



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE US SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Contemplation: Every Moment of Our Lives

To answer a call to volunteer is to *do* something. To answer a call to vocation is to *be* something. This distinction is at the heart of what it means to be a member of the Society. While it is certainly true that membership, by virtue of not being paid, is voluntary, it is equally true that being a Vincentian is not bounded by the hours we spend in meetings or in service to the poor. Rather, this is “*a vocation for every moment of our lives*”. [\[Rule, Part I, 2.6\]](#) We are not merely volunteers; we are Vincentians.

What does it mean, though, to be a Vincentian in every moment of our lives? It can’t mean that we continuously visit the poor at the expense of our jobs and families. St. Vincent was clear that rest from the work was as important as the work itself, advising his followers to “*not take on anything beyond your strength, do not be anxious, do not take things too much to heart, go gently, do not work too long or too hard.*” [\[CCD IV:146\]](#) The reason was simple – we must increase our strength, he said, because “*you need it, or, in any case, the public does.*” [\[CCD I:392\]](#)

So, how, then, beyond Conference Meetings, home visits, retreats, and other works, do we make every moment of our lives “Vincentian”? We recall that in virtue, we become by doing; we act with simplicity, and become simple; we act with humility and become humble; we act with gentleness, selflessness, and zeal, in order to become gentle, selfless, and zealous in our faith. These five virtues are our essential virtues – the essence of being Vincentian. They do not cease to be important once the Conference Meeting adjourns. In a similar way, our empathy and our love are not limited only to some times, places, and relationships. Rather, the transformative grace we seek through our works in the Society makes us different, and hopefully better, people. Our works, our virtues, our essential elements, our reflection and prayer - all these lead us to be “*more sensitive and caring in [our] family, work and leisure activities.*” [\[Rule, Part I, 2.6\]](#) We cannot be one kind of Vincentian and another kind of person.

As in so many things, Blessed Frédéric is a model for us. He lived his family and his professional lives as apostolates, with Christ at the center always. His best known writings on social issues were published in *l'Ere Nouvelle* (the New Era), a newspaper he founded not as a Vincentian, or on behalf of the Society, but as an engaged citizen, dedicating his God-given talents, informed by his service to the poor, to bring the light of the Gospel into the public dialog.

Our journey towards holiness is meant not only to make us better servants of the poor, but to make us better husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, neighbors, friends, workers, citizens, and Christians. That would be a lot to ask a volunteer to do, but through the transformative grace we receive in this vocation, is not too much for a Vincentian to be.

Contemplate

Am I truly Vincentian at work? At school? At play? At home? At all times?

Recommended Reading

[15 Days of Prayer with Blessed Frédéric Ozanam](#)