



SERVING IN HOPE MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.4:

The Rule Creates our Relationships

Learning Objectives

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

- 1. Recognize our relationship within the Vincentian and Catholic network of Charity.**
- 2. Understand our relationship with the Church hierarchy.**
- 3. Appreciate our relationship with others.**

OPENING PRAYER:

".. live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, and is in all. (Ephesians 4: 1-6)

INTRODUCTION:

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

The very founding of our organization was created in an environment of collaboration with other institutions, beginning with the Daughters of Charity through the mentoring of Sr. Rosalie. The founders also knew, respected and collaborated with the hierarchy of the Church. They were active in their parishes and worked with their pastors. They respected the work of other religious and non-religious charities and many of them, including Frederic, were active in civil and Church politics.

The relationships between the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other religious and civil organization needed to be defined. Within the first ten years we find frequent references in the letters of Frederic Ozanam, Emmanuel Bailly and Francois Lallier clarifying activities that should be encouraged or discouraged by the young Society still working out its unique mission. Their vision of how this organization of Catholic laity works with other institutions for the benefit of the poor is captured simply in our Rule.

As generations of Vincentians lived the Rule, from time to time a need for clarification, reinterpretation and renewal was called forth in the designs of Providence. St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic knew that because the Rule was rooted in faith, it would promote unity in diversity, discipline in flexibility, and freedom in accountability. They knew that the Rule would not be static, and they trusted that at different times in history, the Holy Spirit would lead their followers to renew the Rule so that they would be adapted to meet the needs of the poor in each generation. Thus, in the providence of God, new life and hope would always be alive in the hearts and souls of Vincentians.

Our renewed Rule challenges us to have new eyes to see and new ears to hear the cries of those who are poor today by providing guidance and clarity to all of our collaborative relationships.

Rule, Part I - Section 4: Relationships within the Vincentian and Catholic Network of Charity

Section 5: Relationships with the Church Hierarchy

Section 6: Other Relationships

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

- twining to help others in need, nationally and internationally?
- promoting spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help with others who have less resources?
- providing financial, technical, medical and educational support for projects that encourage the poor to become self-sufficient?
- committed to ecumenism and cooperation in works of charity and justice?
- participating in the Church's ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and initiatives?
- preserving the Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society?

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

- consider working with Vincentians in other countries or areas?
- participate in the emergency initiatives of the Society to provide funds for disasters, war or major accidents?
- cooperate with the Vincentian Family in spiritual development and common projects?
- collaborate with the Church's pastoral initiatives at every level?
- have a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church?
- inform the diocesan bishop of our activities annually?
- manage our activities and assets with full autonomy?
- accept the principle of affiliate groups?
- contact State agencies to help in the struggle against injustice?

(Quietly read the text pages 50-53)

DISCUSSION:

What relationships inspires me? What relationships challenges me?

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)

**Encyclical Letter
DEUS CARITAS EST
Pope Benedict XVI**

In the first encyclical Letter, Dec. 25, 2005, Pope Benedict challenges us to a new understanding of collaborative relationships, and so we need to reflect and pray with the following excerpts:

(1) "God is love, (***"Deus Caritas est"***) and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." (1 John 1:16) These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, St. John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: *"We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us"*

We have come to believe in God's love: in these words, the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. St. John's Gospel describes that event in these words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should... have eternal life" (3:16). ...Since God has first loved us (1John 4:10), love is now no longer a mere "command"; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.... For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others.

(25) Two essential facts emerge:

- a) The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility:**
- **of proclaiming the word of God,**

- celebrating the sacraments, and
- exercising the ministry of charity.

b) The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas-agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter "by chance" (Luke 10:31), whoever they may be.

(27) In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.

(30)...I now wish to consider the overall situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world today.

a) Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures. This "togetherness" at times gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, yet our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others challenges us to share their situation and their difficulties. Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual. Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbors in need. The Second Vatican Council had made this point very clearly: "Now that, through better means of communication, distances between peoples have been almost eliminated, charitable activity can and should embrace all people of all needs."

On the other hand—and here we see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization—we now have at our disposal numerous means of offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need, not least the modern systems of distributing food and clothing, and of providing housing and care.

Concern for our neighbor transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council rightly observed that "among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is a growing, inescapable sense of solidarity between all people." State agencies and

humanitarian associations work to promote this, the former mainly through subsidies or tax relief, the latter by making available considerable resources.

b) This situation has led to the birth and the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies, which have borne fruit. Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favoring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.

(31b) The Christian's program—the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus—is a "heart which sees". This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.

Obviously when charitable activity is carried out by the Church as a communitarian initiative, the spontaneity of individuals must be combined with planning, foresight and cooperation with other similar institutions.

(34) Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (1Cor 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing." This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.

(35) There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility, we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work:

"The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor. 5:14)