



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

Contemplation: A Culture of Welcome

Many of our Conferences struggle with finding – and keeping – new members. Often, when this happens, we begin to tell ourselves that perhaps we are asking too much of potential members; scaring them off with the notion of weekly or twice-monthly meetings and home visits. We look for ways to make the Society seem like something it is not so that we can ease people into it. In the end, this approach will not only fail to attract members, but it will diminish the Society itself.

Most current members will tell you that they first joined the Society seeking “*to live their faith, loving and committing themselves to their neighbor in need.*” [[Rule, Part I, 3.1](#)] Most of us wished, as our Patron Saint so memorably put it, to “*love God...with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.*” [[CCD XI:32](#)] Ours is a vocation, a calling, and whether it was in response to a pulpit talk, or a simple tug within our hearts, we all answered a call to serve.

It was only over time that we began to feel God’s presence growing in our hearts through serving His poor. We stay because we have felt and received God’s transformational grace. And if we are truly transformed, why would we keep this to ourselves? Don’t we want this for all of our friends?

This, after all, is the primary purpose of the Society! Our home visits, the heart of our vocation, have always been considered the means, not the end of our association. On the home visit, we see the face of Christ – we come to know Him. This is the universal vocation of all God’s people: to seek union with our Creator. [[CCC: 1877](#)] St. Vincent teaches us where to find Him – right over there, with His hands outstretched. He is the hungry one. He is the thirsty one. He is the stranger, the prisoner, the sick.

President-General Jules Gossin observed in 1851 that when “newcomers sit down unnoticed...without any words of welcome and encouragement...[they] are discouraged, become timid, stand apart, and if they do not leave the conference...they have less taste for it...” [Gossin, Circular letter, 1851] It remains true that when prospective members attend a meeting, we should never just let them sit there and observe. We should welcome them as the friends their presence has already proven them to be, and as quickly as possible accompany them, on a home visit, to see the Lord who called them there!

Just as we evangelize through our loving actions on every home visit, so we evangelize among ourselves and all prospective members by the example of “*our fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.*” [[Rule, Part I, 3.4](#)] If our hearts are filled with Christ from our vocation, it is only so that we may better share Him. It is not our persuasive marketing pitch, but our joy in serving Christ that will call new members to this vocation, and it is our full friendship and welcome that will keep them in our conferences.

Contemplate

Do I sometimes keep God’s transformational grace to myself?

Recommended Reading

[Vincenian Meditations](#)