



## What Makes the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Different?

### How does the Society differ from other charities?

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is composed of women and men who seek their personal holiness through works of charity. In this essential way, the Society differs from charitable associations or agencies whose principal objective is not the spiritual advancement of their members but the doing of good for someone else.

President-General Adolpe Baudon, in his Circular Letter of January 1, 1877, wrote:

"It is laid down in our Rule, and it has been always understood among us, that in uniting to serve our masters the poor, as St. Vincent de Paul expresses it, **our object is not only to relieve material misery**, a very laudable purpose in itself, but to aspire, especially, through the practice of that most sublime of virtues "charity" **to render ourselves better and more fervent Christians**, and to make our poor enter on the same path, if we have the happiness of succeeding."

In his Circular Letter of December 12, 1915, Vicomte Hendecourt, president-general wrote:

**"The Society has two aims: to do a great deal of spiritual good to its members through the exercise of charity, and to do a little spiritual and temporal good to a few poor families in the name of Jesus Christ.** If it did not continually seek to combine these two aims, it would lose its *raison d'être*. If it were to seek only the holiness of its members through pious exercises, there is no lack of Confraternities and Third Orders to meet that need. If on the other hand, it were to seek only the relief of the temporal miseries of the poor, it would only add one more to the list of public and private institutions founded for that purpose."

### The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (or "Vincentians") are men and women who strive to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to individuals in need. We are young and old. Our members come in every shade of skin color. Some of us are wealthy, some are financially poor, but all of us are blessed with an awareness that our blessings (time, talent or treasure) are to be shared with our brothers and sisters in need.

We know that we are not alone. We are part of an international society of friends united by a spirit of poverty, humility, and sharing, which is nourished by prayer and reflection, mutually supportive gatherings, and adherence to a basic Rule.

Energized by the awareness that service to our brother or sister in need is in fact an encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ, members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are keenly aware that poverty,

suffering and loneliness are present for millions in our communities. For that reason, we collaborate with all who seek to relieve need and address its causes.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul offers tangible assistance to those in need on a person-to-person basis. It is this personalized involvement that makes the work of the Society unique. This aid may take the form of intervention, consultation, or often through direct dollar or in-kind service. An essential precept of the Society's work is to provide help while conscientiously maintaining the confidentiality and dignity of those who are served. The Society recognizes that it must assume, also, a role of advocacy for those who are defenseless or voiceless. Some 12 million persons are helped annually by Vincentians in the United States.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States provides an extensive array of services. No work of charity is foreign to the Society. To quote our patron, St. Vincent de Paul: "Charity is infinitely inventive."

### **The Mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

Organized locally, Vincentians witness God's love by embracing all works of charity and justice. The Society collaborates with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes, making no distinction in those served because, in them, Vincentians see the face of Christ.