stories and attitudes toward one another.

## We Heed the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit



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We heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit

And how do we as Vincentians open our hearts, embrace and reveal our own vulnerability as an act of solidarity with the neighbor? “

We heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit”

## We Heed the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit



“Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of Thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.”

“Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created.”

“And the whole face of the earth shall be renewed.”

- Opening prayer by Bailly at first meeting



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The opening prayer is spoken together again

Used at the first meeting of the SVDP, by the lay spiritual advisor!

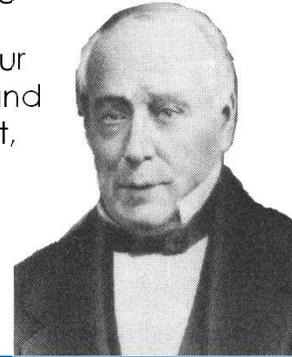
Spiritual Advisors must continually attend to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the conference meeting

## We Heed the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit



“Every one is differently acted upon by Divine grace; every one has his own way of doing good: Let us not impede the various manifestations of the Holy Ghost. Again our conferences are found in various places and good must be done according to the spirit, tendencies and necessities of those places.”

*-Emanuel Bailly 1844*



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We heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit

Appreciation of the diversity of ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests, person to person, conference to conference

Spiritual Advisors must be able to celebrate and support a variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests in the conference.

Here the importance of subsidiarity in the society can be emphasized, the importance of holding the divine tension between our standard (the rule) and the way it is expressed in various different conferences and councils.

That decision is made at the local level.

The spiritual advisor is always seeking to recognize the spirit in others and to lift it up and celebrate it.

# Subsidiarity



## **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).



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How does the rule describe subsidiarity?

Have a couple of people read aloud

Implications for spiritual advisors?

“Are we being sensitive to the cultural, social, and political” implications of our decisions?

“How can I support, encourage, lift up, the creative ideas that emerge in our discussions?  
”

“How do I punctuate discussions with prayer and meditation within the group?”

## We Heed the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit



“You are not the one who will make the matter succeed; it is the Holy Spirit to whom you are going to pray. It is the Holy Spirit who touches hearts and inclines them to good.”

*-Bl. Rosalie Rendu*



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### We Heed the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

Final reminder of how the Holy Spirit fills us with the energy and creativity to channel the love of Jesus in our ministries.

Read this out as facilitator or have a participant read it....and then hold for a few moments of silent reflection.

## Our Primary Purpose



The primary purpose of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

# TO INCREASE THE HOLINESS OF ITS MEMBERS

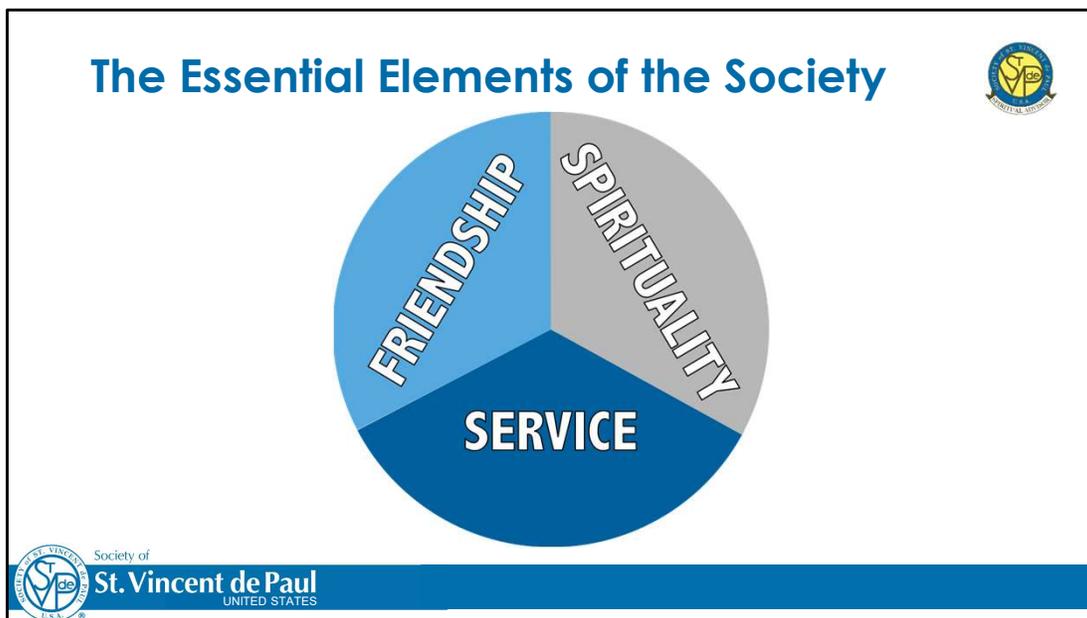
- The Rule, Part 1, Section 1.2



Back to basics: The primary purpose of the SVDP is to increase the holiness of its members.

Most folks know this is a Catholic Christian Spiritual pathway, but spiritual growth is the only process for becoming a Vincentian, a vessel of Love, inspired by God, ready to be poured out.

This has significant implications for the Spiritual Advisor!!



### **Spirituality:**

To bear witness to Christ and His church by showing them the faith of Christians inspires them to work for the good of humanity

- Showing Christ's face to the needy, and seeing Christ's face in the needy
- Evangelization by example
- Praying with those in need

### **Friendship:**

To bring together people of goodwill and to assist them by mutual example and true friendship in drawing nearer to the divine model by fulfilling His essential precept; namely, the love of God in the person of others

- Person to person relationship with those in need
- Home visitation to maintain the dignity of those in need
- Working together on special projects
- Collaboration with other conferences
- Praying together at retreats and festival meetings

### **Service:**

To establish a personal contact between its members and those who suffer, to bring to the latter the most efficacious and charitable aid possible, and to promote self sufficiency

- Material assistance (food, clothing, furniture)
- Financial assistance (Rent, utilities, travel)
- 100% volunteers
- Special works (stores, pantries, housing)

### **The Rule, Part III, Statute 1: The Essential Elements**

The Essential Elements of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are Spirituality, Friendship, and Service.

## The Spiritual Advisor in the Conference



- Inspires and challenges new works
- Assists in the development of Vincentian spiritual formation
- Provides guidance on spiritual matters
- Keeps focus on practical love toward the poor
- Reinforces our Core Values and keeps them at the forefront of our work



### The Spiritual Advisor in the conference

Review each aspect of the role in the conference;

- Inspires and challenges new works: tie back to encouraging subsidiarity and the implications for supporting the identification of poverty trends in the community served.
- Assists in development of Vincentian formation: Role in promoting Ozanam, uses SVDP resources and materials to advance formation
- Keeps focus on practical love toward the poor: Focus on the importance of both action and spirituality in our love toward the poor
- Reinforces Virtues and Values, and the spirit of Vincentian vocation

## Be a Spiritual Animator

- ✓ Bring to life
- ✓ Enliven
- ✓ Rouse
- ✓ Stir
- ✓ Stimulate



Be a Spiritual Animator:

Review Descriptors

Do you know anyone who has this power to rouse others? Think of Jesus and how people came alive when he spoke or acted. He stirred some longing and truth in them. We pray for his Spirit to “enkindle in us the fire of his love.”

Implications for Spiritual Advisor’s role in identifying others that can participate actively in the animation of the spirit in the conference.

Identify those that could take up the role (succession planning) and give them opportunities to participate

## To be a spiritual advisor



The word **Advisor** comes from Anglo-French *aviser* "to look at, examine, consider, inform."



### To be a Spiritual Advisor

Read slide, *aviser* : *the meaning*: "to look at, examine, consider, inform."

Contrast with "Spiritual Direction/Director." The Spiritual Advisor journeys WITH fellow members as an animator, encourager, partner, friend.

## Why is Spiritual Growth Critical?



- Keeps us focused on our true mission
- We can't give to others what we don't have ourselves
- Helps in challenging situations
- Invokes the Holy Spirit in all activities



### Why is Spiritual Growth Critical?

Focused on our true mission: the primary purpose of the Society for the growth in the spirituality of the members because:

We can't give to others what we don't have ourselves. A special accountability to model the virtues, especially in difficult situations/relationships

We need the grace of the Holy Spirit especially in difficult and challenging situations

So a spiritual advisor must seek and call on the Holy Spirit during ALL parts of the meetings.

## Spirituality is our bedrock

- Assure time for prayer & reflection
- Provide funds for resources
- Provide books on Vincentian spirituality, Saints & Blesseds
- Encourage Spiritual Advisor to participate in service
- Express appreciation for the Spiritual Advisor's contribution
- Keep Spiritual Advisor "in the loop"



Spirituality is our bedrock: Review the “shoulds”

These are examples of ways in which the Spiritual Advisor supports spirituality during our conference gatherings.

Obstacles to Incorporating Spirituality into Conference Meetings:

**Unclear about role**

**Feel inadequate for the role**

**Meeting structure cuts off reflection**

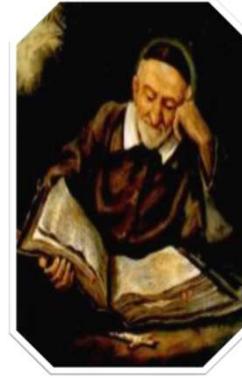
**Members reluctant to discuss feelings**

This workshop should help alleviate several of these concerns.

## Help develop Vincentian Spiritual Lives



1. Imitate lives of Founders
2. Love God “in the strength of our arms & the sweat of our brow”
3. See Christ in the Poor
4. Be led by the Spirit, then Providence makes works possible
5. Live our Virtues –Simplicity, Humility, Zeal, Gentleness, Selflessness



Assist development of Vincentian Spiritual Life

Review the five goals for Vincentian Spiritual life

The Vincentian way of spirituality is a certain way of being. These are the 5 important themes of Vincentian Spirituality:

1. Reading - Absorbing the example of the lives of our founders & patrons.
2. Showing love of God in **action**.
3. God reveals self to us in the person and issues of the poor, and our faith response is to do something about it.
4. Always attentive to the inspiration of the Spirit; trusting God will provide the means for what is asked of us.
5. Our virtues are those which make the poor feel at home with us.

## Responsibilities of Conference Spiritual Advisors



### At Conference Meetings:

- ❖ Lead/delegate opening and closing prayers
- ❖ Utilize published Society resources or provide appropriate Vincentian or scriptural readings
- ❖ Lead discussion/reflection after each reading
- ❖ Insure all meetings are conducted in a spirit of Vincentian friendship

(Spiritual Advisor Guidelines, Part III, B )



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### Responsibilities of Conference Spiritual Advisors at Conference meetings:

#### Review the responsibilities

These Responsibilities are from the Spiritual Advisor Guidelines (Pages 14 and 15 in the revised manual). The first responsibility of the conference spiritual advisor is to be the spiritual leader at the meeting. This includes the prayers and discussion, but also maintaining the milieu of Vincentian Friendship:

- When differences arise, calling for time out, listening to one another, and prayer
- Keeping the focus on loving those who are poor as Christ does (kind, gentle, nonjudgmental, etc.)
- Being open to the Spirit for new or revised works & approaches.

## Responsibilities of Conference Spiritual Advisors



### Commissioning of New Members

- Choose an appropriate time & occasion
- All members should annually renew their commitment

### Attending Eucharist Together

- Celebrate Eucharist together for six Vincentian feasts
- Commissioning/Commitment at Mass

### Special Events

- Collaborate with Council on spiritual development
- Encourage Conference members to attend training, liturgies, and social events



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## Review of Vincentian Celebrations

Note: Reinforce re: Seek the help of the Council Spiritual Advisor to set up retreats, ongoing formation, etc

### **Statute 9: Festival Meetings and Conference Masses**

Conferences and Councils celebrate liturgical ceremonies, particularly Vincentian ceremonies, throughout the year, endeavoring to maintain a spirit of friendship among the members.

The Council of the United States has designated six days for religious observances. On these occasions, the members of Conferences and Councils demonstrate the spiritual nature of the Society by attending the Eucharist together:

- Ozanam Sunday (the last Sunday of April)
- The feast day of Blessed Frederic Ozanam (September 9)
- The feast day of St. Vincent de Paul (September 27)
- The Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the Society (December 8)
- A Conference Mass celebrated at least once a year for all members, including spouses and children. During this Mass, it is most appropriate to commission new members into the Conference, pray for those we have visited, pray for our benefactors, pray for the poor, pray for the deceased members, and for continued good work.
- Another feast day of local custom, e.g., December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

## Inspire & challenge toward new works



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Provide inspiration and challenge toward new works

The picture depicts the diversity of talent and spirit with Vincent and Jesus in the middle.

When a Spiritual Advisor listens in the group, they become aware of how God is speaking to them in the needs of the poor of today (e.g. hearing the same unmet need repeated in meeting after meeting). That is how Vincent experienced God and Christ in the Poor. He believed God revealed Self in the events and concerns of the poor. Vincent responded to God by organizing actions to meet those needs. (Doesn't have to be a whole new work, maybe just gathering information on resources available or advocating for a service with the government officials).

Begin to discuss the role of the spiritual advisor in promoting good dialogue (a balance of advocacy for a position and inquiry so that all are understood)

This is the beginning of the role of the spiritual advisor in promoting a “culture of consensus” in the conference.

## Desired Outcomes – Members to See



- The link between service and holiness
- Conference members as a faith community
- Each moment as an opportunity for holiness
- The face of Christ in everyone served
- Ministry is impossible without the Eucharist and regular prayer & reflection, personally and with other Vincentians



Desired outcomes; What we want to happen in the conference

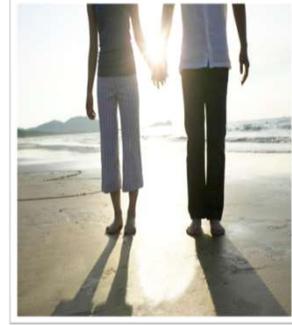
Review the outcomes

Essentially, We evaluate our effectiveness as Spiritual Advisors by assessing whether our members grow in these hoped for outcomes.

Important to engage the conference members in dialogue around how the formation materials and experiences are working for them. Spiritual Advisors must be hungry for feedback that makes them more effective in the role

## Reflection Questions

1. What kind of support do you need from your Conference?
2. What obstacles are you facing in carrying out your role?



Reflection questions:

Three minutes in silence

Five minutes in table discussion

Ten minutes in plenary

Opportunity to share practices, discuss obstacles. Use flip chart or white board if available so you can start identifying feedback themes.

## Spiritual Advisor

- Selected by the Council or Conference President
- Ordained or Lay
- Dedicated to learning and sharing Vincentian Spirituality



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### Spiritual Advisor Qualifications

Quick review of the slide

Ordained or Lay but operating out of a Vincentian Frame of Reference

This slide could generate questions or concerns about the role of the priest as Spiritual Advisor, especially if they do not understand and support Vincentian Spirituality

Facilitator determines if now is a time to hear out the concerns, or post to the parking lot for later discussion, or discussion at breaks.

# Spiritual Advisor Guidelines



“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 Advisor is very important.”

Rule, 3.13

- Focus on Vincentian Spirituality and Vocation
- Animators, facilitating the spirit at all levels
- Promotion of the Mission of the Society
- Cultivating **friendship** among members



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## Spiritual Advisor Guidelines

Quick review of the rule,

Focus on Cultivating friendship among members as Spiritual Advisor, calling for a balance in the elements of Spirituality, Service, and Friendship.

The work of gently but persistently modeling the behaviors we are trying to encourage

## Spiritual Advisors & Formators Work Together



- **Spiritual Advisors** establish a Regional Vincentian Spirituality Committee
- **Formators** create a Regional Formation Plan
- **Spiritual Advisors** serve the Region, Councils, and **Conferences**
- **Formators** support the Region and the Councils
- Both support a network of formators, spiritual advisors, and presenters



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Describe purpose to show how roles at all levels work together

Spiritual Advisors focused on Spirituality at all levels and support all formation activities at the level of service

Formators focused on deployment of formation programs at the regional and council levels

Spiritual advisors engage the conferences in the spirituality and formation plans designed at the national, regional, and council levels.

# Planning



## Conference Formation Plan

Nat'l/Reg'l Councils	Diocesan Council	Conferences
National Assembly	Ozanam Orientation	Spiritual Reflections
Invitation to Renewal	Spiritual Advisor Workshops	Conference Retreats
Getting Ahead	Leadership Workshops	Vincentian Feast Days
Poverty Institute	Home Visit Workshops	Serving in Hope
Voice of the Poor	Spiritual Retreats	Vincentian Celebrations
	Systemic Change	
	Council Assembly	



### Planning at the conference level

Review the flow from national to council to conference and show how we all work together:

National Assembly forms and informs leaders and advisors and members, the Ozanam orientation is created at the national level and deployed through each regional and council formation plan, and the conferences have available a wealth of formation and prayer materials for deployment in the conference.



## Resources and Reflections

Spiritual Advisor Handbook and Other Resources



Okay, so you're a Spiritual Advisor. Now what?

In this section, we'll introduce you to the Spiritual Advisor Handbook, as well as a number of other specific resources for your own formation, and for your Conference.

# The Spiritual Advisor Handbook

- Revised in 2021
- A more integrated approach
- Additional, practical tools

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We used the previous Spiritual Advisor Handbook for about ten years, and it is a rich collection of resources. In fact, the wealth of resources available to us is both a blessing and a burden! Especially as a new Spiritual Advisor, it is easy to be overwhelmed by it all.

We wanted to take an approach that was more integrated; presenting the information in a way that could be useful to a brand new Spiritual Advisor and a very experienced one; both a collection of resources, and a simple “how-to.”

**Other SVdP publications recommended to be purchased with the Handbook:**

- **Rule (pocket-size)**
- **Vincentian Pathway: Personal and Conference versions**
- **Vincentian Meditations** – Thomas McKenna, CM
- **The Spirituality of the Home Visit**
- **Serving in Hope-Module I**

We’ll talk about each of these a little bit today – not just to talk about what they are, but more importantly, how you can use them; how they are meant to make your role easier!

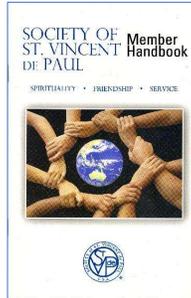
In addition, there is an extensive list of resources in the book that you may wish to explore on your own.

# The Member Handbook



## For New Members

Introduces the Vincentian vocation; a call to grow together in spirituality, friendship, and service. Welcomes them to the journey toward holiness



## For All Members

Deepens and reignites the fire in their hearts, and enables all members to live their Vincentian vocation, journeying together toward holiness



The Handbook does not replace Ozanam Orientation!

It also does not replace the Rule, the Manual, or anything else. Think of it as the “Cliff’s Notes” version of training and formation.

Often new members are not able to attend Ozanam Orientation for a while. You might also consider giving these to prospective members, to help them discern their vocation.

And for current members, sometimes inspired by the questions from new members, the handbook is a refresher!

For the Spiritual Advisor, whose role includes helping prospective members discern their vocation, this is an ideal “all-in-one” tool.

## The Rule



“Since the beginning of the Society, a Spiritual Advisor has been appointed to **help foster spiritual life** within the Conferences and Councils **under the guidance of the Holy Spirit** and **in conformity with the Rule** and Statutes of the Society.”



Our most important resource is our Rule. Exactly what does the Rule say about Spiritual Advisors?

(Read, or have a participant read the slide)

Ask for thoughts, and discuss:

- Is this detailed or specific enough?
- Does this tell you exactly what to do?
- Can you think of things you might do that could be described this way?
- *Remember that idea of whether the Rule could be rewritten just by observing you?*

## Responsibilities

- Lead the Prayers and Spiritual Reflection at Conference meetings.
- Collaborate with the Conference President, Council Spiritual Advisor, and Senior Formator to offer programs for formation of members.
- Ensure that all meetings are conducted in a spirit of Vincentian Friendship
- Mentor all Vincentians through the use of the Vincentian Pathway.



1. This is the best understood aspect of the role!
2. Developing a formation plan is very important! SVdP offers so many, varied, and rich resources, but without a plan, we can easily overlook many of them.
3. As Spiritual Advisors, we sometimes act as the “conscience of the Conference,” keeping our meetings on track and in the Vincentian spirit.
4. The last point is related to the second; our formation plans should guide members on the Vincentian Pathway – and the Vincentian Pathway book is a great resource to help with this!



Remember this idea?

One of the roles of the Spiritual Advisor is to help our Conference Meetings look like the gatherings that are described in our Rule.

Again – not to try to interpret the Rule as a set of instructions, but to consider whether its words might be written by any stranger observing your Conference.

We'll reconvene after lunch and continue this section.



Timer counts down in ten-second increments, and starts automatically.

## Our Conference Meetings



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

The Rule, 3.3.1



**A Community of Faith**



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So what are the words the Rule uses to describe Conference Meetings?

First, it says (on slide) that we meet *regularly...usually weekly*. Why so often? What if we don't have that many home visits to discuss? Can't we discuss minor "business" by email or telephone?

But the Rule does not describe these meetings as "business meetings," but instead says this:

*“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.”*

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

Our primary purpose is to grow in holiness together. Our Conference is not just a club – it is a community of faith, and the meetings are a time to grow together in spirit!

## Spirituality

- Am I holy enough?
- Reflections vs. Homilies
- Our works as a means, not an end



As a new (or prospective) Spiritual Advisor, it's easy to feel intimidated; it's easy to feel as if you do not have the knowledge or experience; it's easy to ask:

*“Am I holy enough?”*

The short answer is **“YES!”**

Remember, you are not called to be a professor or a priest; you are called to be committed to learning, and to encouraging others in their own formation.

That is why Spiritual Advisors don't prepare homilies; we prepare and lead reflections.

Our reflections set the tone for our meetings, and help to remind our fellow Vincentians that our works – our home visits - are a means, not an end.

They are our means towards growing closer to Christ.

## Spiritual Reflection

“...members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith...”



WEEKLY REFLECTION	SERVING IN HOPE	APOSTOLIC REFLECTION
Free download Read & Reflect	Formation Vincentian Pathway	Personal Corporate


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So...if not a homily, then what?

The Rule does not give us much specific guidance about the Spiritual Reflection, but it does say that “...members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith...”

It is so very important to always share our reflections together in our community of faith; to grow together in Holiness through that sharing! We share honestly, we listen openly, we grow together.

As a Spiritual Advisor, it is not your role to prepare homilies, but to encourage all members to reflect and share.

There are several excellent means for conducting the Spiritual Reflection at the meeting.

First (easiest!) is the Weekly Reflection, which you can download from SVdPUSA.org (example, and notes on how to use it, are in the Handbook.)

*Open to Tab 2, P. 19 of the Handbook; discuss how to conduct this type of reflection*

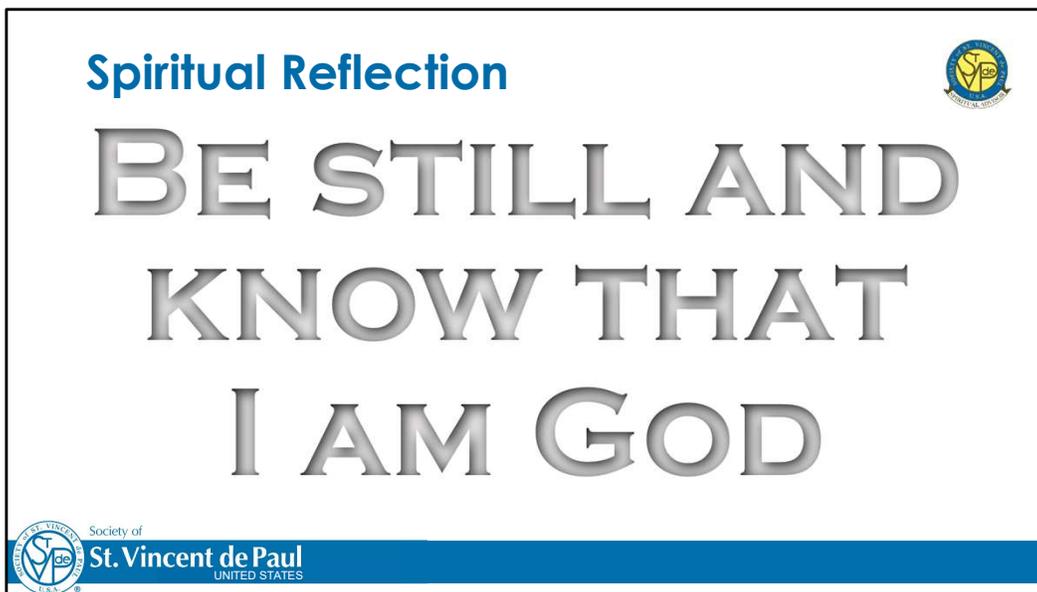
Second, the *Serving in Hope* books each include about six different sections. Each of these sections may be used as a reflection for a single meeting, or an entire module could serve as the basis for a day long Conference Retreat!

*Open to Tab 2, P. 20 of the Handbook; discuss how to conduct this type of reflection  
Also Tab 8*

A more advanced, but very rewarding type of reflection is the Apostolic Reflection. We'll talk in a few minutes about another tool you can use to plan for this type of reflection, but the Apostolic reflection can be a workshop all by itself!

The Handbook contains two excellent papers by Fr Hugh O'Donnell on the Apostolic Reflection – these two papers are meant to be read together:

- Vincentian Discernment (Tab 12 )
- Apostolic Reflection (Tab 11)



*(For best effect, stand silently for about ten seconds before saying a word!)*

When we reflect together, we always follow any readings with a moment of silent reflection. It is important to remember that this “designated” moment is not the only time to welcome the silence!

When we ask members to share their own thoughts, we might be met with silence. When this happens, do not assume it is because minds and hearts are blank, or that members are not engaged. Rather, they are likely still contemplating, reaching their own understandings; listening to God.

Don't interrupt!

Don't be afraid of the silence.

It is in the silence that God speaks to us!

## Friendship



**“The session is nearly always concerned with business, it seems long.”**

The friendship that unites us with each other unites us with our neighbors in need.



Are the members of your Conference open to making spirituality central to your meetings? Do your meetings seem to focus more on “business?”

**That quote is from Bl. Frederic, describing the meetings of the very first Conference, just two years after it was founded!**

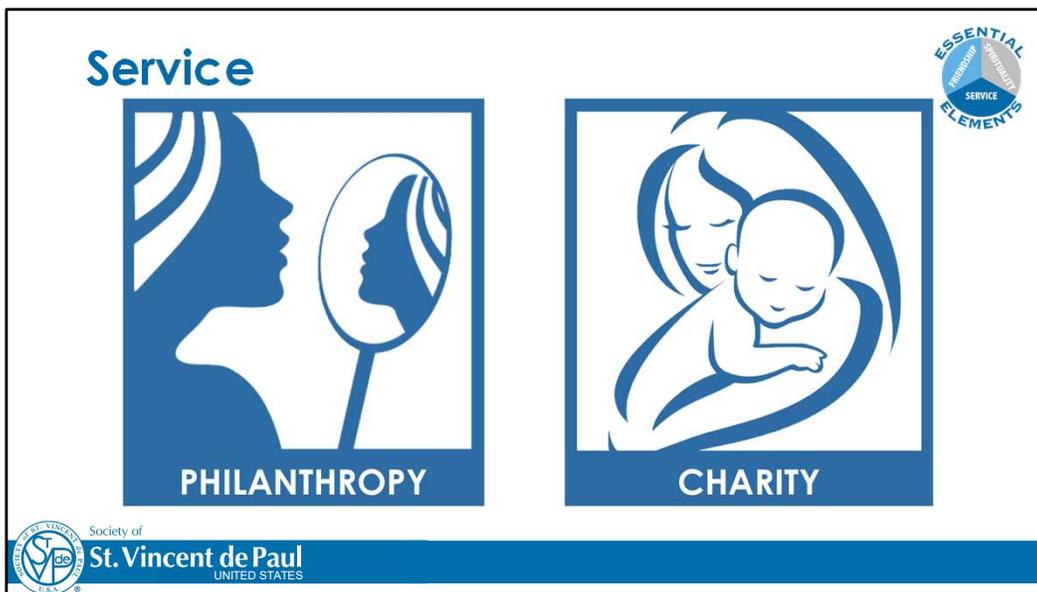
That natural human tendency is nothing new, and it is not a reason for Spiritual Advisors to be discouraged! It is the reason you are there!

One of our Essential Elements is Friendship. It is Friendship that keeps our Conference Meetings focused on our primary purpose, but it is a special character of Friendship.

In a letter to Lèonce Curnier in 1837, Frederic explained the importance of friendship in our meetings, and its relationship to spirituality:

*It must be agreed, however, that friendship being a harmony between souls, it cannot subsist in a prolonged absence, unless it is given from time to time certain signs of good accord, and these signs can be two-fold: words and actions. Words borne on faithful paper apprise him who forgets that he is not forgotten. They dissipate anxieties, mingling common annoyances and sorrows. It is truly an epistolary meeting where one always gains and never loses. However, there are bonds stronger still than words: actions. I do not know whether you have observed that nothing creates intimacy between two men than to eat together, travel together, and work together; but **if purely human acts have this power, moral acts have it even more, and if two or three come together to do good, their union will be perfect.** Thus, at least, He assures us who says in the Gospel: "Truly, when you are gathered together in my name, I will be in your midst."*

The friendship that unites us with each other unites us with our neighbors in need.



We're not social workers. We're not simply "volunteers." We serve those in need, as our Rule reminds us, "for love alone."

Our service is *charity*, not *philanthropy*. Frederic once explained the difference between the two:

**"Philanthropy is a vain woman for whom good actions are a piece of jewelry and who loves to look at herself in the mirror. Charity is a tender mother who keeps her eyes fixed on the infant she carries at her breast, who no longer thinks of herself, and who forgets her beauty for her love."**

- Frederic Ozanam

This understanding should guide not only how we approach our Home Visits (and other works) but how we discuss them in our meetings.

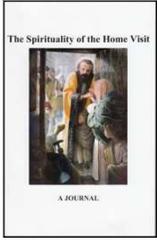


## Home Visitation Reports



“Members who personally encounter the needy individual or family are assumed to have a special insight into the best way to give help.”

**Neighbor**  
**Friend**  
**Brother/Sister**





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Our Manual reminds us to always give the highest deference and consideration to what the Home Visit Team presents to the Conference. They have spent 30 minutes, an hour, sometimes more visiting a home, getting to know a neighbor in need. We listen with the assumption that they have *special insights*.

As a Spiritual Advisor, helping the Conference to keep this in mind is part of your role! We do not gather together to criticize each other, or to audit the lives of neighbors we have not even met.

There are some simple practices that can help us to focus on the spiritual nature of the home visit! First, as we discussed earlier, remember the meaning and implication of the words we use. Encourage members to refer to those we visit not as “clients” (the C word!) but as neighbor, friend, brother, sister - words that remind of our mutual relationship. A relationship, as the Rule reminds us, is “based on trust and friendship,” leading us to “understand their troubles as we would a brother or sister.”

Would a stranger write those words to describe our home visit reports?

Second, some conferences place a chair at the front, or center of the meeting room. It is meant to represent the neighbors we are discussing. If all members imagine that the person they are talking about is sitting right there, it will change the character of the conversation!

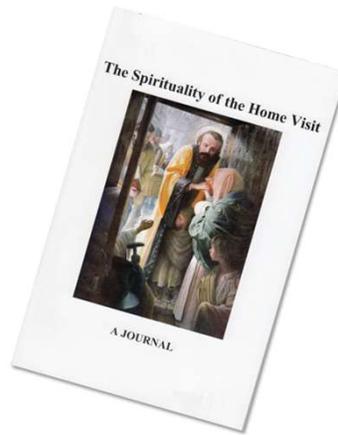
**“Our friend, our Lord, is in our midst.”**

Finally, consider using selected Home Visit reports as subjects for Apostolic Reflection to open the meeting. Encourage members to use the Home Visit Journal individually.

As often as possible, find ways to remind your fellow Vincentians that our service is primarily a means to draw us closer to Christ.

## Home Visit Journal

- Personal Reflections
- Shared Reflections
- For *all* Vincentians



A tool included with the Spiritual Advisor Handbook is the Home Visit Journal, but we encourage Conferences to purchase them for all members!

In this journal, Vincentians can write down their thoughts and feelings following home visits; reflecting actively as a means towards their own spiritual growth.

Our works are only a means!

We can also use reflections shared by members with the rest of the Conference as the basis for an Apostolic Reflection.

This is a very powerful resource, and it brings to mind Christ's questioning of his disciples after they had returned from a mission.

"What have you learned?"

## Using the Journal



1. Reflect on your feelings
2. Where you found God's presence
3. Did you experience mutuality
4. Reveal the Vincentian Virtues
5. Reflect and review



*Ask participants to open the Home Visit Journal to Page 17-18.*

Explain that one might not write out a response to every single question on every single visit, but that the reflection is meant to focus how we view our visits; how we can use them to draw closer to Christ. The reflections remind us that we have seen the face of Christ.

## Journal Questions



- What I would do differently if I could do it over?
- What insights will I take to the next visit?
- What will I share about the visit at my next Conference meeting?



*Still on Page 17-18.*

Critically, reflecting on our visits makes us better Vincentians, and sharing what we have learned is how we contribute to our community of faith in our Conference meetings.

As a Spiritual Advisor, consider asking members to share a specific reflection of theirs as the focal point of your Spiritual Reflection from time to time!

As a Conference Retreat idea, you might also ask all members to bring a home visit reflection to share.

These types of reflections are a natural basis of Apostolic Reflections, exactly following Christ's own habit of asking his disciples to reflect on their own missions. St Vincent followed this practice with his followers as well.

# The Vincentian Pathway

- Ozanam Orientation!
- Individual & Conference
- 4 Aspects & 4 Levels



The Vincentian Pathway we follow in our personal formation begins with Ozanam Orientation, but it shouldn't end there!

When we talked about both "Intellectual Formation" and "Spiritual Formation" this morning, we emphasized the importance of continued reading and study, along with shared reflection.

This book, "Walking the Vincentian Pathway," is a simple guidebook to help to navigate the many Vincentian resources available. (Some people joke that it is like a "Webelos Handbook" where you can check off your progress towards a badge of rank, but we don't award badges!)

There are two versions (personal and Conference) and are both included with the Spiritual Advisor Handbook. The structure is the same, but one is intended for personal, self-guided study, while the other is intended to help in developing a Formation Plan for the Conference.

The book follows four different aspects of the Vincentian Vocation through four different levels of depth.

*(Ask participants to take the individual version out as you advance the slide)*



The pathway is framed around four aspects of our Vocation, which include the three Essential Elements, plus Servant Leadership.

*(Emphasize the importance of Servant Leadership as central to our vocation!)*

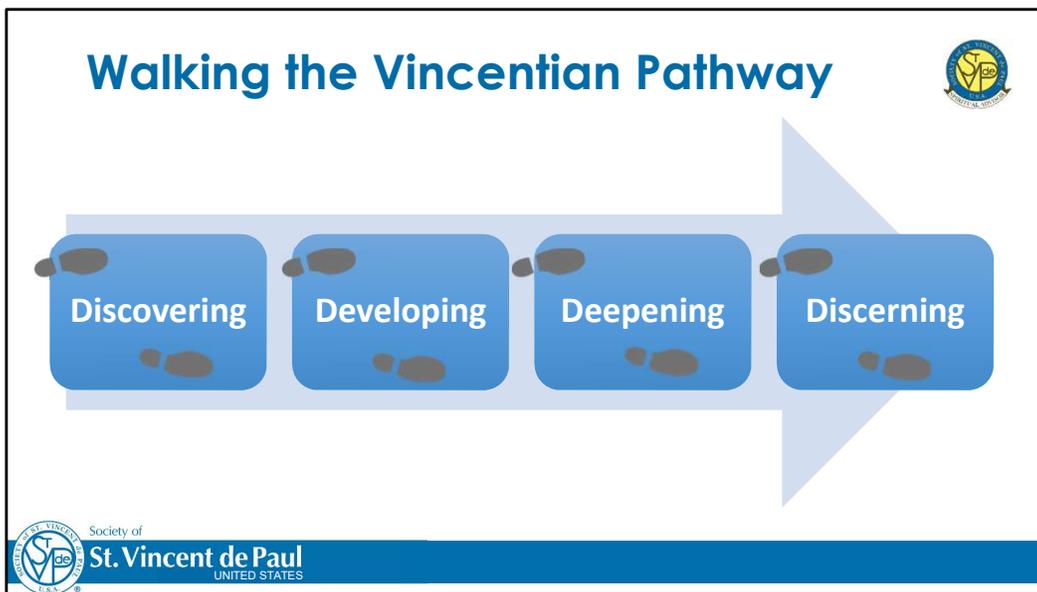
*Discuss how we use each of the essential elements as a focal point. Notes:*

**Spirituality:** Will root you in a clear understanding of the Vincentian Spirituality which underlies your Vincentian Vocation.

**Friendship:** Will provide you with the ways to gather the support, advice, and encouragement you Need for Your Vincentian Journey.

**Service:** Will guide you to See exciting new ways to serve with a Vincentian heart, so that you will be able to strengthen and deepen your current service.

**Servant Leadership:** Will lead you to become a true Vincentian Servant Leader in the spirit of Jesus and our founders.



There are four main sections of the book, each one designed for a different level of depth and understanding of each of the four aspects of our Vocation.

You will find that the content is not “linear.” In other words, at no point will it be recommended to sit down and read the entire Manual. Rather, those sections of the Manual (and other resources) that pertain most appropriately to the specific aspect, at the specific level of depth, are grouped together.\*

This approach may seem familiar – it is similar to the way our daily and weekly readings are organized around the Liturgical Year.

*(Select just one brief example of a recommended reading for each level of depth)*

**Discovering**

**Developing**

**Deepening**

**Discerning**

\* *Of course* we encourage everybody to go ahead and read all of the resources in full at any time – just as the Church encourages us to read all of the Bible at any time! The purpose of the Pathway is just to organize our study around specific areas of focus, and in some cases, introduce members to resources that may be new to them.

## Other Resources



- **Spiritual Advisor Handbook, Sections 4-12**
- **Turn Everything to Love** by Robert P. Maloney, CM
- **Faces of Holiness** by Robert P. Maloney, CM
- **A Heart on Fire** Apostolic Reflection with Rosalie Rendu
- **Vincentian Celebrations**
- **Online: [famvin.org](http://famvin.org) and [vincentians.com](http://vincentians.com)**



*Be mindful of time. You can move very quickly through this and the next slide if time is short.*

*Only discuss each of these items if you have time to spare, because you need to leave 5-10 minutes for a table work exercise/discussion!*

### **Spiritual Advisor Handbook, Sections 4-12**

Have participants turn to Tabs 4-12, and briefly introduce the resources there if time allows. (Tab 4 is literally a very long categorized list of resources!)

**Turn Everything to Love** by Robert P. Maloney, CM

**Faces of Holiness** by Robert P. Maloney, CM

**A Heart on Fire** reflections on Bl. Rosalie

These are excellent sources for readings and reflections.

### **Vincentian Celebrations**

Recommended that every Conference get a copy!

**Online: [famvin.org](http://famvin.org) and [vincentians.com](http://vincentians.com)**

Two websites with excellent source material!

# Conference Formation Plan



Nat'l/Reg'l Councils	Diocesan Council	Conferences
National Assembly	Ozanam Orientation	Spiritual Reflections
Invitation to Renewal	Spiritual Advisor Workshops	Conference Retreats
Getting Ahead	Leadership Workshops	Vincentian Feast Days
Poverty Institute	Home Visit Workshops	Serving in Hope
Voice of the Poor	Spiritual Retreats	Vincentian Celebrations
	Systemic Change	
	Council Assembly	



*(The main purpose here is to emphasize that so much of the Conference Formation Plan consists of keeping in contact with the National, Regional, and Diocesan Councils, and encouraging members to participate in the training and formation activities planned and run there.)*

**Within the Conference, the Spiritual Advisor should encourage Members to attend Mass together on Vincentian feast Days, and to have regular celebrations, such as Commissioning and Commitment Ceremonies.**

# Conference Formation Plan



Formation Plan		
Dimension	Area for Personal Improvement One Step I can Take to Improve	How Can I help my Conference with This?
Human		
Spiritual		
Intellectual		
Ministerial		



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*Participants can take out this worksheet again, but this time fill in a few things they might add to a Conference Formation Plan.*

*Allow 3-5 minutes of quiet work, then open up some discussion to share ideas.*

## Fifteen Minute Break



0:00



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Timer counts down in ten-second increments, and starts automatically.



## Vincenian Discernment and Consensus:

Objective: Promote the use of Vincenian Discernment in the creation of a culture of consensus in the conference

Focusing in on an understanding of discernment and consensus and the strategies that promote engagement and alignment among conference members

Assist the President and other leaders to create the environment that optimizes relationships through servant leadership,

Zeal drives us to stay focused on the flourishing of all the gifts that Vincenians bring to their conferences and councils

Humility and Selflessness remind us to honor the dignity of all members by encouraging their participation and creativity and by meeting behaviors that support inclusion of all voices

## What is Discernment?



- **An Openness to God's Will**
  - In me, in a unique Conference, Council, the Society
- **To be Led by the Spirit in Freedom**
  - Free to be, act, go in a certain way without resistance
- **A Choice between Two Goods**
  - Where does my body, time, money belong now?



• **An openness to God's will** – Listening to the way the Spirit is present to me as a person with an unrepeatable name, in a particular unique Conference, Council, the Society.

**Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, C.M.:**

When God spoke your life into the world, He spoke that once and forever, never to be repeated. God has said something special in each of you and each person you serve and in each person who comes into your life. We begin to see that each person is unique and of immense value and importance.

• **To be led by the Spirit in freedom**

“The Spirit calls us, invites us in our freedom to go in a certain direction, to act in a certain way, to be in a certain way.” (Hugh O'Donnell)

▪ **A choice between two goods** - - not between good and evil, but in this choice, where do my body, time, money belong? (concrete choices, lots of options)

## Pray together



Lord God,

It is your will that I desire to follow. Lead me each and every day through the gift of your inspiration. I commit to have eyes to see and ears to hear the people and the events you may send me in my attempt to follow your holy will. I invite the intercession of our founding saints as I dedicate myself to have a listening Vincentian heart as I journey in Your kingdom. Amen.



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### **Pray together:**

Stop and pray together the prayer for the gift of the Sabbath time in our lives where we hope for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to bring us closer to embracing the Will of God in our lives

## Vincentian Polarities



**Saint Vincent understood the importance of embracing paradox, the extremes:**

- **Embrace the extremes=energy/creativity**
  - Effective AND Affective Love
  - Love of God AND Neighbor
  - Solitude AND Communion
  - Person AND Community
  - Community AND Mission
- **Tensions to manage, not problems to solve**



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### **Vincentian Polarities:**

Review the challenges that Vincentians face when we try to embrace the tensions that drive creative ministry. How do we balance our natural preferences and tendencies with the “other side”?

Vincentians are called to discern the Will of God that emerges from our accommodation of the fullness of the practice of Vincentian Love for God and Neighbor, solitude and communion, self and community, and the specific conference community and the Mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Polarities are not problems to solve, they won't ever go away, but we can manage the tensions effectively to optimize creativity when we can get our egos out of the way.

# Vincentian Polarities



- Contemplation and Action
- Stewardship and Charity
- Friendship and Boundaries
- Leadership and Followership
- Organized Works and Providence



## Vincentian Polarities

These are polarities that Vincentians encounter in our Vocation:

**Contemplation and Action:** Prayer/contemplation as the centerpiece of spiritual growth **and** Service with the “Sweat of the Brow”. This tension can be responded to with a bias towards one or the other. One of the tensions Spiritual Advisors face is when the Spirituality of the conference meeting is overshadowed by discussion of the mechanics of our service.

**Stewardship and Charity:** On the one hand we want to be excellent stewards of our resources but too much focus here can end up in rules that exclude neighbors in need. We also want our practice to be characterized by boundless charity and compassion, but too much focus here can end up enabling behaviors that do not promote flourishing of the person.

**Friendship and Boundaries:** On the one hand we want to develop productive relationships, mutuality and friendship with our neighbors **AND** we must also be careful to establish appropriate boundaries that support the privacy of Vincentians and their personal lives and families.

**Leadership and Followership:** We are all Servant Leaders, rotating formal roles within the conference and creating the conditions for the flourishing of our conference members. At the same time we must also be “servant followers”, respecting the role of the formal leader, encouraging effective dialogue and consensus.

**Organized Work and Providence:** On the one hand we engage in works that address the needs of the poor and marginalized in our communities. Sometimes these works stay in place for many years and Vincentians become attached to them. In the Vincentian tradition however, we must always be open to the changing needs of the neighbor in our community and accept the Providence of God when he leads us away from one work to another that is needed.

# Vincentian Discernment



- **Discernment** is essentially a prayerful process through which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can come to discover the difference between what is our will and what is the will of God. It is rooted in the faith that God can and does direct our lives, that indeed, God loves us tenderly and he only asks that we trust him and entrust our lives to him.
- Vincentian Discernment is simple and radical, it demands faith and trust, and it is rooted in honesty and openness to the Spirit in Prayer.



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## Vincentian Discernment:

Have participants read the first bullet and focus on the difference between what is our will and what is the will of God.

It is one thing to BELIEVE that God can and does direct our lives. The difficulty is truly accepting that “He only asks that we trust Him and entrust our lives to Him.”

This is our gift and our challenge

Have participants read the second bullet. Focus on the simplicity balanced with the radical nature of adopting the practice through Humility, Selflessness, Simplicity, Gentleness and Zeal.

# Vincentian Discernment



- **Two key components:**

- We must be led by the Spirit**

- We must stand in complete freedom.**

- The Spirit calls us, invites us in our freedom to go in a certain direction, to act in a certain way, to be in a certain way.
- Discernment is not a democratic voting process-or a decision making process of the head.
- Discernment is not about negotiating a "good deal" with God.



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Vincentian Discernment:

Key Components:

Review the slide with participants

**We must be led by the Spirit:** This is the contemplative/reflective aspect of perceiving the will of God. Can I quiet myself to perceive the voice of the Spirit? Can I engage the Spirit holistically, mind, body, and spirit?

**We must stand in complete freedom?** This is the self-assessment of my own will and where it is urging me. What are my biases, judgements, and presumptions that might stand in the way of the voice of God?

# Vincentian Discernment



**Discernment is essentially of the heart.** It is about listening to what God is calling us to do. And this demands the inner journey to the heart; it must be rooted in our deepest way of being. Discernment is not a “thinking head” but a “listening heart.”



Vincentian Discernment is essentially of the heart.

Have participant read slide.

What are the practices to open the heart?

How can I harvest the wisdom and creativity of the brain and then listen differently to the Spirit's urging?

What are practices that would help Spiritual Advisors to hold the space for “listening hearts” in our meetings?

Spiritual Advisors must both participate and be detached enough to discern whether we are making the space for the Spirit in our dialogues, especially when they are spirited.

Spiritual Advisors can call the group to silence for reflection and this can be done in those moments when we lose our focus on the Spirit

# Vincentian Discernment



**St. Vincent** says:

“Only to souls who possess tranquility is true *discernment* given. Without tranquility of spirit, it is impossible to succeed in any exercise; but as this depends principally upon God and our spirit of indifference, we must seek tranquility in these two sources. The nature of indifference is to strip from us all resentment and all desire, to detach us from ourselves and from every creature. Why haven't we the same liking for freedom that He has? O Savior, You have opened the door to freedom for us; teach us to find it



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Vincentian Discernment:

Facilitator reads the slide content.

Tranquility of spirit is key, and that is only attained through attunement within the group, safety around dialogue, and the release of personal agendas that drive meeting behavior. This is the beginning of the spirit of indifference

Indifference is the translation from the French and has some different connotations in the English language around not “caring”. Indifference in this context is the gift of being able to recognize what is happening emotionally and suspend and detach from biases and judgements, aspiring for freedom from the influences of ego to make way for God.

# Vincentian Discernment



“Enlighten us, my Savior so that we may see the things we are attached to, and if it please You, bring us into the freedom of the children of God.”



Vincentian Discernment:

Facilitator leads group in this simple prayer that builds on the content from Slide 131

Simple prayers for Discernment like this can be sprinkled throughout a facilitated discernment that help to move folks from the heat of dialogue to the freedom to receive the graces of the Spirit

As Spiritual Advisors practice facilitating the spiritual environment for Vincentian discernment, gently turning folks to brief moments of silence and prayer will help people modulate their own biochemistry. Deep abdominal breathing is a simple and effective tool.

For many Vincentians this blending of dialogue and spirituality is disconcerting. Skills of persuasion verging on bullying, competition, needing to be right etc..are far more finely honed in our culture.

Spiritual Advisors have permission to gently, selflessly keep their eyes on the prize: Spirituality woven through the fabric of conference community.

For this reason, spiritual advisors must do their own work to model non-anxious behaviors, excellent listening, and compassionate presence, all while holding the space for the Holy Spirit

## Four Steps of Vincentian Discernment



1. Imitation of Jesus Christ
2. Unrestricted Readiness
3. Significance of Events/Seek Counsel
4. The Decision



Four Steps of Vincentian Discernment: This is the overview slide for the four steps.

We have identified above :the need to be **led by the spirit (Imitation of Jesus Christ) and to strive for indifference (Unrestrictive readiness. )**

What follows are the gathering of the facts, seeking counsel (**Significance of Events**) , and practicing group discernment to reach consensus/and a decision (**the Decision**)

Use the following slides to unpack each step

## Imitation of Jesus Christ



- What would Jesus do in this situation?
- What would Jesus do in these circumstances?
- How does this decision help me to better serve others?
- How does this decision affect my own self-aggrandizement?
- Am I seeking my own ego needs?



### Imitation of Jesus Christ

This is the “What would Jesus Do” step

Read through in a conversational tone and ask folks what other questions could be asked?

WWJD sounds right on, but in the end are we willing to DO what Jesus would DO?, even when it is hard and means giving up a pet bias or judgement?

Do I know when I am seeking my ego needs?

What are my blind spots?

Spiritual Advisors do well to know their own so they can share them with the group, normalizing our complete lack of perfection, and making it ok to work with blind spots.

## Unrestricted Readiness



- Am I willing to let go of my prejudices?
- Am I willing to step outside my preconceived plan?
- Am I willing to give up control?
- Am I willing to accept a “yes” or a “no”?



Unrestricted Readiness previously known as Indifference

Again, review in conversational tone, sharing personal examples of your own difficulties.

Encourage a kind of dialogue with the group, perhaps walking among them

Am I willing to give up control...? even to God?

Am I willing to accept a yes or a no?

More importantly if the group moves in a direction that I would not have selected can I support the will of the group with a good attitude?

## Unrestricted Readiness



“I hate uncertainty as much as you do, but what is really important to us is to govern our lives not by our hatred of uncertainty but by indifference, by which we are open to what God wants. Let us then try to grow in indifference.”

*St. Vincent to St. Louise*



### Unrestricted Readiness in practice

With this quote St. Vincent lifts up the basic human instinct to reduce anxiety

Here he poses an essential question: Can I resist the temptation for premature closure on an issue because of the discomfort of anxiety and potential or real conflict?

Can I break through and trust God for guidance, and practice the emptying of my egoic needs and grow in this indifference/unrestricted readiness?

## Significance of Events



- What are the objective and subjective facts?
- What are the events and circumstances?
- What are my feelings and intuition?
- How is God speaking through events?
- How is God speaking through people?
- How is God speaking through authority-civil, community, and Church?



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### Significance of events

So now we imagine what Jesus would do, we recognize our own hopes and fears and suspend them for the discernment process, now we are ready to unpack the objective and subjective facts

This is different from a process that doesn't recognize feelings and intuitions as part of what must be included because of their profound influence on behavior

This is not a step to lay aside an examination of how God might be speaking through people and events, but rather to invite God into this process

Here the spiritual advisor can gently influence how we infuse our dialogue with the Spirit, reading tone and body language and helping folks re-center when emotions are strong.

Breathing deeply as a group and saying some small discernment prayer like the one on Slide 96.

## Significance of Events



- The sacredness of the story
- The guidance of the Rule and the Manual
- Prayer both personal and corporate
- Honoring the Truth for persons and community
- Heart and Mind and Spirit and Body



### Significance of Events: Strategies that promote and support Discernment

How do we promote reverence for the sacredness of the story? Spiritual Advisors have a special responsibility to recognize the dignity of each person even when they don't agree with the person. By modeling reverence for the process we encourage everyone!

Part of the process will be to go to our Rule and Manual and perhaps other Vincentian and Roman Catholic teachings to help in the discussion. This can be a moment for a pause if needed because the topic is really provoking reactivity. Sometimes it is best to lay the discussion aside so folks have time to process, and further research is a good reason.

Prayer both personal and corporate. The process is conducted in the context of prayer and contemplation. Certainly personal prayers for freedom and compassion, but also other prayers recited together to encourage and reinforce our solidarity

We recognize that persons hold their truth and it must be recognized and honored, though not always agreed with. People know when they are being honored and when they are not,

Finally we must continually remind ourselves that this process is holistic and embraces the mystery that is the Will of God. The best discernments engage Heart and Mind, Spirit and Body

## The Decision



- Is the decision reasonably clear?
- Is it rooted in peace?
- Is the decision just?
- Is the decision compassionate?
- If these conditions are not met, return to the steps for discernment.
- If these decision are met, ACT....and do not look back.
- Confidence in God
- Firm regarding the goal, flexible regarding the means



### The Decision

Facilitator reads the first four bullets. If these are all met, we have likely reached the decision through consensus, our preferred decision-making model. If not, we return to the start of the process

If we are at peace, and all can actively support the decision/consensus, then no second-guessing, move forward.

During the implementation, Clarity on the goal, flexibility/creativity regarding the way we get there.

## Steps in Vincentian Discernment



- **Unrestricted Readiness to Divine Goodness**
- **Deliberation - Weigh the Evidence**
- **Seek Counsel from a Wise Person**
- **Experience & Action have Primacy, in Dialogue with the Gospel, - “God is Here”**
- **Practical wisdom – Practical Action**
- **A Good Action Embraces the Extremes**



*(Hugh O'Donnell, C.M. “Vincentian Discernment”)*



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### Steps in the Vincentian Discernment, a summary

Hugh O'Donnell CM, offers a summary of the process :

**Unrestricted Readiness to Divine Goodness** – to be really ready to do whatever God would have us do: “Be it done to me according to your will.” (**Led by the Spirit and Unrestricted Readiness/Indifference**)

**Weigh the Evidence** – the pros & cons – with a listening heart (the motives, purposes, means, outcomes, consequences). Ask Questions for information, insight, facts & values. (**Significance of events**)

**Seek Counsel from a Wise Person** – Vincent talked things over with Louise or a spiritual director. (**Significance of events**)

**4. God is Here!** God is present in events, circumstances, history, in relationships. Experience & action have primacy (a practical spirituality). Vincent calls us to reflect on experiences & events in light of the Gospel. (**Significance of events in light of God's providence**)

**5. Practical wisdom** – Take practical action flowing from God's wisdom & love. Don't just have lofty thoughts. (**Once decision made....move on it**)

**6. A good action embraces the extremes** (Action and Contemplation; Charity and Stewardship, God & neighbor; for the rich & the poor). Vincent understood that by holding the tension, the creativity in the tension drives solutions that benefit everyone.

## Benchmarks of Vincentian Discernment



- The God who called us here is here.
- God is present in each person and in the community.
- Do not tread on the heels of Providence.
- In contemplating, loving, and serving the poor, the poor one is Jesus Christ.
- The journey is a shared and corporate one.



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### **Benchmarks of Vincentian Discernment;**

**The God who called us here is here:** The dialogue and discernment was guided by our belief that when we are gathered together in community, mindful of the Holy Spirit's presence in and among us, we are able to be inventive and creative and find solutions that best serve the neighbor, and all can support

**God is present in each person and in the community.** When the Holy Spirit is present in each Vincentian and flowing through the community, there is a felt shared sense of mission and ministry that generates creativity and mutuality.

**Do not tread on the heels of Providence.** When discerning God's Will authentically in Vincentian community we do not "second guess" how God's Providence shows up in the results and solutions based on our own personal preferences.

**In contemplating, loving, and serving the poor, the poor one is Jesus Christ.** We are able to actually love and serve the poor in imitation of the gratuitous outpouring of love of Jesus Christ when we meet them in our own brokenness so that the suffering Jesus Christ is present .

**The journey is a shared and corporate one.**

## Group Discernment

**Definition:** Coming together with open hearts and open minds to seek God's wisdom around issues important to the community



### Group Discernment

Read definition to group

Sounds simple, what makes it challenging?

This could be a place to write on whiteboard or flip chart the responses to that question and then address them later in the slide deck when we talk about the details of reaching consensus

Again, we journey together, and it takes humility and selflessness, fueled by the **Zeal** to be a part of community.

## Group Discernment



Discovering God's will for:

- Conference
- Council
- National

Group Discernment:

Review the slide, then ask participants to focus on the image in the middle of the table.

We must all be focused on discovering God's will, in community, for true discernment to happen.

If we are overly focused on our own agenda, the gentle whispers of God cannot be heard.

## Consensus in our Rule



### 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.



Consensus in our Rule.

Have a participant read the slide

Talk about consensus being our ultimate goal, so we manage the dialogue with such care and love and respect, in the light of the Holy Spirit, that there is no need to resort to a vote.

When is it appropriate to vote? There are times, for example when folks are running for office.

The President, other officers and especially the Spiritual Advisor must assess, in an ongoing way, if we are relying on voting instead of doing the spiritual work of achieving consensus through a commitment to Vincentian discernment..

On sensitive issues, even though we want to reduce the anxiety of tension around different opinions, resorting to a vote makes winners and losers and that is never the optimal starting place for implementing anything.

Let's unpack consensus....move to next slide

## What is Consensus?



- **Definition:** Consensus is a cooperative process in which group members develop and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole
- **Main reasons to use consensus as a decision-making method:**
  - 1. High quality decisions
  - 2. Builds connection among members
  - 3. More effective implementation

Source: [www.treegroup.info](http://www.treegroup.info)



What is consensus?

Review the definition and be sure we take the time for the dialogue. if folks want to challenge or disagree or redefine,

Main reasons to use it.

Review each of these, talking a little around the “why”:

Decisions include the whole wisdom of the group, we take the time to work through tensions that end up making the solutions stronger, through the work of building consensus.

We find ways to connect and become stronger friends.

Finally, consensus based decisions start with an advantage during implementation, as the whole group consented it!

Check out the website. (This is the content that National Council President Ralph Middlecamp is using to drive consensus decision making at the national level.)

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[tree@ic.org](mailto:tree@ic.org)

## Cooperation is the Basis



### ***We all get more of what we want when we cooperate***

- We genuinely try to work together, typically based on some shared interest, purpose or calling
- We search together for the best solution for all; it's "us against the problem" not "us against each other."
- We optimize creativity when relationships support an atmosphere of solidarity
- No "winners and losers"



## Basic Principles

Review these principles

This is where we start making the case that the Society Rule, Mission and Ministry all point in the direction of the conditions necessary for Consensus.

On this slide it is about the conditions for cooperation that are built into our structure

We **ARE** trying to work together, we **DO** have a common and shared interest and calling.

We are journeying **TOGETHER** towards Holiness, with a foundation of commitment to friendship!

We **DO** believe that when we gather together the Holy Spirit is in and among us and deepens our mutuality and friendship and enhances our service to the neighbor

## Consensus Synthesizes Group Wisdom



- Unity, not unanimity, not everybody's first choice
- Arriving at a "sense of the meeting" - something you can support, are willing to let go forward, or you "can live with it"
- Value all kinds of input (rational, emotional, kinesthetic, etc...)



### Basic Principles

Same spirit with this slide. As you review the basic principles, relate to who we already say we are.

**We seek unity**, and that doesn't mean everyone agrees on everything, but that we are more committed to honoring consensus and recognizing our own ego traps that we are able to find the common ground and support and accept the will of the Group that reflects our discernment of God's will.

**Value all kinds of input:** We say we are all equal in the society, and that we honor the dignity of one another and those we serve. Does this show up in our actual meetings and relationships? Are some folks overpowered by others? Does everyone get a chance to speak? Do we honor the needs of different temperaments? Do we give our introverts time to process so that their wonderful ideas can emerge? Do we spend our time listening and learning or figuring out what we are going to advocate for?  
**(Consensus is a questioning process, more than an affirming process)**

This is all about the journey to integrating our aspirations for who we are becoming as Vincentians into the way we evolve conference relationships. We say we practice the Vincentian Virtue of Zeal: a passion for the flourishing of the human person. **(Share, question, and learn from each other's experience and thinking)** That MEANS **"lifting everyone up to their highest potential, instead of knocking down your opponents."**

As Spiritual Advisors this is the place for the integration of who we say we are spiritually with how we are with one another. An amazing opportunity for Spiritual Advisors to leverage their calling to be that non-anxious presence that gently reminds folks of who we are becoming and how we have agreed to get there by modeling Jesus, our Saints, and acting from a Vincentian Virtue based foundation

## Consensus Synthesizes Group Wisdom



- Consensus is a questioning process, more than an affirming process
- Share, question, and learn from each other's experience and thinking
- Encourages lifting everyone up to their highest potential, instead of knocking down your opponents



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## Basic Principles



- **Remember the spirit and process of the system are even more important than the structures**
- There is no substitute for being friends with each other
- A positive attitude will get you everywhere
- **Meetings should be fulfilling—if they're not, then ask why, and change it!**



### Basic Principles

Review this slide in the same way. Each of these points is consistent with the Vincentian Ethos.

**Focus on the last bullet.** The quality of our meetings, our community spirit, is as important as the quality of our ministry with the neighbor. If meetings are not fulfilling, it sub optimizes the opportunity we have for personal fulfillment, journeying together to Holiness, and ultimately the service we provide

## Reflection



- 3 minutes to write down a couple of examples of when you observed your Conference or Council making a decision that resulted in true consensus and a time when it didn't.
- What were the dynamics for both?
- What could have been done differently?
- 5 minute share with another.

Reflection and table work:

Review the instructions

Make sure the first three or so minutes are in silence as folks think of different scenarios in their conference or counsel.

After the 5-minute table share there is an option for plenary discussion of the themes that emerge. This might be another time to use the flip chart or white board.

## “Cooperation is the Basis”



# Mission and Vision of Love drives Vincentian Relationships:

## 2.2 The journey together towards holiness



Cooperation is the Basis:

**The rest of the slides all point to the Mission and Vision of the Society embedded in our Rule that support a culture of consensus in conferences and councils**

The most dramatic is our commitment to journey together towards Holiness.

### 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.

## Friendship is an essential element



### 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.



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Friendship is an essential element

Have a participant read the rule segment

Reinforce how friendship is hardwired into our expectations of conference life

This is a deep friendship grounded in spirituality and common mission, vision and virtues

Our strength is this friendship, it is the synergistic fuel for our ministry and service

## Relationships are Central



Conference meetings are privileged occasions during which members manifest Christ's love to one another and experience his healing presence. Conferences meet regularly and frequently, at least twice a month, in celebration of mutual friendship and out of a passion to serve the Lord

(Rule: Part I, Article 3.3, 3.3.1 and 3.4; Part III, Statute 5)



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### Relationships are Central

Have participant read the slide

This slide speaks for itself. There couldn't be a clearer statement of the importance of the way our meetings reflect love and connection to God. Our friendship is a reflection of the way God circulates in and among us.

## Relationships are Central



Unlike other organizations within and outside the Church, the Conference meets less to conduct business than to celebrate and deepen its unity for essentially spiritual reasons. Opening and Closing Prayers, together with the Vincentian spiritual reflections, heighten our awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence.

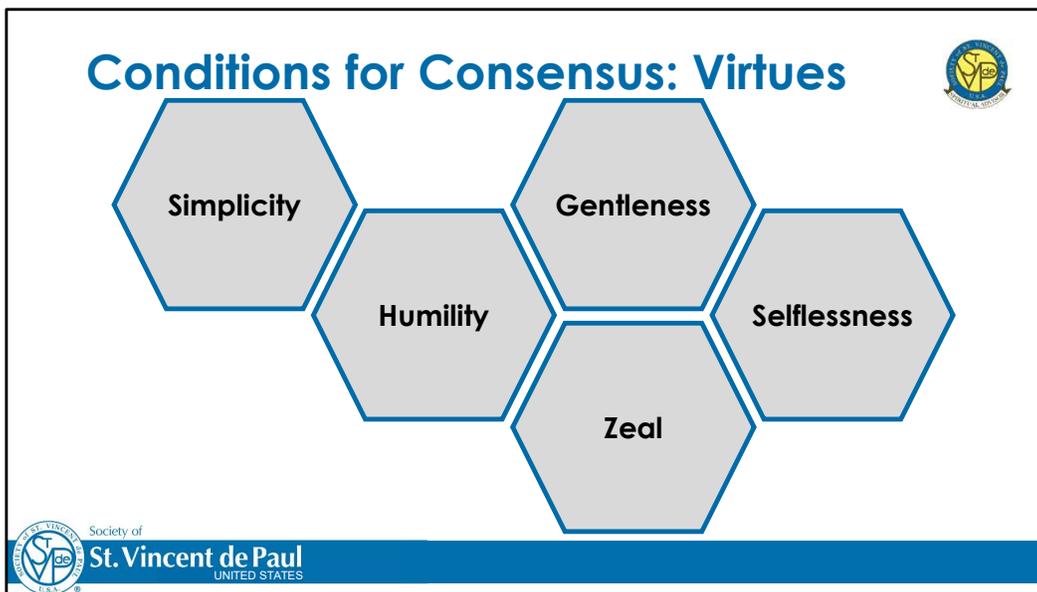
**(Rule: Part 1, Article 2.3)**



### Relationships are Central

Have participant read the slide

This rule segment clearly describes the priority of our conference meeting agenda, the celebration and deepening of our unity and friendship.



## Conditions for Consensus: Virtues

Review the virtues one by one either read or have participant read the definitions and then make the connections to how these virtues support a culture, **REQUIRE** a culture of consensus.

**Simplicity:** This virtue is about straightforward respectful, even loving communication. It is grounded in the integrity of loving presence and anchors communication even during times of spirited dialogue. We “say what we mean, and mean what we say”

**Humility:** This virtue grounds our attitude during dialogue. An understanding of our frailties, gifts, talents and charism and “**whose they really are**” keeps us from allowing the ego to trick us into thinking it is all about us! From a humble perspective, it opens us to be able to identify, value, and lift up the gifts of others.

**Gentleness:** Gentleness allows us to be patient. To listen carefully. To avoid reacting. To move to a question rather than a judgement, to believe in the dignity of all persons. To value the hidden wholeness in our fellow Vincentians, to create the atmosphere for introverts to offer their considerable gifts.

**Selflessness:** In consensus, Selflessness teams up with Humility to be able to truly listen and ask open and honest questions (defined as questions you don’t already know the answer to). Selflessness practiced by the majority of the team creates the environment for many ideas to be considered.

**Zeal:** The essential virtue that animates our ministry, but only in concert with humility and selflessness. The passion of zeal can overpower and dominate if not tempered by who we are as Vincentians and “**whose**” we are.

## Role of Spiritual Advisor



- Introduce the spirituality of Vincentian discernment
- Create reflections that encourage respectful sharing around differences
- Encourage the discipline of hearing all the voices.
- Identify win/lose scenarios and encourage both/and solutions
- Invoke silent reflection or conciliatory prayer in moments of conflict
- What else?



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### Role of the Spiritual Advisor

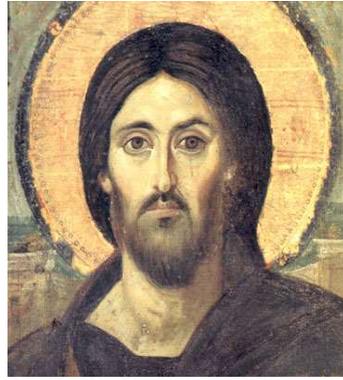
Review the role of spiritual advisor in the culture of consensus.

Remind folks that our spirituality and commitment to journey together **REQUIRES** we develop strategies to optimize our meetings, maximize the quality of participation and mutuality

Friendship, mutuality, and reverence for one another flows from Vincentian spirituality and charism and animates our meetings and allows the Holy Spirit to lead us to cooperation and consensus

## Spiritual Consensus

- Facts plus Spirit's guidance
- Not majority vote, victory of the dominant, compromise
- Not unanimity – all feel heard & OK
- Not on your schedule



### Spiritual Consensus

Establishing consensus with the intercession of the Holy Spirit is Spiritual Consensus

Read the features

This is a radical approach to leveraging Love and Friendship and Common Mission to achieve solutions that are creative, innovative and supported by all.

**Use the facts, but wait for Spirit's guidance in regard to them**  
**Consensus is not a democracy, but a discovery of what God wants.**  
**Not unanimity but all feel heard & can go along with solution**  
**God's schedule is not my schedule – all in God's time.**

# Closing Prayer



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**Leader:** O God, your love ignites our hearts, captures our imaginations, shapes our dreams, and awakens possibilities. Make us disciples on fire with your love so that we can become true followers of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Help us, O God, to enkindle in others a sense of hope that transformation is possible... and give us the grace to transmit to others the fire of their charism. Let us pray.

**Right Side:** When the heart is on fire, light comes from within. With the eyes of an enlightened heart we can see the hope to which we are called. By responding to the call to belong to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we proclaim that the quest to be a servant of the poor is the fire of our lives.

**Left Side:** The path to seeing the eyes of the heart is discovered in the journey of discipleship. It is not an easy journey. It is an ongoing effort to live the gospel with integrity trying, sometimes succeeding, often failing, recognizing the need for patience, and then trying again.

**Right Side:** Discipleship is a way of being in the world that affects every relationship. Disciples shape one another according to the action of the Spirit in their lives. The energy of the disciples flows from faith in what is unseen yet believed. At its very core, discipleship is a call to a love so radical that it never gives up on God, one's neighbor, or one's self.

**Left Side:** Disciples are called to love well, as Jesus did, with hope, truth, fidelity and compassion. This leads inevitably to taking a stand with the Christ of the paschal mystery who willingly laid down his life in love so that all may have life in abundance.

**Together:** Almighty God, We do not ask that you make life easy for us, but that problems will not intimidate us. We do not ask for success in every venture, but that when we fail, we can still go on with a fresh beginning. We ask for the grace to bring the love of God, the compassion of Jesus, to those who are poor and suffering. And we ask for the grace to set our hearts on fire so that we will live the true spirit of a Vincentian. Amen.