

From Your Servant Leader

August 3, 2017

Three different “Our Faith in Action: Today’s Society of St. Vincent de Paul” (OFIA) episodes aired last week on EWTN-TV. This means that over the next two weeks, expect some interesting questions at your Conference meetings!

The show was originally designed to “Bring the Society to Catholic homes” in our plans to attract more potential Society members. This is done by using OFIA as our own version of Catholic reality television, showing real Vincentians helping real people in real local communities.

Each episode has three examples, often in three different cities. None of the dialogue is scripted, and as they used to say on another famous show, “What you are about to see is a true story” of the Vincentian charism alive and well. Besides, we can’t make up this stuff!



Another benefit of the show, though, is what our own members are getting out of it. You get a glimpse into what another Conference or Council is doing, and it may look a lot different than what you do locally. Just last week among those three episodes, we saw a free pharmacy, a menu planning enhancement to a food pantry, a young-adult Society/poverty immersion experience, a Vincentian farm that provides a food pantry’s fresh produce, a micro-loan program to help people escape from predatory lending, some unique home visits such as provision of a chair lift for a young girl and her family, and some other examples of programs you may never have heard of in your Society experience.

And so this week and next, you may hear this question at your meeting: “Why aren’t WE doing this work?”

It’s a good and fair question. The fact that a program is featured on TV doesn’t suggest that this is any sort of Society requirement or even suggestion. It instead illustrates the great innovation and creativity among our members in every community, using available resources to meet needs. The televised examples are also ideas from which you can build your own creative ideas and programs!

Consider the OFIA programs as idea springboards. While we won’t ever suggest on the show that any program (even a home visit) is a standard everywhere, every featured program is a possible idea for you as a Conference to take on, adapt as you see fit, and use in your neighborhood. So let’s see, 13 episodes, three vignettes per episode; that means 39 or so potential new ideas you can consider from this series.

Some people will very quickly think “that won’t work here” and they may be right. Others, fortunately, will ask “Could that work here?” and turn on their own creative juices to enhance or create programs, have reasons to invite new members with new skills to join us and grow the Society and its works.

Let’s consider too that all those Vincentians you see on TV are real people! They can be available to answer your questions, provide more information on program costs and benefits, and otherwise

help you to consider the idea's viability for your area. Some have already presented on their work at regional or national meetings. Reach out, and let them know you liked what you saw on TV!

All of the OFIA episodes will air again in a few months as a regular EWTN series! We'll also put them all on the internet after they air twice, so you can find them at your leisure and share them with your Conference members. In essence this will become a video library chock full of possible ideas.

To be clear, we don't intend that the programs featured on EWTN are the best of what the Society offers. We wanted to show the larger EWTN viewing audience the scope of what we do, provide some regional and program diversity, and excite them about joining us in our spirituality and works. Often we shot video of two or more programs in one city to save production costs. There are many other great programs out there, but we can't present all of them in our limited series – at least not yet. While we have completed principal shooting for the first 13-episode series, we have hopes that the series may continue so maybe your Conference will be featured one day. But with 4,400 Conferences, that's a lot of shows!

For now, please watch when each episode airs, and use them primarily as a recruiting tool for Society membership. But a great secondary use may be to watch the shows together as a Conference and ask, "Hey, why don't we try this?" We might all be surprised what can happen next.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave" followed by a stylized flourish.

Dave