



SERVING IN HOPE MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.1:

The Rule Defines our Vocation

Learning Objectives

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

- 1. Appreciate the importance of having a Rule.**
- 2. Recognize the Origin, Purpose and Scope of the Society.**
- 3. Understand our call to have a personal encounter with the poor.**

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

"I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you. The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise... God has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of any merit of ours but according to his own design." (2 Timothy 1:6-9)

INTRODUCTION:

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

Today, faithful to the spirit of our founders, we are the Vincentians who have the responsibility and the privilege to **"stir into flame the gift of God"** given to us in the renewed Rule of the Society, approved in 2003.

Christians look to the Gospel teachings of Christ to guide their life's journey. While the New Testament scriptures provide instruction to the whole Church, there is also a recognition that the journey will be different for each of us depending on our talents and how we are called to use them. As early as the third century, groups of believers with specialized callings banded together in distinctive communities. These communities began to live under agreed guiding principles called the "Rule". It is the Rule of St. Benedict, written around 550, that is the model for the Western Church.

After Benedict, the founders of the major religious orders and movements in the Church, including Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Ignatius of Loyola and Vincent de Paul, wrote a "Rule" for the communities they founded. This "Rule" was written out of their experience and their lives, and it clearly defined the spirituality, heritage, structure and regulations of the organization which the founders felt were necessary for authenticity, fidelity and accountability to their vocation.

As a growing lay organization, the founders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul also recognized a need to define the mission of their new organization. In 1835, just two years after the foundation of the Society, Emmanuel Bailly requested Francois Lallier to take on the task of

capturing the Society's spirituality, structure and identity in the form that had served many other Church organizations—a written "Rule"

And now our "Rule" has been renewed and revitalized out of our lives and experiences - out of the lives and experiences of over 650,000 Vincentians in 135 countries on the 5 Continents of the world. In the Providence of God, we have been given this renewed Rule, and it captures the heart and soul of being a Vincentian today.

RULE, Part I-Section 1:

The Origins of the Society and Service to the Poor

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

As **Vincentians**, we are called to be an International Catholic voluntary organization of lay people, dedicated to the poor and to the Church. Our purpose is to follow Christ through service to those in need by bearing witness to His compassionate and liberating love. We must always show commitment through person to person contact and to serve in hope.

As **Vincentians**, we are called to give any form of personal help to anyone in need, to alleviate suffering or deprivation, promoting human dignity and personal integrity. Therefore, we seek out and find those in need, the forgotten and the victims of exclusion or adversity.

As **Vincentians**, in fidelity to the spirit of our founders, we constantly strive for renewal and adapt to changing world conditions, so that priority can always be given to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society. Therefore,

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

- the channels of peace and joy of Christ?
- conscious of our own frailty and weakness?
- the presence of the Risen Christ-nurturing the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace?
- grateful for the blessings received from those we visit?

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

- pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance during our home visits?

- serve the poor cheerfully and without judgment?
- help the poor to feel and recover their own dignity?
- see the suffering Christ in the poor?
- observe utmost confidentiality?
- establish relationships based on trust and friendship?

(Quietly read the text on pages 43-45)

DISCUSSION:

How are you inspired and challenged by Part I - Sec. 1 of our renewed Rule?

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)

OUR FOUNDERS

The renewed Rule begins with a new insight into the Origins of the Society by stating: "The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide Christian community; founded in Paris in 1833, by a group of young Catholic lay people and an older person, who joined together to create the first Conference. The Society wishes to remember them all with gratitude, as they set an example of dedication to the poor and to the Church. From **Le Taillandier**, who received the first inspiration, to **Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Deveaux, Félix Clavé**, all of them knew, in their humility, how to seek the wise advice and support of the one who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society, Emmanuel Bailly. The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charism of each one." (1.1)

Indeed, we stand in gratitude for the gifts and talents of each one of our Founders, who joined together with Blessed Frederic Ozanam to found the Society of St. Vincent de Paul:

EMMANUEL BAILLY (1794-1861): *"The first President-General and Spiritual Advisor."* Emmanuel Bailly was born in the Pas de Calais Department in the north of France. He soon settled in Paris

and worked there as a journalist, editor and publisher. Six children were born to him and his wife, Sidonie, two of whom entered religious life. Throughout his life, Emmanuel Bailly acted as a kind of godparent to young people whom he met during the course of his work. He founded the Conference of History where students could meet to discuss and debate a wide range of issues. It was here that Frederic and his companions were challenged: "What is your Church doing now? Show us your works and we will believe you."

It was therefore quite natural that Ozanam and his five friends should come to Bailly in order to submit their plans for undertaking charitable work. Bailly provided them with a meeting place, he encouraged them to define their ideas and agreed to guide their efforts by becoming their Spiritual Advisor. Having a great devotion to St. Vincent de Paul, and being familiar with his writings, he linked the Charity Conference to the great Vincentian spiritual family by sending the founding members to Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity. In 1844 Bailly retired as the Society's President-General, but he remained a member of the Council until the end of his life in 1861.

AUGUST LE TAILLANDIER (1811-1886): *"The one who received the first inspiration."* Auguste Le Taillandier was born in Rouen (Normandy). He belonged to a family of trades people, who had been living in that region since the 17th century. He and his family moved to Paris so that he could continue his legal studies. He there met Ozanam, becoming one of his friends. He joined the History Conference, as a virtually silent witness, since he never participated in the discussions which so captivated his friends. In 1833 he told Ozanam that he thought rhetorical arguments were leading nowhere and that it would be better to join together in some charitable work, instead of discussions about history, literature and philosophy. And thus, *"he became the one who received the first inspiration."* Le Taillandier was actively involved in the first Charity Conference, in addition to other charitable actions, such as giving religious instruction to apprentices and making visits to prisoners and former prisoners. He then returned to his hometown of Rouen, married and had five children, and became regional director of one of France's oldest and most distinguished insurance companies. He founded a Conference in Rouen and became its president.

PAUL LAMACHE (1810-1892): *"The passionate defender of justice."*

Paul Lamache was born at Saint-Pierre- Eglise in Normandy. He belonged to an ancient family of landowners and administrators, on the fringe of Norman nobility. Paul Lamache settled in Paris to study law. In 1832 he met Ozanam and joined him in the History Conference where he took an active part in debates, then in the Charity Conference. After completing his law studies, he married. He wrote many articles for different revues, in which he participated in the great debates of that age. He was the first Catholic writer to declare himself strongly against slavery.

He became equally involved in the support of the freedom of education. He was successively appointed Rector of the Departmental Academy in the Cotes- du-Nord (Brittany); Professor of Roman Law at the University of Strasbourg, Professor of Administrative Law in Bordeaux and then in Grenoble.

FRANCOIS LALLIER (1814-1886): *" The one who formulated the first version of the Rule."*

Francois Lallier was born in Burgundy. He made Ozanam's acquaintance at the Law Faculty and was to remain, until his death, "one of his closest friends". Ozanam chose him, more-over, as godfather for his daughter, Marie. He was one of the keenest participants in the History Conference's debates. He was actively involved in the steps taken to found the Society: with Bailly, first of all, and then with the Archbishop of Paris. In 1835 he was entrusted by Bailly to formulate the Articles of the St. Vincent de Paul Society's Rule. He was an excellent lawyer, renowned for his precise use of language and he applied himself avidly to such work. In 1837 he was appointed the Society's Secretary-General and signed circulars which form an important part of our Vincentian tradition. In 1839, after stepping down from Council-General, he married and returned to live in his native town, and there he worked as a magistrate.

JULES DEVAUX (1811-1880): *"The first Conference treasurer."*

Jules Devaux was born in Normandy, and he was the son of a country doctor, probably from peasant stock. In about 1830 he settled in Paris to complete his medical studies. It was there that he met Ozanam and his friends, who participated in the History Conference. He took part in the Conference but did not seem to have been very active there. He attended the early meetings of the Society's foundation. He was the first Conference treasurer. He left Paris in 1839, after submitting his medical thesis, and settled in Normandy. After his mother's death, he temporarily abandoned medical practice and traveled especially in Germany. He tried to found the first Conference there but its establishment was postponed.

The remainder of his life is not well known. He died in Paris in 1880.

FELIX CLAVE (1811-1853): *"The least known of our Society's founders."*

Felix Clave, a native of Toulouse, settled in Paris about 1831. It is unknown what kind of studies he undertook but he was cultured and frequented a social milieu somewhat above that into which he had been born. He associated himself with Ozanam's friends and was a member of the delegation which approached Bailly, as well as taking part in the Charity Conference's meetings. He himself founded a Conference in the district of Paris where he lived. Then he left to work in Algeria, and he tried to found a Conference there but was unsuccessful. In 1839 he left Algeria and went to Mexico, where his brother-in-law was living. Clave returned to France, married and published several works, among which was a collection of poetry. Eventually, his nervous troubles increased, and his wife had to resign herself to committing him to an asylum. He died at 42 years of age, two months after Frederic Ozanam's death.

(Biographical notes taken from the book: Origines et fondateurs de la Societe de Saint-Vincent de Paul.)