



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

Contemplation: True Presence

Vincentians are doers, we are people of action. We love God, as St. Vincent said, “*with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.*” [\[CCD XI:32\]](#) We believe, as Frédéric did, that “*religion serves best not to think, but to act.*” As central as our prayer life is, our Conferences are “*communities of...prayer and action.*” [\[Rule, Part I, 3.3\]](#) And yet, as we often emphasize in our home visit training, ours is not a ministry of constant motion or problem-solving, but is instead, in its heart, a ministry of *presence*.

In our person-to-person service to those in need, we seek to “*establish relationships based on trust and friendship.*” [\[Rule, Part I, 1.9\]](#) We seek to be like the friends we call in our own times of distress, who come to us not to find us new jobs, or heal our sick family members, or bring the dead back to life, but to sit with us, to feel the sadness that we feel, and by sharing it, to lighten our burdens.

We are called to see the face of Christ in those we serve, but also to share Christ’s face, His love, and His presence. Just as He told us [the poor would always be with us](#), so also He assured us that He would be with us Himself, [until the end of the age](#), and He connected these two truths by reminding us that how we treat the poor [would be judged as if done to Himself](#).

Our ideal is to serve the neighbor [for love alone](#); not the love of romance, but the love of God, the love that is called charity, the love that Vincent said is “*inventive to infinity.*” [\[CCD XI:131\]](#) It was in Christ’s inventiveness, Vincent said, that He found a way, after his earthly life had ended, not to remain a carpenter, but to remain truly *present* to all who believe, and to all who seek Him, in the Eucharist.

The primary purpose of the Society is our own growth in holiness, and while our person-to-person service is our primary means towards this growth, our spiritual practices, like Vincent and Frédéric before us, include “*devotion to the Eucharist*” [\[Rule, Part I, 2.2\]](#) And how could it be otherwise? In the poor, as in the Eucharist, we see Christ’s true presence, and our service itself becomes sacramental.

We are called not only to stand with the poor, but on our home visits, to sit with them; to be present with them. It is through our presence, not simply our actions, that our home visits, like [Eucharistic Adoration](#), become acts of love and devotion to God’s beloved Son.

Jesus, Son of Man, was sent by the Father to share our humanity fully, to be present with us, among us, and finally, through bread and wine, in us. To share Christ’s love as Vincentians, then, is to be truly present, going to the neighbor as Christ came to us, bringing within us Christ’s true presence through the Eucharist we have received. Ours is a ministry not only of presence, but of true presence, for on the home visit, as in the Eucharist, He will, [as He promised](#), be truly present, too.

Contemplate

How can I be more present to the neighbor?

Recommended Reading

[‘Tis a Gift to Be Simple](#)