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The following article was written by Fr Gerald Scott CM and Sr Debra McCarthy for the September 2000 issue of 'Oceania Vincentian' . ('Oceania Vincentian' is a Publication in the Australian Province of the Vincentians):

An Effective Way of Communicating St Vincent

Gerry Scott CM and Debra McCarthy DC

Preamble

Introduction

In the Spring of 1999, a request was received to give "a brief talk" on St Vincent, in a series of lectures on **"Models, Mentors and Patrons of Spirituality - Justice and Charity"**. This article, contributed to the new "Vincentian Studies" of our Province, is an account of the response given.

The request came from Gordon Carter, assisting the Catholic Pastoral Formation Centre of Melbourne. Clearly this challenge was to be accepted but consideration needed to be given as to how best present Vincent under this title. What became clear was that both content and process were important in maximising participant engagement.

In the 1600s, Vincent de Paul revolutionised the role of the church and society in the care of the poor. He was ably assisted by Louise de Marillac - a partnership which forged new ways of service. Both were later canonised and accepted by the church as its special patrons and models of being "with the poor in love". Any talk on Vincent must include Louise.

Content

It was decided not to present a biographical account of Vincent's life or focus on the traditional "Vincentian Virtues". While both approaches are valid it would be difficult to encapsulate Vincent's life and draw out personal applications in a brief talk.

It was decided to focus on practical expressions of justice and charity. Justice and charity have many faces. In the life and work of Vincent and Louise we can see examples and ways of modelling the key components of justice and charity.

These were the topics chosen:

1. **God as "source and model of all charity" - The motivation and the heart of service.**
2. **Effective, practical response to need - Feet on the ground and get results.**

3. **Innovative service development - New ways to do, better.**
4. **Long term, well structured planning - To stand the test of time.**
5. **Accountability and communication - Serving responsibly with accurate record keeping.**
6. **Lobbying to change an unjust system - Advocacy for the poor.**
7. **Modelling just values in leadership style - Practice what you preach.**
8. **Formation of others as a matter of justice.**

These eight topics could be simply presented, in "non-church" language and expended to include stories from Vincent and Louise as well as our own experiences with the poor.

Process

While this content is important, the process of planning and presenting this talk was more significant. The preparation would be better if done in collaboration with a Daughter of Charity. The shared approach - male and female - to a common subject well known to each. Sr Debra McCarthy DC agreed to assist in this project from beginning to end, including the preparation of this article for the Vincentian Studies Board. Sr Debra DC is the Director of Marillac House in East Brighton - a service for children and adults with a disability.

On further reflection and discussion we agreed to share this "brief talk" in a visible display of one of Vincent's most revealing, roles as a model and mentor: his long and brilliantly successful partnership with Louise de Marillac.

Louise and Vincent were a great team, They combined the visionary and the practical, the gentle and the firm, the mystic and the incarnational, the broad planner and the eye for detail. They consulted each other, shared decision making, sought advice, challenged and affirmed each other. They complimented each other in style and approach and both recognised the need and value of a shared process.

After preparing a set of separate "capsules" on each of the eight topics, there was discussion about which presenter would give examples or outline various aspects. These capsules give an added advantage in controlling the length of time taken.

As we grew more confident during the talk each of us began to personalise our ideas with stories of Vincent **and** Louise and experiences of our own. Eventually we were indeed portraying something in our working relationship that echoed the relationship of Vincent and Louise.

In fact we were given approval to keep going beyond time - a sign of acceptance by the group.

In conclusion, we are very happy to provide the text for all eight segments. However, it ought to be noted that each person puts their own stamp on such communication each has their own emphasis and story. The nature of the audience also governs the text. For example one would choose more active stories and life experiences [Vincent, Louise and own experiences] when speaking with youth in contrast to a more mature audience that could perhaps enter into deeper considerations of history, spirituality and sociology.

If a Daughter of Charity were not available to assist, perhaps we are already in an era of lay formation where a lay woman, adequately well read on Vincent, could be included in the presentation.

This is perhaps one way, **in** content and **in** process, to pass on our Vincentian Family Spirit to others.

Content of Talks to St Vincent de Paul Society

St Vincent de Paul's Contribution

in his Spirituality to Justice and Charity

Fr Gerald Scott CM and Sr Debra McCarthy DC

4th October, 1999

In the 1600s, Fr Vincent de Paul revolutionised the role of the church in the care of the poor. He was ably assisted by Sr Louise de Marillac - a partnership which forged new ways of service. Both were later canonised and accepted by the church as its special patrons and models of being "with the poor in love".

Justice and charity have many faces. In the life and work of Vincent and Louise we can see examples and ways of modelling the key components of justice and charity.

1 . God as "source and model of all charity".

- Vincent and Louise sought spiritual direction to assist them to become better people and grow closer to God.
- Evangelisation and service are intimately connected
- Called to serve the poor "corporally and spiritually"
- Always see "Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ"
- Crucified Christ " Charity of Christ crucified urges us to the relief of all forms of poverty" DC motto.
- Trinity as the model of community - unity with diversity
- Vincent and Louise had solid, Scripture and Eucharist based prayer lives Vincent up at 4.30am to pray
- All actions are the Church in action.
- God was the source of strength - not merely activity

2. Effective, practical response to need

- Vincent and Louise knew the poor by name, personal hands-on service

- Genuine love for the poor, the most abandoned - no professional boundaries.
- Value and respect for each individual regardless of rank- or position
- "Let us serve God ... but let us serve Him with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow".
- Vincent lived with persons with mental health problems at St Lazare
- The poor were never romanticised, nor patronised. Vincent saw them as "good people but unchangeable" or as the bashful poor.

3. Innovative Service Development.

Louise and Vincent had an eye to practical detail in service development.

- Able to assess a need and respond in a creative way.
- New services include foster care (breastfeeding mothers), home based care and work/OT in institutions in order to earn money.

4. Long term, wellstructured planning.

- Asked that food and gifts go to a poor family but realised that effective planning would be more effective in the long term - Ladies of Charity founded.
- All organisations founded had clear rules with a vision and methodology.
- Clear job descriptions, task analysis. Louise was particularly good at preparing these documents..

5. Accountability and Communication

- Clear investment plan - security in properties
- Demanded that accurate accounts be kept. Sent Louise to view the books of the Ladies of Charity.
- Always communicating by letter to priests, brothers, Daughters, Ladies and collaborators in the works
- Louise often began her letters "I haven't heard from you for some time".

6. Lobbying to change an unjust system

- **State;-** changed conditions for galley slaves, housing of the army with orphan girls, tried to stop the civil war, issues re the treatment of children.
- **Church:-** Daughters and Ladies of Charity as new models of service, Council of Conscience re the selection of Bishops, call for improved liturgical practice and evangelisation of the rural poor.
- Vincent and Louise used their networks in Church and state to effect change. They got to know key political and religious persons who could help the needy.
- They loved the Church and worked for its improvement. Vincent loved "a rundown" Church. The church can be seen as needy too.
- Vincent found himself in positions of influence but never saw this as power but only as a way of influencing for good.

7. Modelled just values in own leadership style

- Collaboration in action
- Humble - God was the source
- Enabled both sexes to work together and separately - different gifts recognised.
- Shared decision making. Letters between Louise and Vincent - "What do you think about". Vincent, however, was never indecisive at the end.
- Asked for information and advice from a wide range of people but particularly from those at the coal face.
- Always consulting, encouraging, listening and admonishing if needed [sometimes with humour and exaggeration].
- Servant Leader - non-hierarchical model. Sister Servant the term Vincent decided for leadership within the Daughters.
- Genuine interest in co-workers and community members.
- Always practised what he preached

8. Formation of others a matter of justice

- Formation in justice for the worker/priest and those they are called to serve.
- Mutuality in service. Priests and Sisters formed by those they evangelise/serve.
- Formation of clergy before and after ordination - theology, prayer life, liturgical skills. Seminaries and Tuesday Conferences.
- Formation of Daughters - reading, writing, medical skills, theology, prayer, how to live in community, how to make soup, how to teach .
- Daughters only allowed to act if trained first. Louise an excellent teacher.
- Both Vincent and Louise were well trained and educated.
- Formation is not about learning for its own sake but in order to better assist the people.
