

## WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL OBJECT OF SVP

It was good to see Kieran Murphy (Autumn edition) raise the issue of our principal object. With all the pressures on members now it is understandable, if regrettable, that while there is a good deal of emphasis in the SVP in Ireland today on what we do and how we do it there is little on *why* we do it. So a debate on our objects is to be welcomed.

I suggest that at the heart of what being a member of the SVP is about is a personal encounter with a person in need. It is through this two way relationship in which we both give and receive (and I'm not thinking of material thing) that we discover why we do what we do.

This is part of the connectedness of human beings to which Kieran referred but I believe that there is an additional dimension for us which distinguishes the SVP from a purely humanitarian organisation. Article 1.2 of the SVPs International Rule (see [www.ssvpglobal.org](http://www.ssvpglobal.org)) puts it this way

“The vocation of Society members, called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service of those in need and so bear witness to his compassionate and liberating love”. There are two integrated elements here – love of Christ through service to our neighbour in need – rather than a single object focusing on self which was Kieran's starting point.

This is not a spirituality which puts our personal interests ahead of those of the person we are seeking to help ( as perhaps the primacy of personal sanctification implicit in the quote from Frederic Ozanam which Kieran selected a quote which must be seen in the context of its time would suggest ).

It is rather that like all Christians we are called to respond to the imperative to love our neighbour clearly set out in Matthew 25 and elsewhere in the Gospel and that we have chosen to do this (at least in part) in a community of lay people (the Conference) with the same vocation and inspired by the example of St Vincent de Paul, our patron, and Frederic Ozanam, our principal founder - a central value of whose was that what we do for the person in need we do for Christ himself.

Kieran suggested that our principal object is to express, experience and explore the connectedness of human beings. It is this but it is more I suggest.

My own preferred definition of what the SVP is about comes from the first revision of our original 1835 Rule which came after Vatican 2. It states that:-

“The source of the Vincentian vocation is both human and divine. It is the anguish experienced in seeing the suffering of another human being; the spontaneous reaction of sympathy, even fury, which surges in the presence of injustices undergone by our brothers and sisters in humanity. It is also the attitude of the Christian, living in the hope of the resurrection, the hearer of a message of hope to those who suffer”

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