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# THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

*An Outline*

by

**JAMES F. KENNEDY**

President Metropolitan Central Council  
of Chicago

Chairman of the Superior Council's Committee  
on Literature and Forms

—:—

Presented September, 1922, at the  
Annual Meeting of the Superior Council  
of the United States  
held at the Catholic University of America  
Washington, D. C.



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of Chicago**

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## The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

### Its Origin

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul had its origin when the first Conference was formed at Paris in the year 1833 by eight young men — not the least remarkable or zealous of whom was Frederic Ozanam — attending the School of Law of the University of Paris. In a debating Society, composed of students, were many atheists, who were bitter and aggressive in their attacks on the

Church. They were answered with ability and eloquence by a few practical Catholics among the students. The strength displayed in defense of their faith rapidly developed intimate and friendly relations among these youths, who had not previously known one another.

After one of these debates, Frederic Ozanam, generally accepted as the founder of the Society, said to his companions: "How sad it is to see Catholics, to see our Holy Mother, the Church, thus attacked, ridiculed, and calumniated; let us, of course, remain in the breach and face the attacks, but, do you not feel, like me, a desire of the necessity for having outside this combative Conference, another meeting consisting exclusively of Christian friends and wholly devoted to charity? Does it not seem to be time to join actions to words and to affirm by works the vitality of our faith?"

Thus animated, they met together and formed the first Conference, choosing St. Vincent de Paul for their model and patron, and took upon themselves the visiting and assisting of the poor in their homes, that great work which has become so essentially characteristic of the Society, and by which its members are brought within the reach of priceless lessons of Christian resignation and practical piety. This was the seed from which sprang the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

It was organized by young men and for young men. Ozanam was just twenty, the oldest of his companions was under forty, and the ages of the other five from nineteen to twenty-three. After a short time, when their numbers had increased to about one hundred, these members of the first Conference, divided and formed a second Conference, and eventually a Society was constituted with a rule and purpose.

### **The Society's Spread in France and Abroad**

Gradually, the Society spread over France, and, in 1836, three years afterwards, it passed the confines of that country and a Conference was established in Rome. Early in 1844, it found its way to England and Ireland. And, in 1845, the first Conference was founded in the United States of America.

### **Organization and General Administration of the Society**

The Council General, located at Paris, France, maintains general jurisdiction over the Society throughout the world. This Council is a self-perpetuating body. Councils and Conferences in all parts of the world report to the Council General, which issues an annual summary of such reports. Once a year the President General presents to the Sovereign Pontiff a report of the Society's work. Conferences and Councils or-

ganized in any country as branches of the Society depend for letters of aggregation or affiliation with the Society at large upon the approval of the Council General. Before such application may be made by a Conference a probation period of one year is required, and that the application show evidence that the Society's Rule has been observed and that a reasonable amount of charitable work has been done during the probationary period.

As one of the objects of the Society is to maintain its members by mutual example and advice in the practice of a Christian life, and as the Holy See has awarded the members the privilege of sharing in the many indulgences for faithfully observing its Rule, and as these spiritual favors are limited to the members of Conferences formally aggregated by the Council General, the necessity of every newly organized Conference preparing itself for such aggregation is obvious.

### **Subordinate Administration**

The subordinate administration of the Society is divided as follows: Superior Councils, Central Councils, Particular Councils and Conferences.

#### **Superior Councils**

The Society in the several national divisions is administered under the supervision and direction of a Superior Council. In some countries, how-

ever, owing to local conditions, more than one such Superior Council exists. The Superior Councils act as Intermediaries between the various divisions of the Society and the Council General. The Superior Council of the United States has general supervision of the Society in this country.

### **Central Councils**

Of Central Councils there are two classes: Metropolitan Central Councils, having supervisory jurisdiction of the Society in the territory of the Ecclesiastical Provinces, in which they have been founded; Diocesan Central Councils have supervision of the Society in their dioceses and are subordinate to the respective Metropolitan Central Councils of the Ecclesiastical Provinces in which they are located, if such Metropolitan Central Councils exist; or in the event that such Councils are lacking, then to the Superior Council.

The functions of the Superior Council and the Central Councils are solely administrative and supervisory in character. They do not engage in, or conduct, works of charity, leaving those activities entirely to the Conferences and the Particular Councils.

### **Particular Councils**

Particular Councils are organized in cities, towns, or localities where three or more conferences exist, to unite them in one general organization for the supervision of the Conferences and

for the effective administration of the affairs and work of general character, attention to which might suffer through lack of funds, or personal service, if dependent upon the means and efforts of individual conferences.

Membership of Particular Councils is made up of the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of Conferences represented, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Special Works and such additional persons as the Rule may provide for the membership of the Council. Many Particular Councils include in their membership the Secretaries of Conferences.

Particular Councils are subordinate to Diocesan Central Councils, if there be such, if not, to the Metropolitan Central Councils, or in the absence of both, then to the Superior Council.

### **The Conference**

The Conference is the unit of organization of the Society. It is based on parish lines. It usually assumes the parish name for its title and limits its activity to the bounds of the parish in which it is established. It has a board of officers consisting of President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, Librarian, keeper of clothes room and the Pastor, or one of his assistants, delegated by him, serves as Spiritual Director. The Conference is under the jurisdiction of the Particular Council, or in the absence of such Council, to the next higher Council in the order hereinabove named.



## Conference Meetings

The members of the Conference meet once a week throughout the year. The President opens the meeting with the prescribed prayers. Some one of the members give a short spiritual reading from the Society's Manual. Then follows the secretary's minutes, the treasurer's report, the calling of the relief roll, the reports of the groups of visiting committees concerning the condition of the poor families they assisted during the preceding week, as well as the reports on the different features of charitable works that have been given attention to. An interchange of views and opinions are expressed among the members on pending matters of interest to the Society and the well-being of the families on the roll. They pass upon the committees' reports on new applicants for relief, giving special attention to the different types of families applying for help. In this phase of its work the Vincentians keep in mind the thought that they owe a duty, not only to the Conference, to its benefactors, but also to the applicants for aid, to fully acquaint themselves with the needs and circumstances of the persons asking for assistance. The benefactors contribute their funds because they have faith in the diligence of the members in applying their gifts to the deserving. The families asking for aid are entitled to receive a fair hearing of their requests, which, if they be in need means

so much for their material and moral well-being. Relief is allocated to the Visitors for the poor families that have been adopted by the Conference and is taken to their homes during the ensuing week. All the Visiting Committees are composed of at least two members. The Treasurer takes up a collection, to which every member contributes an offering proportionate to his means. This collection is made in such a way that the amount given by the member is absolutely secret. No member ever knows what any one of his brother members contributes.

These weekly meetings may vary in length, according to the number of members in the Conference and the extent of its work. The meetings are characterized by few of the formalities that are found in ordinary beneficial societies or other organizations, being more of the nature of social or friendly round table gatherings, where brotherly love reigns supreme and everyone is ready to sacrifice his opinion, his time and his comfort for the good of all.

### **General Meetings**

Besides the weekly meetings of the Conferences, all the members of all the Conferences of the City and its environs, assemble four times a year in what are commonly known as General Meetings. These meetings are held under the auspices of the Metropolitan Central Council, or the Diocesan

Central Council, where one exists, otherwise under the Particular Council. Previously to these General Meetings, the Conferences have made returns of their quarterly reports and at the close of the fiscal year their Annual Reports to the Particular Council. These reports are tabulated and a summary of the receipts, expenditures, works and membership is prepared and read to the members at the General Meetings. A like summary for the same periods is read showing the activities of the Special Work Committees. In places where the number of the Conferences are few the individual reports of each Conference is read, as well as the summary of all. The General Meetings are looked forward to with keen interest by the Conference members in that they afford them opportunity to join in the religious exercises of the meetings held on feast days, and are at the same time occasions for the reunion of the Conference members.

Instead of holding the General Meetings in one stationary place, it is customary in many localities, where conditions are suitable, for some one of the Conferences of the City to invite the Particular Council to convene the General Meeting in its parish hall. In such instances the pastor of the Church where the hall is situated is the President of honor of this General Meeting. From time to time these meetings are honored by the

presence of some invited speaker. Not infrequently, the bishop or archbishop of the Diocese is present and addresses the members.

Although at the General Meetings the reports presented cover the four quarters of the calendar year, the meetings themselves are not fixed with a view of any equal division of time but are held on the four feast days of the Society as follows: the first Sunday of Lent; the Sunday of the Good Shepherd, (the anniversary of the translation of the relics of St. Vincent de Paul) the second Sunday after Easter; the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul, July 19th, or the Sunday immediately following; the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th, or the Sunday within its octave.

On these feast days all active and honorary members are expected to receive Holy Communion, to attend the General Meeting and join in the opening and closing prayers.

### **Retreats**

A retreat or tridium for the members of the Conferences and the Councils occurs once a year. On these occasions the clergyman in charge of the retreat recalls to the minds of the members their duties and obligations, not only as Christians, but to the Society, its poor and the charity work it conducts. These annual retreat or tridium exercises have been conducted almost from the begin-

ning of the Society. All members who possibly can do so are expected to join in these annual exercises.

### **Duties of Active Members**

Active membership is limited to practical Catholic men above eighteen years of age, who are desirous of securing their sanctification by assisting in the relief of the poor or in other good works adopted by the Society. In a general way, it may be said that a member fulfills his duties as such by; first, attending at least three of the weekly meetings of his Conference every month; second, visiting once a week the poor family or families assigned to him, or the prison, almshouse, hospital or other institution he has engaged to visit, or in performing such other work as he has assumed, in accordance with the Rule of the Society; third, attending each year the General Communion and meetings of all the members of the Society in the town in which he resides, on the four Feast Days of the Society; fourth, contributing such amount as he can afford to the secret collection which is taken up at the weekly Conference meetings as also at the General Meetings; fifth, attendance at the General Meetings; sixth, attendance at the exercises of the annual retreats.

## **Aspirant Members**

Aspirant members are chosen from among youths under eighteen years of age. They attend all meetings and take part in the works of the Conference under the direction of the older members. Sometimes, when sufficiently numerous, they are organized into Conferences, and adopt special works, as, for instance, securing the regular attendance of children at Sunday School and teaching Catechism.

By the Papal Brief of January 10, 1845, Aspirant Members participate in all the indulgences accorded Active Members.

The hope of the Society in the future lies principally in the training of the youth of today. Active Members of the Society can do much by making known to their sons, younger brothers, relatives and friends the purpose of the Society, its works and the personal-service of the members. They soon awaken in the minds of these youths an interest that will steadily grow into a love for works of charity, a love for one another, a love of God's poor and a love to become Aspirant Members.

## **Honorary Members**

Honorary Members are practical Catholic men who do not join actively in the works of the Society and are not expected to attend the Week-

ly Meetings of the Conference, but who make an annual offering of a fixed sum of money for the support of the work. They are expected to receive Holy Communion and attend the general meetings on the Society's Feast Days, and to assist at the annual Retreats and other pious ceremonies.

Honorary Members are entitled to the same Indulgences as Active Members upon the usual conditions stated in the list of Indulgences for Active Members insofar as they can be applied to Honorary Members.

### **Benefactors, Benefactresses and Subscribers**

These are not members of the Society. They are charitable persons, men and women, of any creed, who, by their contributions, make the Society the almoner of their alms. Many Conferences are greatly assisted by the zeal of benefactresses who act as collectors, secure employment for needy women, or do works in which the Conference members cannot engage in a direct manner.

### **Special Works of the Society**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul had originally for its special and almost exclusive object the visiting of the poor at their own homes, and it was through this that it trained its members in the practice of charity. No deed was better

calculated to excite zeal, none to be more fruitful. As the poor were visited, their great wants were revealed; one good work, at first isolated, brought on another; a seed thrown at random raised new ones; from the garret, the cellar or other humble dwelling places of the poor, the Vincentian went to the school, the workshop, the prison, the hospital, and in fact, everywhere that want, misery and misfortune found an abiding place, or where material or spiritual good could be done. The Special Works thus undertaken embrace nearly all the miseries of human life, and there exists between them a harmony which none could foresee and which, therefore, can be ascribed to God alone. Many of the splendid charity institutions administering to needs of neglected children and the friendless aged owe their beginning to the efforts of humble members of the Society, who, because of their knowledge of conditions, urged that the problems be cared for.

While the visiting of the poor in their homes is the great work of the Society, it is not always possible to provide all of the members with the opportunity to make family visits. In some localities the poor are not numerous; some Conferences have not sufficient funds, and again, some excellent Vincentians feel called to other works for which they are specially adapted.



Among some of the outstanding Special Works are :

Visiting persons confined in prisons,  
almshouses, hospitals, sanatoriums,  
and other institutions.

Finding homes for poor children.

Spiritual training for boys and young men.

Christian burial for the poor.

Circulating good literature.

Summer outing for poor mothers  
and their children.

Secretariats for the poor.

Securing employment for men and boys.

These and other works engage the attention of the members, for it is an axiom that "no work of charity is foreign to the Society." It must not be concluded, however, that the Society in every city or town is bound to adopt all, or even the greater part of the designated special works. In some countries, conditions are not favorable for the doing of some of these, while in other countries, many of them reach a high state of development and efficiency. Sometimes the social conditions of a country, at others the limited resources of the Society, or peculiar circumstances surrounding it and, often the interference or prohibition of the civil authorities render impossible the establishing or carrying on of certain types of charitable works. It, therefore, becomes the duty of the Vincentians to venture upon no Special Work without mature consideration and the special sanction of the ecclesiastical authorities.

## **Source of Revenues of the Society**

The revenues of the Society are derived from the following sources:

1. The secret collection at the weekly Conference meetings, the Monthly Council and General Meetings.
2. The annual contributions of Honorary Members.
3. Gifts from benefactors and benefactresses.
4. Moneys contributed in poor boxes in the churches. Moneys contributed in boxes of St. Anthony's Shrine.
5. Annual charity collections.
6. Lectures — Entertainments.
7. Legacies.

## **Thoughts to be Remembered**

The real object of the Society is the welfare of the soul of the individual member. Visiting and assisting the poor and the unfortunate are the means to this end, but not the end itself.

No dues, fines or penalties for neglect of duty are imposed on members; nor are the obligations of personal service assumed obligations of conscience, that is, they do not bind under pain of sin. The Society trusts entirely to the zeal and loyalty of its members, to their love of God and of their neighbor, for a strict compliance with its Rule.

The Society does not assume the public duty of aiding all the poor of a parish or town. It does what it can, with the means at its disposal, to help the poor in soul and body. It follows the advice of Tobias: "If you have much, give abundantly, if you have little, take care even to bestow willingly a little."

### **The Society's Adaptation to New Conditions**

From the days of Frederic Ozanam the Presidents of the Council General, the Society's spokesmen, have pointed out, from time to time, that its members develop and sustain its works with efficiency, not only in respect to its spiritual aspect and the personal service given by the members to the families aided, but also that the needs of the poor be suitably cared for. Consequently, the Society has the power to adapt itself to the changing economic conditions of our civilization. This power of adaptation is aptly outlined in the following excerpts from the address of the President General to the members of the Paris Conferences at the General Meeting, December 14, 1919, published in the Society's Bulletin of March, 1920:

"In order to develop normally and to live a useful and efficacious existence, every association must continually adapt itself to its environment always in conformity with the principles upon which it was founded. It is thus acted upon by two forces, tradition and evolution, which, though

apparently mutually exclusive, often have bearing upon each other. - - No more need be said to convince you that our Society should evolve, that is adapt itself to changing external conditions, that it may the better carry out its missions, provided always that its traditions are preserved inviolable. The traditions of the Society, which should be the fountain of our inspiration, must be respected. Immobility, however, means death; activity is a sign of life and progress. It is not enough to say: 'We are doing what Ozanam did.' On the contrary, very often, we are not doing even that. Ozanam did not feel that he had discharged all his obligations to his fellowmen when he had made a few visits to the poor. In addition, he comforted the imprisoned, looking after apprentices, taught soldiers. We must ask ourselves the question: 'If Ozanam were alive now, what would he do?' Ozanam's mind was broad, deep, enthusiastic and reflective. He lived in God and his intimacy engendered in him a remarkable clearness of vision. He saw into the heart of things when he wrote, that what divided men was not so much the question of political forms as the social problem. 'We must precipitate ourselves,' he said, 'between these two hostile forces, the one animated by the power of gold, the other by the power of despair, if we wish to prevent a conflict, or at least to mitigate its consequences.' . . . According as the activity of our Society developed, its character became truly social, so that it has been described as the most social of all works.'

## The Society in the United States

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the oldest lay Society in our country. The first Conference was founded in St. Louis Cathedral Parish, St. Louis, Missouri, November 20, 1845, by the Very Ambrose J. Heim, Vicar General, an Alsatian by birth. Soon afterwards the Society spread rapidly to other dioceses. From the beginning it secured warmest approval from members of the hierarchy. Among its earliest sponsors were the Most Reverend Peter Richard Kenrick, St. Louis, in 1845, the Most Reverend John Hughes, New York, 1846, and the Right Reverend John Timon, Bishop of Buffalo, New York, in 1848.

In their pastoral letters of the Second and Third Plenary Councils of Baltimore issued in 1866 and 1884 respectively, the Archbishops and the Bishops of the United States warmly approved the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and strongly urged its extension to all the dioceses and parishes of the country. The Cardinals Gibbons, McCloskey and Farley, Archbishops Spalding of Baltimore, Kenrick, Purcell, Corrigan, Ireland, Feehan, Ryan, Kean, Williams, Quigley, Elder, Blenke and Riordan, the great churchmen of their times, were staunch friends and propagators of the Society. During its long career of usefulness it has merited the approval of the Ordinaries of all the dioceses where it has carried on its work. The establishment of the Superior Council of the United States

of America was cordially recommended by the Archbishops in their Annual Meeting in 1911. At the time of this Council's institution in 1915, His Eminence, James Cardinal Gibbons, became its first Spiritual Director, and his successor as Archbishop of Baltimore, the Most Reverend Michael J. Curley, D. D., has followed him as its spiritual guide.

Conformably to the plan adopted at the institution of the Superior Council of the United States in 1915, every one of the fourteen then existing ecclesiastical provinces, when satisfactorily organized, shall be presided over by a Metropolitan Central Council.

At the present time Metropolitan Central Councils have been instituted in: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis and St. Paul. Though as yet lacking such Councils the Society is organized and carrying on its work in the provinces of Dubuque, Milwaukee, Oregon, Santa Fe and San Francisco.

The Superior Council of the United States has jurisdiction over the entire Society in this country and is the sole medium of communication and relations for all its subordinate divisions with the Council General.

The Metropolitan (Provincial) Central Councils are limited in their jurisdiction to the supervision of the Society in their respective provinces, and are under the jurisdiction of the Superior Council.

The Diocesan Central Councils are limited in their jurisdiction to their dioceses. They are under the jurisdiction of their respective Metropolitan Central Councils, or, in the absence of such Councils, of the Superior Council of the United States.

The Rule with regard to organization, object, membership, jurisdiction, administration, etc., apply without exception in the United States as they do for the numerous divisions of the Society throughout the world.

### **The Society's Publications**

The Bulletin of the Superior Council of Ireland, in which is published the English translation of the French Bulletin, is intended for the use of the Society in English speaking countries. Besides, there are also national publications. At present in the United States, The Catholic Charities Review, succeeding The St. Vincent de Paul Quarterly maintains a section devoted to the Society under the direction of the Superior Council, and it is recognized as the official publication of the Society in the United States. Be-

sides some of the Central or Metropolitan Central Councils publish Bulletins for the members of their provinces.

### **Facts to be Remembered**

The Society is a Catholic organization of laymen as distinguished from an organization of Catholic laymen. The meetings are opened and closed with prayer and followed with spiritual reading.

Membership in the Society is limited to men. A similar organization, The Ladies of Charity, founded by St. Vincent de Paul, meets the desire for organization by women.

Unless the parish Conference has been aggregated by the Council General its members do not share in the spiritual rewards provided by the Sovereign Pontiffs. Though Conferences are aggregated the spiritual rewards are limited to those members complying with the required conditions, one of which is to attend at least three of the weekly meetings every month.

In order to function properly, a Conference meets weekly throughout the year, there being no vacation periods. Its relief to the assisted families is to be personally brought to them in their homes weekly by the members of the Conference; visits to families are to be made by Committees of two members;— when reporting



visits count only the times the families have been visited by the committee from the Conference, not the number of members engaged in making the visits; no matter how many members call when a visit is made, it counts but one visit.

### **The Members Follow Counsel of Ecclesiastical Superiors**

That the members will always remember that they are only laymen without any mission to teach others. For this, and every other reason, they will pay the utmost deference to the counsels which may be given to them by the Society, or its heads; they will, above all, follow with respect the course which the ecclesiastical superiors think proper to point out to them. St. Vincent de Paul wished that his disciples should not undertake any good work without having first secured the assent and received the benediction of the local Pastors. Neither will the St. Vincent de Paul men ever undertake any new and important work within an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, without consulting him who is the head of it. They will do nothing in opposition to spiritual authority, considering as an evil the good which they would attempt contrary to its opinion.

They will extend to a certain degree, this deference to the Sisters of religious orders, or even to laymen who may have offices of charity to

perform toward those whom they may also desire to help, esteeming it an honor to be considered the least among their brethren, and to be no more than servants and instruments of others in ministering to the poor. Lastly among themselves the younger will defer to the elder, and the newly admitted members to those of long standing.

This society of charity endeavors to attain and practice every virtue; there are some virtues which are more essentially necessary to the members for the due discharge of the charitable duties to which they devote themselves, and among these are: self-denial, christian prudence, humility, the active love of their neighbour, zeal for the salvation of souls, meekness in heart and word, and above all, the spirit of brotherly love.



## THE SOVEREIGN PONTIFFS AND THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, almost from its beginning, has been deeply indebted to the Sovereign Pontiffs for their approval of its object and Rule, and for their kindness of heart in placing the Society under the constant care of a Cardinal Protector, who represents its interests before the Sacred Congregation. The following excerpts indicate the esteem in which the different Popes have held the Society since its organization:

### Pope Gregory XVI

Twelve years after the inception of the Society, His Holiness conferred various Indulgences upon the Benefactors of the Society by a Brief, dated the 12th of August, 1845, which opens as follows:

“Whereas, We have learned that the Society established under the auspices and name of St. Vincent de Paul, and devoted to the exercise of works of Christian charity, is, in an eminent degree, advancing the good of religion and the welfare of the faithful; and in order that the said Society may daily make new progress We have determined to enrich with the Heavenly Treasures of the Church all such as shall bestow their care and wealth to the furtherance of the Society aforesaid, to the end that by the spiritual advan-

tages held out to them their zeal may be more and more enkindled.”

### **Pope Pius IX**

On the fifth of January, 1855, Pope Pius IX gave audience to 450 members of the Society, whom he deigned to address, concluding with these words:

“I bless you in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, and may their benediction be with you all the days of your lives. May it extend over all those who co-operate in your charitable works, whether in Rome or Italy, in Europe, or in the whole world.”

### **Pope Leo XIII**

In his Encyclical Letter, “*Humanum genus*,” dated the twentieth of April, 1884, His Holiness referred to the Society in the following terms:

“We cannot pass in silence a Society that has given so many admirable examples, and deserved so well of the people. We refer to that which has taken the name of its Father, St. Vincent de Paul. The works achieved by the Society, and the object which it has proposed to itself are well known. The efforts of its members tend simply, by a charitable initiative, to lead them to the help of the poor and unfortunate; an end attained with wonderful wisdom and a not less admirable modesty. But the more this Society

conceals the good that it does, the better fitted it is for the practice of Christian charity and the relief of the miseries of men.”

On many subsequent occasions His Holiness deigned to express his approbation of the Society, and in a letter under his own hand, dated the tenth of February, 1898, addressed to the President General (Paris) He thus referred to it:

“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul devotes itself entirely, in spirit and by its rules, to relieve the sufferings of the wretched; it strives with its whole zeal, with its whole care, to imitate and reproduce the boundless charity of Christ; and, consequently, it has always been, and it is, the object of Our most affectionate interest.”

### **Pope Pius X**

On the eleventh of May, 1904, His Holiness, Pope Pius X, deigned to receive the President General and a deputation from the Council General (Paris) and to address them in the following gracious terms:

“Beloved Sons: I wish to thank you for all the good you are doing. Yes, assuredly, I know your Society. I saw it at work in Mantua and in Venice. where it was rendering invaluable

services to the poor by distributing alms but still more so by bringing them spiritual aid. How many families have been saved by its intervention? But, above all, how many young men have been led back to the right path by it? The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a work of apostleship for good, while there are others which are at the present day, works of apostleship for evil. Continue, therefore, to exercise charity in the way you are doing; you will find in it peace for your soul, and when one has done some good in the day he rests more peacefully at night. Your Society is the work needed for the present time. I will encourage it and bless it."

### **Pope Benedict XV**

Our Holy Father, in a letter to the President General in October, 1914, wrote:

"We have never ceased to take the most lively interest in this Association, eminently Catholic and Social, and it is with profound satisfaction that We have followed, and still follow, the development of this wide-spreading tree, which has extended its branches and borne its precious fruits of supernatural charity into all parts of the world.

“When at Bologna, We had the opportunity of seeing more closely the countless benefits of the Apostleship of this Society, so penetrated with the spirit of Jesus Christ, and the good work of its Conferences, which We have endeavored to further as far as We are able.

“This is to tell you, dear son, of the love, which following the examples of Our predecessors of holy memory, We bear in Our heart for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and for all its members, who not long since renewed their zeal and the ardor of their devotion, on the occasion of the never-to-be-forgotten centenary celebration of the birth of him who was the principal founder and the most illustrious Apostle of the Society.”

### **Pope Pius XI**

Replying to the joint address of the President and the Council General presented to Pope Pius XI shortly after His elevation to the Papal See, His Holiness graciously wrote as follows:

“Dear Son:

Health and Apostolic Benediction.

It was with keen pleasure that We read the joint address which the worthy President and the Council General of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul so kindly sent Us on the occasion of Our elevation to the Chair of St. Peter.

We have for a long time closely followed the activities of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul and have appreciated their zeal and devotion to the Holy See, the supernatural spirit which animated their works, and the resulting abundant fruits of their apostolate. We have also many times had the opportunity of manifesting Our paternal interest towards your Conferences. Nor could We receive otherwise than with a very special benevolence the homage of the sentiments of filial piety which you have so heartily offered Us, with the assurances of your profound attachment to the Holy See.

Your letter clearly places before Us, as in a picture, the present condition of your works. If your Conferences themselves were obliged to suffer a terrible blow because of the great cataclysm which has overthrown Europe, We know how devotedly you have undertaken to upbuild your impoverished work and to restore them to their former strength and prosperity. Our heart was consoled on learning that with God's help this work of restoration is nearing completion, and that by the charity of your confreres throughout the world you have been permitted to extend great help to the countries which suffered most from the war. The 230 new Conferences, of which your worthy Society has witnessed the aggregation, give testimony of its prolific vitality.



In giving thanks to God for the results accomplished, We are happy to extend to you, Dear Son, and to your co-workers, Our earnest congratulations for the zeal you display in so widely extending this greatly needed work and in disseminating its salutary influence. We beseech our Divine Saviour to continue to pour out abundantly of His graces upon this Institution, which draws from the depth of His Heart the secret of its generous devotion, and to continue His blessings on your apostolate of charity in the immense needs of the present times.

We grant with all Our heart, to you, Dear Son, to the members of the Council General, and to all the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, to your benefactors and to your works, the Apostolic benediction.

Rome, The Vatican, April 5, 1922, the first year of Our Pontificate.”

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