

## **Personal Thoughts on Vincentian Spirituality**

Brian O'Reilly was appointed International Vice President General by the new International President-General at the General Assembly Meeting held in Salamanca in June.

The saying of prayers at Conference meetings, the Spiritual Reading and discussion, the annual Festival Mass have often been the cause of discussion and debate on their relevance to the work of the Conference. Spirituality is said to be a personal thing, but I feel it is becoming marginalised when Conference members are faced with a hugely increasing workload in these difficult economic times.

Are we in danger of losing the *raison d'être* of our Vincentian ethos? Vincentian Spirituality is the 'life blood' that courses through all our work, visits, meetings, giving strength to face the many difficult challenges faced in our communities. Is this not our vocation?

An understanding of our vocation and its commitments are needed. Vincentian Spirituality is the bond uniting the Vincentian family. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is an integral part of the Vincentian family. It has adopted the spirituality that Saint Vincent de Paul imbued in his Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. The SVP founders considered the "Christ of Saint Vincent de Paul" to be the all-encompassing force of its work. It is a 'must' for all members to understand the spirituality that is ruled by the driving force of the person of Jesus Christ.

The cornerstone of Vincentian Spirituality is Christ, not the poor Christ of St. Francis of Assisi, nor Christ the doctor and healer of St. John of God, but Christ, the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor. St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic Ozanam did not fix their gaze on a Christ the teacher, like St. John of la Salle did, nor on a Christ healer like St. John of God, but on a Christ in search of the poor to take them out of their misery and help them in their pain, a Christ who lives in the person of the poor. Vincentian Spirituality is not a doctrine but an encounter, not with the Christ seen in a vision but with the Christ who lives in the poor in our cities, towns and villages.

Spirituality is a driving force, a special form centering a person in God on one hand and on the other locating him/her in a specific relationship with the world in which we live. Vincentian Spirituality should consist of the living out of charity through prayer and service.

Vincentian virtues, Love of God, Service and Humility spring from the contemplation and study of this "Christ of Saint Vincent de Paul". These virtues make the framework of spirituality and their practice in the daily life of the Vincentian an external manifestation of the energizing vision of the driving force - Christ. One of the main roles of Vincentians should be to extract the substance of these virtues, giving them new forms and expressions attuned to the signs of the times we live in.

We need to fix our attention on the spirit that the founders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul desired would be the vital force of its work. To neglect the original spirit of the first conferences of Charity would be to betray the aims proposed by Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions. The original spirit has to be preserved, placing it in the perspective of the modern vision of the Church and society.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul faces difficult challenges in today's problems. In what form can the Vincentian Spirituality of today follow the way proposed and taken by Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam, a way of focusing on Christ, Servant of the Poor?

Vincentian spirituality needs to be present in the secular world to fulfill itself, because it is in that place that it finds the world of the poor. It is an integral part of our Vincentian vocation, formation and training that we cannot put aside. It is our past, our present and our future.