



SERVING IN HOPE MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.3:

The Rule Encourages our Community of Faith

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session, you will have greater insight to:

- 1. Recognize our call to be a “Community of faith and love.”**
- 2. Appreciate the responsibilities of Conferences.**
- 3. Understand the role of Councils.**

OPENING PRAYER:

"God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. ... God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus. He has made him our wisdom and also our justice, our sanctification, and our redemption. This is just as you find it written, Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord.""
2 Corinthians 1:27-31)

INTRODUCTION:

**RULE, Part 1-Section 3: Members, Conferences, Councils—
Communities of Faith and Love**

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

Praying with our renewed Rule let these words penetrate your heart:

As Vincentians, we meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of us. Our Conferences are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. We are united together through spiritual bonds, friendship and a common mission to the poor and marginalized.

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Do we:

- meet regularly and consistently, weekly or every two weeks?
- meet in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy?
- encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and a spirit of prayer?
- recognize the importance of a Spiritual Advisor?
- realize that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money?

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Are we:

- aware of being a worldwide community of Vincentian friends?
- defending the rights of those most rejected by society?
- welcoming to young members?
- preserving the spirit of enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination?

Praying with the Rule, in our Conference we ask...Do we:

- make all decisions by consensus after prayer, reflection and consultation; and when necessary, put matters to a vote?
- handle funds with the utmost care, prudence, generosity?
- keep accurate records of all money received or spent?
- allot funds only to branches of the Vincentian Family?

Praying with the Rule, as leaders we ask... Are we:

- authentic servant leaders?
- fulfilling our responsibility of promoting Vincentian spirituality?
- encouraging the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of each member?
- promoting the formation and training of members and officers?
- improving the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of our service to the poor?

Praying with the Rule, as Councils we ask... Do we:

- assist Conferences to develop their spiritual life?
- facilitate Conferences to intensify their service and to diversify their activities?
- encourage existing Conferences to expand?
- create and sustain new Conferences?
- promote Special Works?
- conduct formation courses and encourage Vincentians to attend?
- foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian Family?
- provide communication to and from Conferences and Councils?

Praying with the Rule, as Councils we ask...Are we:

- promoting the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world?
- responding to the Society's network of charity by regular and rapid exchange of news and information?
- seeking to form youth conferences?
- ensuring that decisions are made as close as possible to the local environment and circumstances?
- giving freedom of action to Conferences and Councils in order that they can help the poor spontaneously and effectively?

(Quietly read the following text)

DISCUSSION:

In what ways does the Rule challenge you to be a "Community of Faith and Love" in your Conference and Council?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)

BEING CREATIVE IN VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP

Eduardo Marques

(A member of the Society for 27 years, belonging to Conferences in Brazil, United States and France.)

"Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavor to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have the special responsibility of promoting Vincentian spirituality." (Rule 3.11)

Leadership can be defined in different ways, and there are many different kinds. However, the following definition expresses the essence of leadership: *"The skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being of common good."* (James C. Hunter) This definition incorporates a key element of Vincentian Leadership. A leader can influence people to work enthusiastically to accomplish his/her own goals, which may not always correspond to the common good. Here we are stating explicitly that the Vincentian leader is a **servant**, *a servant of the common good*.

Servant leadership forces us to think of others before ourselves: the first element of servant leadership is the desire to serve. In fact, there are many ways to cultivate various traits of Vincentian Leadership, but there is only one which makes them an intrinsic part of one's life: the **genuine desire to serve**, that is, to put others ahead of oneself, to make a difference by helping others for the better.

First Vincentian Leadership Trait:

St. Vincent de Paul is an example of just such a person with the desire and ability not only to exhibit service and Vincentian Leadership traits, but also to teach them. The first Vincentian Leadership trait, taught by St. Vincent, is the ability to learn. We must learn about the needs of others and ascertain the best way to serve them. Vincent was able to identify others' needs better than they could express them. This is possible only when we live as others live and we evaluate how their lives could be better when compared to our own standards. Vincent was able to read each event as if it was a message to him personally.

This ability gave him the skill to constantly analyze any situation, to see what could be an improvement to those he was serving, and to ultimately identify an innovative solution. Vincent told us that indeed "Love is inventive to infinity!"

Second Vincentian Leadership Trait:

Influence based on authority not on power, which is related to style, is the second trait of Vincentian Leadership. Many times St. Vincent referred to himself as the least important member of the Congregation of the Mission, despite having founded it. Even though he suffered melancholic moods— self-admittedly very difficult—Vincent was able to exercise his influence based on knowledge, experience and infinite faith in Divine Providence. There is no better way of encouraging people than in demonstrating that it is not only our competence at stake, but also a matter of one's personal relationship with God.

Third Vincentian Leadership Trait:

Example by behavior forms the third trait. The will to serve must be constantly expressed in decisions, actions, and presentation. St. Vincent was an example of a person who would make any sacrifice for his cause. He wrote some 30,000 letters, expressing his ideas and care for his co-workers and friends. In any situation, but particularly in crisis, a leader's faith, values and long-term vision is tested. The consistency of example and principle is the key element in building credibility of leadership. Daily actions have the power to express two dimensions of

Vincentian Leadership: first, the consistency between the will to serve and the intrinsic values of the leader; and, second, the real importance of short-term actions when compared with long-term vision.

Having **long-term vision** is a key trait of a Vincentian Leader. St. Vincent may well have known that some of the works he created would last for centuries and be spread throughout the world. Two centuries later, following his example, Frederic Ozanam, the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, had a long-term dream: spread a small band of members, grouped in a unit called "**Conference**" to every place in the world. In his own words, Frederic Ozanam introduced the concept of global networking to the nineteenth century: *"I would like to embrace the whole world in a network of charity."* Long-term vision encompasses at least two values relevant for Vincentian Leadership: First, it creates a common purpose to serve. Second, it provides fundamental criteria to evaluate short-term happenings and actions. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, launched by a group of young students, could have failed some months after it was founded. However, it grew so successfully that today it has more than 600,000 active members in over 140 countries, operating in the same manner it was founded, with the same vision and the same mission.

The Society been so successful because:

1. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul learns from the past:

From its beginnings the Society developed a strong desire to learn from previous leaders. Initially, Ozanam learned the importance of serving the poor from St. Rosalie Rendu. As students from a prestigious university they had a deep desire to learn and study. The Society learned to take risks, and developed a conservative approach to dealing with change, making decisions based on tradition and the International Rule in a centralized manner.

2. The members of the Society have an intrinsic will to serve:

Direct volunteer service, listening to the needs of the poor and sharing their sufferings, is only sustainable if the server has the means to serve. Direct contact with poverty leads the membership of the Society to create innovative ways to reduce it, either through the formation of new Conferences or the launching of social works. Growth is a response to the exposure to poverty.

3. The members of the Society strive to grow in holiness:

The first objective of the Society is to provide a means to be holy through service to the poor. As this holiness is a relationship between the person and God, there is no need to pretend to serve. In other words, genuine service is a fundamental behavioral trait of the members of the Society.

4. The Society has a distinctive mission and vision:

The operational model of the Society is based on three components: first, direct service to the poor through home visits; second, the grouping of members in small faith communities called Conferences; and third, the members are laity who strive for holiness through a clear and complete set of values. Also, through the International Rule the leaders of the Society have clear performance measures, including quantitative and qualitative growth and the maintenance of the initial spirit of the Society.