

GUIDELINES FOR THE SPIRITUAL ADVISOR IN THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

Presentation

This document presents, in its first section, a description of the role and a list of the responsibilities of the Spiritual Advisor in the Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul. The second part offers a few suggestions of reflections and prayers that could be used at the meetings.

I. The Spiritual Advisor of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

A. Description

The Spiritual Advisor is a priest, permanent deacon, religious or Catholic lay person who undertakes the role and responsibility for the spiritual growth, development and life of the Council or Conference in accord with the mission and ministry of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Spiritual Advisors are full Council/Conference members, but they do not serve as officers of a Council or Conference.

B. Function of the Spiritual Advisor

Spiritual Advisors play an important role in promoting the work of the Society. They give inspiration and challenge for the adoption of works in keeping with changing times and need.

The Spiritual Advisor's task is that of spiritual animator. The Spiritual Advisor is to help the development of the spiritual life of the members and to enable them to better understand the meaning of charity and its practical application toward those in need.

The Spiritual Advisor attends the meetings, participates in the discussions and provides the necessary guidance to the Council or Conference membership on spiritual matters.

As circumstances permit, Spiritual Advisors may actively participate with other members in the direct service of the needy.

C. Qualities Appropriate for a Spiritual Advisor in the Society

- ♦ A commitment to the call and pursuit of Christian holiness.
- ♦ Personal witness to growth and development of his or her own spiritual life.
- ♦ A knowledge of and commitment to Jesus Christ and the role of the gospels as an integral part of Vincentian spirituality.
- ♦ A knowledge of the spirituality, values and lives of St. Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and St. Louise de Marillac.
- ♦ A commitment to the value of lay ministry in the fulfilment of the mission of the Catholic Church.
- ♦ A commitment to the Rule, mission and ministry of the society and to the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- ♦ An ability to recognize and enable the gifts and talents of Vincentians and others in fulfilling the mission of the Society.
- ♦ A Willingness to participate actively with fellow Vincentians in their service to the needy.

D. Responsibilities of the Spiritual Advisor

To either provide scriptural and spiritual readings for the meetings of the Council or Conference which relate to the mission of the Society or share responsibility with others to assure that appropriate readings are provided.

To help design, plan and execute special prayers and formational sessions, such as days of recollection, prayer services, etc.

To help members of the Society reach a deeper faith awareness of:

- a) their participation in the mystery of the Church;
- b) their need for openness to others;
- c) their vocation as Christians and Vincentians to serve and minister to others as well as to each other;
- d) their identity with the poor and needy;
- e) fostering friendship with those in need.

E. Functional Responsibilities of a Council Spiritual Advisor

- ◆ Aid in the recruitment of Conference Spiritual Advisors.
- ◆ Organize training sessions and materials for Conference Spiritual Advisors.
- ◆ Frame the spiritual portion of quarterly gatherings and other meetings of the whole Council. This will necessitate attendance and participation at these meetings.
- ◆ Guide Conference Spiritual Advisors on matters of spirituality both collectively and personally.
- ◆ Be the direct liaison and advocate on spiritual matters with the bishop.
- ◆ Assist in supervising the spiritual growth and development of the Conferences.
- ◆ Arrange for, in conjunction with the Conference Spiritual Advisors and officers, retreats, days of recollection, special spiritual study opportunities, the feast of Blessed Frederic (September 9th), Ozanam Sunday, etc.
- ◆ Attend when and where possible, regional and national meetings and participate actively in the spiritual components of these meetings.

F. Selection and Approval of a Conference Spiritual Advisor

The Conference president may nominate someone for the pastor's approval, e.g., a parochial vicar, a parish administrator, a permanent deacon, a member of a religious community, a lay person who is an active member of the Conference. However, other candidates may be considered, e.g., a religious assigned to pastoral ministry, a director or teacher of religious education, a retired priest or religious. In any event, the person nominated should be dedicated to his or her spiritual life and one who possesses or is willing to learn the meaning or Vincentian Spirituality (see Appendix II).

G. Responsibilities of a Conference Spiritual Advisor

- ◆ Lead opening and closing prayers of each Conference meeting.
- ◆ Obtain, prepare and read – or assign to be read – spiritual reading for each meeting which relates to the mission of the Society.
- ◆ Lead discussion/reflection after each reading.
- ◆ Insure that all meetings are conducted in a spirit of Christian charity.
- ◆ Collaborate with the Council Spiritual Advisor in setting up programs for the spiritual development of the Conferences such as days of recollection, prayer services.

- ♦ To assist members to reach a deeper faith awareness of their participation in the mystery of the Church, of their need for openness to others, of their vocation as Christians and Vincentians to serve and minister to others, person-to-person, as well as to each other, and of their identity with the poor and needy.
- ♦ Attend Council and regional meetings and, if possible, other gatherings dealing with or related to spirituality.
- ♦ Communicate and promulgate information obtained from meetings to the Conference membership regarding spiritual matters.
- ♦ Provide resource material for the membership to assist in their personal spiritual development.
- ♦ Maintain ongoing communication with the pastor or parish administrator.

H. Relationship of a Spiritual Advisor to the Council and Conference

Besides contributing to the spiritual life of the Council or Conference, the Spiritual Advisor also serves as the advocate for the rights of the poor and reminds the Society of its responsibility to be servant of the poor. Advocacy may include raising individual and corporate consciousness of the plight of the poor, as well as inspiring and challenging Vincentians in reading the signs of the times and in adopting works in keeping with changing times and needs.

The Spiritual Advisor may assist in the planning of activities with the Council or Conference members.

The Spiritual Advisor may be a spokesperson, along with others, for the Society's unity to other parish organizations and in extra-parochial meetings.

Spiritual Advisors should be readily available to members of the Society and should manifest support in every way possible for the ministry and mission of the Society.

The Spiritual Advisor should understand and encourage the development of a Vincentian spirituality in him/herself and in the members of the Council or Conference.

I. Relationship of the Spiritual Advisor to Diocese, Clergy and Local Community

The Spiritual Advisor should help the Council President communicate the value, works and needs of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to the bishop, clergy, religious and pastors or parochial administrators.

The Spiritual Advisor, Council and Conference members should seek ways in which the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul's ministry and mission has a complementary role in relationship to archdiocesan or diocesan social services.

The Spiritual Advisor should assist members of the Society in seeking ways to expand membership of the Society in the service of the poor. With a special urgency, there should be an outreach to those retired who have the health, time and energy to offer their assistance, as well as to the youth whose vitality and energy level would be invaluable to the mission of the Society.

<p><i>I am the Resurrection and the Life. (John 11:25)</i></p>
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II. Reflections and Prayers

1. Reflecting on Our Relationship with the Poor

Reflection:

I ought not to consider a poor peasant or a poor woman according to their exterior nor according to what appears externally in their demeanor, especially since they quite often do not have even the appearance or the intelligence of a rational person, so gross and crude are they. But reverse the medallion and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who wished to be poor, is presented to us in those poor; that he did not have the appearance of a man in his passion, and that he passed as foolish in the minds of the Gentiles and as a stumbling block to the Jews; and with all that he calls himself the evangelizer of the poor. O God, who makes the poor appear beautiful if we consider them in God and in the esteem that Jesus Christ gives them! But if we regard them according to the feelings of the flesh and the spirit of the world, they will seem contemptible.

"On the Spirit of Faith", St. Vincent de Paul

Discussion Questions:

1. How do I feel about the Poor? Will any of them ever be my friends?
2. Are the Poor "Our Lord and Masters"? Why then do we call them our "clients"?
3. Do we defend and speak out for the Poor in our Nation today? Where is our advocacy in the "Welfare Reform" controversy?
4. How do we feel about the "laziness" of the poor? Do we blame them for their plight? Do we think, "If they would only work as I do...?"
5. Jesus is present in the Eucharist. Is He not present, too, in the Poor? What is the difference?

Prayer:

Lord, you are the **Way**.

Open our minds to understand your work in the world.

Lord, you are the **Truth**.

Open our hearts, so in trusting your ways all the fears of our life will disappear.

Lord, you are the **Life**.

Make ours an example for the world to see your love for all creation.

We are the **Light**.

Make our Baptism, the strength, so we can establish your Kingdom in the world.

We are the **Salt**.

Make our Eucharistic life bring hope and joy to the world of prejudice and confusion.

God, you inflamed Blessed Frederic with the Spirit of your charity, that he might found a lay society for helping the poor; by following his example of keeping your commandment of love, may we become a living leaven and an instrument of salvation for all humanity. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

2. From a Letter Written by Frederic Ozanam (Rev. Pedro Villarroya, C.M.)

The savants have compared the state of the slaves of antiquity with the condition of our workers and proletariat and have found these latter to have more to complain of, after eighteen centuries of Christianity. Then, for a like evil, a like remedy. The earth has grown cold. It is for us Catholics to revive the vital heat to restore it, it is for us to begin over again the great work of regeneration, if necessary to bring back the era of the martyrs. For to be a martyr is possible for every Christian, to be a martyr is to give his life for God and his brothers, to give his life in sacrifice, whether the sacrifice be consumed in an instant like a holocaust, or be accomplished slowly and smoke night and day like perfume on the altar. To be a martyr is to give back to heaven all that one has received; his money, his blood, his whole soul. This offering is in our hands; we can make this sacrifice. It is up to us to choose to which altars it pleases us to bring it, to what divinity we will consecrate our youth and the time following, in what temple we will assemble; at the foot of the idol of egoism, or in the sanctuary of God and humanity.

The humanity of our days seems comparable to the traveller to whom the Gospel speaks; it also, although it took its way in roads marked out for it by Christ, has been attacked by the cutthroats and robbers of thought, by wicked men who have robbed it of what it possessed: the treasure of faith and love, and they have left it naked and wounded and lying by the side of the road. Priests and levites have passed by, and this time, since they were true priests and levites, they have approached suffering themselves and wished to heal it. But in its delirium, it did not recognize them and repulsed them.

In our turn, weak Samaritans, worldly and people of little faith that we are, let us dare nonetheless to approach this great sick one. Perhaps it will not be frightened of us. Let us try to probe its wounds and pour in oil, soothing its ear with words of consolation and peace, then, when its eyes are opened, we will place it in the hands of those whom God has constituted as the guardians and doctors of souls, who are also, in a way, our innkeepers in our pilgrimage here below; so as to give our errant and famished spirits the holy word for nourishment and the hope of a better world for a shield.

That is what is proposed to us, the sublime vocation God has given us.

Frédéric Ozanam A Life in Letters, Translated and edited by Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M.

Ozanam's Letter to Léonce Curnier. Paris, Feb. 23, 1835 (#90)

Discussion Questions:

1. How are Ozanam's times similar to ours? What make them different? What does he mean when he says we are called to be martyrs?
2. Do I, we, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, feel the responsibility for the well-being of God's creation? Is it true that God entrusted His creation to us?
3. Gospel values vs. World values. How have we, as members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, come to see the difference and make them real in our lives? Do we still believe we can serve two masters?
4. Why do I feel "burnout" since I am doing what Jesus did on earth?
5. How do we strengthen our faith in Jesus so we never give up our work? Where do we find the energy to continue to be a joy to the poor and to our families.

3. Praying in Saint Vincent's Spirit for the Virtue of Gentleness

Scripture Reading: Mt 4:23-25

Jesus toured all of Galilee. He taught in their synagogues, proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, and cured the people of every disease and illness. As consequence of this, His reputation travelled the length of Syria. They carried to Him all of those afflicted with various diseases and racked with pain: the possessed, the lunatics, the paralyzed. He cured them all. The great crowds that followed Him came from Galilee, the Ten Cities, Jerusalem and Judea, and from across the Jordan.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do I serve the poor and those with whom I work with the love and kindness shown me by the work and actions of Our Lord as He walked and worked on our earth with the poor of His time?
2. Do I sometimes forget that the poor people I serve are loved by God in a very special way?
3. Each person I meet carries his/her own physical, mental, psychological suffering. Do I respect and honor whatever silent sufferings each one carries?

4. Praying in Saint Vincent's Spirit for Unity Among Vincentians

(Read prayer slowly. Pause for a minute to reflect on the prayer.)

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

I, then a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Question for Reflection/Sharing:

1. When do I feel most united/connected/a-part-of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul?
2. When do I feel least united to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul?
3. How does one person making important decisions affect the unity of a group?
4. How can we involve more people in Conference decisions?

NOTE: The booklet, Praying in Saint Vincent's Spirit, - (editors) Hugh O'Donnell, C.M. and Jay Gibson, C.M. 1990, is another source from which you can develop your own readings.

5. Vincentians are Beatitude People

People who are about building up the Kingdom of God in the here and now, are Beatitude people. When one lives the Beatitudes, one's life is a blessing. Beatitude people are co-creators with God of a peaceful and just world. They challenge us to be hot, not tepid, comforting, not comfortable, and to see the ordinary and extraordinary. They are risk takers who embrace the sacredness or the holy in each moment, particularly in the culture and unsettled times in which they live. To be about Beatitude-living enables Beatitude people to constantly bless the world and praise God. Beatitude people's values are from the mind and heart of Jesus. They rejoice in the nourishment provided by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain;
and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Then he began to speak, and he taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”.

Discussion Questions:

(Rev. Ron Ramson, C.M.)

1. Make a list of what you would consider to be your eight Beatitudes.
2. Do you feel comfortable with our Lord's Beatitudes?
3. Which Beatitude makes you feel most uncomfortable?
4. How are Vincentians Beatitude people?
5. How are Saint Vincent and Frédéric Ozanam Beatitude people?

Oh my dear Savior, pour out your spirit of simplicity into my heart so that I may hope to be your true apostle by always fully cooperating with your grace.

Saint Vincent de Paul, XI, 283

6. Saint Vincent de Paul (September 27)

The King will say to those on his right hand, "Come you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to me." (Mt 25, 34-36)

At daybreak on September 27, 1660, Vincent de Paul, heavily burdened both by years and work, offered his life to the God of mercy in whom he had always trusted. A group of missionaries from the community of Saint Lazare were witnesses to the peace with which the Founder of the Mission passed from time to eternity. He was leaving a life filled with numerous works of charity and an extremely rich apostolic and spiritual legacy, which would sustain the vocations in his Congregations. Death did not catch him by surprise; for many years he had been preparing for this joyful encounter with God, the crown of his achievements.

1) The Mission of Jesus was to Work for the Poor

The poor were the focal point of Saint Vincent's vocation and work. In imitation of Jesus Christ, Vincent de Paul chose the poor as his inheritance. In him were fulfilled the words which he had spoken to his missionaries almost twenty years prior to his death:

How happy will they be who can repeat at the hour of their death, those beautiful words of our Lord: "He has sent me to bring Good News to the poor." See how Jesus' primary concern was to work for the poor! Jesus willingly dedicated himself to the cause of the poor and outcasts. Woe to us if we become cowardly in the fulfilment of the obligations we are under: to assist the poor. If we do not serve the least of our brothers and sisters, we will be denied entrance into the kingdom of God.

2) Death Always Arrives too Late

Vincent de Paul lived more than twice as long as the average person of his time. Neither the thought of death nor the trials that might come before it were able to frighten him. He did not see death as an obstacle but rather as a liberating necessity. He would have liked to die beside the road and not in an armchair. Yes, he did die "with his weapons in hand", taking care of the poor until the very last.

Is it a misfortune for a wife who is in exile to rejoin her spouse? Is it a misfortune for a traveller to regain his native land? Is it a misfortune for those on board ship to reach port? Should we then be afraid of (death) which we can never sufficiently desire, and which always occurs too late?

3) To Live and Die where We Have Been Placed

Pope Alexander VII had granted a plenary indulgence to all missionaries *in articulo mortis*. A man of faith, Vincent de Paul, five years before his death, trusted in this grace, which would wash away all blemishes provided one remained faithful to one's vocations. He said:

At the hour of death we shall be clothed with a robe of innocence which will make us pleasing to the eyes of God at the very moment when we must render him an account of our life. Our Lord, in the Gospel, drove out of his presence the man who had appeared before him without a wedding garment. This garment will be given to us at the hour of our death by this indulgence, if we are willing to live and die in the post in which he has placed us.

1. Can I say with Saint Vincent that I do not fear death, because I have consecrated myself to God for the evangelization of the poor?
2. Do I consider the poor my inheritance, for whom I am ready to die?
3. Do I feel the need for charity, as Saint Vincent did?

Prayer:

Lord God, you filled your priest Saint Vincent with the strength of the apostles to work for the salvation of the poor and the instruction of the clergy. May we who follow the example of his life be driven by unceasing charity to continue the mission of your Son in the world. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

*Charity must never look to the past, but always to the future,
because the number of its past works is still very small
and the present and future miseries that it must alleviate are infinite.*

Blessed Frederic Ozanam