



St Vincent de Paul Society
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Appendix of the Spiritual Adviser Handbook

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June 2019



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For an electronic copy of the Handbook, Workbook and Appendix on the MAVS microsite, go to mavs.vinnies.org.au and search for 'spiritual adviser handbook'.

For a copy by email contact Kate Scholl: kate.scholl@vinnies.org.au

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Vincentian Spirituality Resources and Prayers

I. SVDP USA National Council resources www.svdpusa.org

The order form and catalog for the following resources are on their website.

- Ozanam: Beatification Commemorative Book
- Praying with Frederic Ozanam by Ron Ramson CM, (English and Spanish).
- Turn Everything to Love by Robert P Maloney CM.
- Faces of Holiness by Robert P Maloney CM.
- Praying with Vincent de Paul by Thomas McKenna CM.
- Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change: by International Vincentian Family Commission.

II. The Vincentian resources

The following can be ordered on www.amazon.com:

St Vincent de Paul:

- St Vincent de Paul, The Trailblazer, by Bernard Pujo.
- The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor, by Robert P Maloney, CM.
- Vincent de Paul and Charity, by Andre Dodin CM.

St Louise de Marillac:

- Praying with Louise de Marillac, by Audrey Gibson DC and Kieran Kneaves DC.
- Louise de Marillac: Social Aspect of Her Work, by Margaret Flinton DC.

Blessed Rosalie Rendu:

- Sr Rosalie Rendu: A Daughter of Charity on Fire with the Love of the Poor, by Louise Sullivan DC.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam:

- Ozanam, by Madeline des Rivières.
- Frederic Ozanam, by Mary Ann Garvey Hess.
- Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Letters by Joseph I Dirvin CM.
- http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=ozanam_law

Vincentian Spirituality:

- Classics of Western Spirituality Series: Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac
- He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul, by Robert Maloney, CM.

Vincentian Prayers

Prayer is central to the Vincentian vocation and spirituality. We pray at our meetings, during our person-to-person service, individually and as a group. Here are some sample prayers you may wish to use in various meetings and activities.

Prayers Before a Visit (home or in a Centre)

1.

Holy Spirit, inspire us with joy and patience. Be at work in us to bring good news to the downcast, to heal the brokenhearted, to be witnesses of the love of Christ. Stir in us the fire of your love, and guide us with discernment, and wisdom, generosity and kindness. **Amen.**

2.

Dear Lord, help me to open my heart and eyes to your presence today. May I see you in those who call for help and allow them to see you in me. Enable me listen with an open heart and receive each person with graciousness. Bless my efforts to see each person as an opportunity for grace and a step closer to being the person you have called me to be. Thank you, Lord, for making these graces available. May I always see them as gifts and not burdens. **Amen.**

Prayers with Those in Need

1.

Dear Heavenly Father,
Thank you for this call, thank you for the opportunity to meet with N....., our brother and sister in Christ. Lord you know each of us. You knew us from the day we were born, you know our hearts, our needs, and everything about us. You told us that you will never leave us or forsake us. You ask us to seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will be opened, ask and it shall be given. We are all asking today for each of our needs, some spoken, some on our hearts. Show us the way, and help us all walk closer to you. Thank you again for bringing us together. In your name we pray. **Amen.**

2.

God,
You have said if two are more are gathered in Your name, You are there. You are clearly here in this room. You are as close as the hand we now hold. Be with N....., give her/him/them patience for the small challenges (insert particular challenges as appropriate) and courage for the big challenges. Help her/him/them to know she/he/they is/are never alone and that You are always, always with her/him/them. **Amen.**

3.

Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today, that You and I can't handle.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven...

4.

Make up your own prayer based on the situation at hand, always trying to mention the friend and family members by name during the prayer.

Prayers Following a Home Visit

1.

We thank you, Lord,
for the many blessings which we receive from those whom we visit. Help us to love
and respect them, to understand their deeper needs, and to share their burdens
and joys as true friends in Christ. **Amen.**

2.

Thank you, Lord,
for all the blessings you have given today. We ask you to continue to bless the ones
we have visited, to inspire them to trust in you and come to you for their needs.
We pray for *...names of each person and specific needs...* We pray that our work
may be continued by your Vincentian servants and completed by your grace, in the
spirit of St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. **Amen.**

All Day Meetings: Opening Prayer

Leader: Let us ponder as we pray the words of St Vincent de Paul:

"Jesus, You have called me to evangelise persons who are bruised and
burdened, and my purpose is to make you known. When you lived on this
earth, your thoughts and actions were of mercy, forgiveness and healing
for all people, because you knew it was your Father's Will that all be
saved.

"Teach me by your example, and grant me all the virtues necessary to be
a true evangelizer and make me, through the fervor of my zeal, to set the
world on fire. I want to give myself to You, body and soul, mind and heart
and spirit, and always to do what pleases You. In Your mercy, grant me
the grace to have You continue in me and through me Your Work, O
Blessed Savior." **Amen.**

Leader: Let us pray:

Use alternate sides or men/women

Left: Loving Creator,
we ask for the insight to understand the needs of people today,
and open our hearts and ears to the situations those we assist are facing,

Right: The hungry have a right to food,
the homeless to shelter,
the oppressed to freedom
and the ill to health care.

Left: God, enable each of us to risk,
being in solidarity with our brothers and sisters,
to be contagious in our love for all,
as we share the spirit of St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Right: Do not allow our fear, ignorance or pride, limit the action of your Spirit,
nor Divine creativity within us from bearing fruit.

All: We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

All Day Meetings: Mid-Day Prayer

Leader: Let us give thanks to God for calling us to serve the poor in the spirit of Jesus, as followers of St Vincent de Paul, especially for the grace to know that in those who are poor, "we see the face of Christ". Let us pray:

Right: Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.
Faces beaming with success,
Demanding faces with eyebrows raised,
Intensely strained and challenging faces,
Faces daring glances asking that I do my very best for them.

Left: Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.
Caring faces, gentle, kind and understanding,
Faces that bear the marks of the years of their giving,
Comforting faces, soft, smiling, relaxed,
Inviting me to trust and to love the poor.

Right: Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.
Smooth-skinned young faces whose expressions change in seconds with an array of emotion.
Lined faces of those who hold wisdom close to the heart.
Peaceful faces awaiting with expectancy, in hope and trust.

Left: Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.
Tragic faces manifesting physical or emotional pain, with head bent and eyes closed, with pain's unwritten statements.
Yes, I thought I saw you in the sad faces with tears gently slipping down with hurt that knew no words.

Right: Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.
All of them teaching me of life without words.
All gifts to me, sealed in human wrappings – lined and unlined, smooth and rough, they are your face made visible to me.

Left: Many faces I have thought were you, Jesus.
Each face manifesting you, proclaiming you in deep emotions.
We revered these faces of our past, our present, and the faces that will be in our tomorrow.

All: God, we find you in the human faces that surround our daily lives, for you are there.
Help us to serve you in all the faces of the poor and give us your grace so that we may be aware of your presence alive in our midst. **Amen.**

All-Day Meetings: Closing Prayer

Leader: O God, your love ignites our hearts, captures our imaginations, shapes our dreams, and awakens possibilities. Make us disciples on fire with your love so that we can become true followers of St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Help us, O God, to enkindle in others a sense of hope that transformation is possible and give us the grace to transmit to others the fire of their charism. Let us pray:

Left: When the heart is on fire, light comes from within. With the eyes of an enlightened heart we can see the hope to which we are called. By responding to the call to belong to the Society of St Vincent de Paul, we proclaim that the quest to be a servant of the poor is the fire of our lives.

Right: The path to seeing the eyes of the heart is discovered in the journey of discipleship. It is not an easy journey. It is an ongoing effort to live the gospel with integrity trying, sometimes succeeding, often failing, recognising the need for patience, and then trying again.

Left: Discipleship is a way of being in the world that affects every relationship. Disciples shape one another according to the action of the Spirit in their lives. The energy of the disciples flows from faith in what is unseen yet believed. At its very core, discipleship is a call to a love so radical that it never gives up on God, one's neighbor, or one's self.

Right: Disciples are called to love well, as Jesus had, with hope, truth, fidelity and compassion. This leads inevitably to taking a stand with the Christ of the paschal mystery who willingly laid down his life in love so that all may have life in abundance.

All: Almighty God, we do not ask that you make life easy for us, but that problems will not intimidate us. We do not ask for success in every venture, but that when we fail, we can still go on with a fresh beginning.

We ask for the grace to bring the love of God, the compassion of Jesus, to those who are poor and suffering. And we ask for the grace to set our hearts on fire so that we will live the true spirit of a Vincentian. **Amen.**



Meetings: Opening Prayers

1.

Lord Jesus,

Deepen our Vincentian spirit of friendship during this meeting, make us responsive to the Christian calling to seek and find the forgotten, the suffering or the deprived, so that we may bring them Your love. Help us to be generous with our time, our possessions and ourselves in this mission of charity. Perfect in us your love and teach us to share more fully in the Eucharistic Sacrifice offered for all, **Amen.**

2.

Heavenly Father,

We come to you today asking for your guidance, wisdom, and support as we begin this meeting. Help us to engage in meaningful discussion; allow us to grow closer as a group and nurture the bonds of community. Fill us with your grace, Lord God, as we make decisions that might affect our friends in need. And continue to remind us that all that we do here today, all that we accomplish, is for the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of You, and for the service of humanity. We ask these things in your name, **Amen.**

3.

Lord, I come before you with gratitude.

You alone know my heart,

You alone know my soul,

You alone know my whole story.

Lord Jesus, I long to see your face.

Grant that I may see it in the faces of Your poor.

May my faith and my actions give praise and honour to God,

Whose mercy is equal to His justice.

May I show mercy to all those I meet.

Grant that I may feed the hungry,

Clothe the naked,

And shelter the homeless

With humility, cheerfulness, and gratitude,

Knowing that in serving the least of these,

I serve the Son of God.

Grant that those I serve may see Your face in me;

And see Your love that embraces us all;

That we may join together with You in eternal life.

Leader:	St Vincent de Paul.	All:	Pray for us.
	St Louise de Marillac.		Pray for us.
	Blessed Frederic Ozanam.		Pray for us.
	Blessed Rosalie Rendu.		Pray for us.

4.

Holy God we claim you as the source of our strength. With all our hearts we say...
Praise God who lifts up the poor.

At the beginning of this day:
We ask your love and mercy.

For the poor we serve:
We ask your help and solace.

For those who collaborate with us in our ministries:
We ask your blessings and peace.

For us and our sisters and brothers who follow in the footsteps of Frederic and his companions:
We ask for fidelity to their spirit of service.

Almighty God, you blest Frederic Ozanam with gifts of grace as husband and father, educator, defender of the faith and founder of the Society. Faithfully he spent his life in loving service and showed others the way to follow you and serve their neighbours. Through his example and prayers may we be faithful in following the path to which you have called us and guide others on their journey. Amen

Parts in bold are said by all.

A Blessing for Our Gathering

By Hilda of Whitby

May the Lord bless us in our searching and our questions
They are the gateway to wisdom, enlightenment and peace,
the way to our hearts.

May the Lord bless us in our gifts.
These are God's providence to the world to enrich it,
to ennoble it, to bring it love.

May the Lord bless us in the yearning of our hearts
No matter how subtle, they are energy,
urging us forward in our quest for God and others.

May the Lord bless us in our decisions.
No matter the mistakes, they are our "yes" in life,
our assent to the field where God is to be found.

May the Lord bless us in our reflections and ideas.
No matter the doubts, they are the seeds
seeking nourishment, sunshine, life-giving water.

May the Lord bless us in our ways, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.



Leadership Prayers

1.

Lord God,

You sent your Holy Spirit as your forever presence among us. When your disciples were hesitant to go out to continue your mission, it was the Holy Spirit that gifted them with wisdom and courage.

Today as we gather, we invite the Holy Spirit upon the Vincentians of this Conference/Council as we search for leadership. Grant your servant leader the courage to step forward as our new president. Grant her or him the wisdom to discern where they may best serve You in our Society.

We ask that You lead us to make all of our decisions in love and solidarity with one another and out of our great love for You and your people. We ask all this through Jesus Christ, your Son. **Amen.**



2.

Lord God,

You sent Your Holy Spirit as Your forever presence among us. When Your disciples were hesitant to go out to continue Your mission, it was the Holy Spirit that gifted them with wisdom and courage.

Today as we gather we invite the Holy Spirit upon us, as we search for leadership. Grant us the courage to step forward to be Your servant leaders. Grant us wisdom to discern where we may best serve You in the Society. We ask that You lead us to make all of our decisions in love and solidarity with one another and out of our great love for You and Your people.

We call upon St. Vincent de Paul who led when he was exhausted, who found gifted people to surround himself with, whose leadership left us a forever legacy leading all of us to see the face of Christ in the poor.

We call upon St. Louise who taught us to see the poor as our Masters.

We call upon Blessed Frederic, the founder of our Society, to help us in our organisation so that we may continue his vision to love those in need and to evangelise the love of God everywhere we go.

We call upon Blessed Rosalie who taught us to be aware of how we serve by telling us that those in need will remember the love that we showed more than the food that we shared.

Holy Spirit, you are the grace that moves mountains. We ask that you guide us to do Your will and we trust that whatever that "will" might be, you will lead the way to accomplish all things in your name. We pray all of these things in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Vincentian Lenten Prayer

Reader 1: Jesus said to his disciples: "[But] take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward."

Reader 2: "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

Reader 3: "But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

Reader 4: "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

Reader 5: May Jesus gift us with his presence this Lent, so that we can be a gift to others as we:

Right side:

Fast from judging others
Fast from unrelenting pressures
Fast from self-concern
Fast from personal anxiety
Fast from discouragement
Fast from criticism
Fast from complaining
Fast from social media
Fast from resentments

Left Side:

to feast on kindness
to feast on trusting God.
to feast on compassion.
to feast on hope.
to feast on encouragement
to feast on affirmation
to feast on complimenting.
to feast on prayer and silence.
to feast on forgiveness.

Together: Lord, give us the grace to feast on your love and compassion during Lent and embrace new life in our Easter celebrations. Amen.



If we are really called to carry the love of God far and wide, if we are to inflame the nations with this fire, if we have the vocation of setting the whole world on fire, if it is so, then how much I must myself burn with this fire.

St Vincent de Paul (1581 -1660)

A prayer for courage, wisdom, faith and love

Lord, grant us courage to do right,
when doing wrong or nothing at all would be easier.
Wisdom to say the right thing at the right time
because words have the power to help or to hurt.
Faith in the goodness of humankind
because living in doubt and fear is not living as you
meant it to be.
And, most important, Love,
The kind that gives without demanding,
supports without holding too tightly,
And understands that we are, all of us, imperfect. Amen.

Blessing Prayer for Healing

By Joyce Rupp

May you desire to be healed.
May what is wounded in your life be restored to good health.
May you be receptive to the ways in which healing needs to happen.
May you take good care of yourself.
May you extend compassion to all that hurts within your body, mind and spirit.
May you be patient with the time it takes to heal.
May you be aware of the wonders of your body, mind, and spirit and their ability in
returning you to good health.
May you be open to receive from those who extend kindness, care, and compassion
to you.
May you rest peacefully under the sheltering wings of divine love, trusting in this
gracious presence.
May you find little moments of beauty and joy to sustain you.
May you keep hope in your heart.
Amen.

Blessing

Bless us with eyes that see goodness,
Mouths that speak love,
Ears that are discerning,
Hearts that are accommodating,
Hands that touch in kindness,
Feet that go the extra mile,
And smiles that show acceptance.
Amen.



Apostolic Reflection



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Apostolic Reflection

Hugh O'Donnell C.M.

BY

HUGH O'DONNELL, C.M.*

The Inter-Assembly document of the Daughters of Charity, *At Jacob's Well*, states: "We will move forward . . . We will commit ourselves to the way of discernment through apostolic reflection." These words declare apostolic reflection will be your way of life, your way of journeying forward.¹

Two insights emerged in working with the Ongoing Formation Team which give direction and substance to the following article. The first appeared in the presentation on Vincentian Discernment, namely, that *unrestricted readiness* is at the heart of discernment and belongs, not to the order of technique or spiritual means but is our way of life. At the center of our lives is *unrestricted readiness* rooted in the goodness of God which opens us dynamically toward the Kingdom of God and our brothers and sisters.

The second insight concerns apostolic reflection as a concrete instance of discernment. Apostolic reflection is not a religious exercise or a new technique that is now in fashion. Rather, apostolic reflection is emerging in our time as the very center of community life in such a way that it is the way forward. *Sharing our lives is the way forward*. This insight is at the heart of these reflections.

What is the foundation of apostolic reflection for Vincent? It is the absolute conviction "God is here!" I have been mentored on the road to this understanding by a confrere, Father André Dodin, and a Trinitarian priest, Father Dennis Dwyer. They led me to understand the profound influence of Benet of Canfield, the English Capuchin, on

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*This is a companion article to "Vincentian Discernment," which appeared in *Vincentian Heritage* 15, no. 1 (1994):7-23.

¹The Congregation of the Mission also affirms apostolic sharing as a key way of renewing and animating its own missionary life, though the vocabulary is different. Paragraph 46 of the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission* reads, "In community prayer we find an excellent way of animating and renewing our lives, especially when we celebrate the word of God and share it, or when in fraternal dialogue we share with one another the fruit of our spiritual and apostolic experience."

Vincent and the more distant but real influence of Jan Ruusbroec, the Flemish mystic. The very important lesson Vincent learned from them is "God is here" -- within me, in front of me, behind me, in this person, this sister, this child, these circumstances, these events. Much careful study remains to be done. I will present what I know and trust you to receive it to the degree it resonates with the love in your hearts and your lived experience of Vincent and Louise.

I heard of Benet of Canfield for the first time four years ago. I learned from Father Dodin that in 1609, when Vincent arrived in Paris for the first time, Father Duval gave him a copy of Canfield's principal work, *The Rule of Perfection*. Canfield is considered by historians of the spiritual life as the Master of the Masters of seventeenth-century spirituality. In particular, he was a teacher of Cardinal de Bérulle and many of those interested in the spiritual renewal of France. When Vincent came to Paris in 1609, he had not yet let go of his ambitions. When Canfield's book came into his hands, he was just beginning to turn to a totally new future in the kingdom. Fifty years later, in 1658, when he wrote the *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, he took the paragraph on discerning God's will and obedience to it body and bones from Canfield. But, Canfield's influence on Vincent penetrated his spirit far beyond this text. When I had an opportunity to read *The Rule of Perfection*, I experienced knowing Vincent in a wholly new way. Comparable to reading Francis de Sales's *An Introduction to the Devout Life* and *On the Love of God*, I realized I was reading Benet of Canfield just as Vincent himself had.

Canfield maintained that the whole of the spiritual journey could be boiled down to one thing: the will of God. God's will mediates everything else. Canfield's influence on Vincent is found, for example, in Vincent's words, "Do not tread on the heels of Providence." He took these words from Canfield and they characterize Vincent's whole spiritual journey.

Canfield divides *The Rule of Perfection* according to the three ways God's will comes to us, namely, the external will of God, the internal will of God and the supereminent will of God. The external will of God which is well known to us, refers to what we are permitted or forbidden to do. These commands and prohibitions flow from the moral law, civil society, the Church or one's situation in life. The external will of God--that is easy enough. Sometimes we stop there.

But Canfield says there is also an internal will. It resembles Jesuit discernment, which pays attention to the inner motions of the spirit,

our feelings, our emotions, our interior experience. It refers to the interior guidance of the Holy Spirit. The will of God is manifested to us in the ways we are attracted and repelled interiorly. We are invited by Saint Ignatius to listen to our interior, our feelings, our emotions, our likes and dislikes, our consolations and desolations. There is an increasing interiority and intimacy between the human heart and the Spirit.

The third and most interior level is the supereminent will of God. The expression sounds very technical, but it can be translated this way. It is the knowledge of the will of God that comes about through friendship, through communion, through having one heart with God. It is the knowledge of God arising intuitively from the love of God. The gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit operate in the same way: spontaneously. We become 'in tune' and then we become intuitive in regard to God's will. When a couple has been married for fifty years, each one knows what is in the other's mind and heart. When we have had friends for a long time, we know in the same way, and beyond that we know we know. That's what the expression "the supereminent will of God" means. It is the knowledge of God's will which comes about through love, communion, friendship, being of one mind and heart with God. That is what Saint Paul speaks of in First Corinthians, when he speaks of having the mind and heart of Christ. It is this increasingly interior experience of God's will that leads us to the heart of Vincent's life.

There is one more influence worth noting. Who influenced Benet of Canfield? Canfield probably was very much influenced by the Flemish mystic Jan Ruusbroec, who is considered by some as the greatest of all the mystics. At the same time, he is *the least other-worldly* of all the mystics. This is Evelyn Underhill's considered opinion. If we translate *least other-worldly* into positive terms, you will see what I am leading to: Ruusbroec regards the mystic as the one who knows in his gut, in her heart, in his bones, in her being that *God is here*. That is his great contribution. He sees that we are not outside of God. We exist *within the common life* of God. When God speaks the Eternal Word, at the very same moment (if you can talk that way) God speaks us. As the Spirit brings everything back to God eternally, the Spirit is always bringing us back to God. For Ruusbroec, we are drawn into the breathing of God: the speaking of the Word and the return of the Spirit. We are inside the divine breathing out and breathing in. God is here. God is here. We are in God. We are in God.

I think this is the deepest sense of Vincent's and Louise's life. If we try to get to their heart and soul, what would we say? We would say that in their hearts and in their bones, they know "God is here!"

I began to reach the conclusion that Vincent's separation from Cardinal de Bérulle was not something he chose to do, rather it was something he had to do. He received a lot from Bérulle, who was an important guide and companion for a long time. It was Bérulle who got him to Clichy and to Châtillon. Vincent, though he could have joined the Oratory, did not; he was being led in another direction. I believe there was a deep reason why Vincent found himself on another path than Bérulle's. For Bérulle, God was elsewhere. He regarded life in terms of taking what was happening in front of him and bringing it to the Divine Liturgy before the throne of God. Vincent's experience led him in the opposite direction. For Vincent, God is here and the Divine Liturgy is in front of us. God is here! That is why we can say "the poor are our Masters." God is here! God is here in poor people, in our experiences, in events and in the persons who are in our presence and in whose presence we are. Saint Ignatius is very strong on the secularity of God's presence, but Vincent recognizes God's presence in a particular form—the presence of God in poor people.

Let us think of *repetition of prayer*, which is a creation of Vincent and Louise, from this perspective. Spontaneously and from his heart, Vincent says: Sister, what do you think? Please share your prayer with us, for 'God is here,' God is in your life, in your heart, in your thoughts, in your reflections, in your prayer, in your experiences. Share God with us.

The heart and soul of apostolic reflection, then, is to be found in the radical conviction that *God is here*. When you come together in apostolic reflection, then, what is the ground for your coming together? God is here in me, in my Sister, in each other and in the community. God is here in our coming together.

Now what is the contribution of Vincent and Louise? They treated each person as sacred and unique. Personalism is very powerful with them. Vincent and Louise treated one another as sacred and unique. Then they treated each and every person as sacred and unique.

DePaul University in Chicago has been able to identify the charism of the university in a way people can work with, which is what you have done with your mission statements. You have identified the five qualities that characterize your institutions. DePaul found two words to express our values: *Vincentian Personalism*.

The person is very much at the center for Vincent and Louise. So, you can see that the key in apostolic reflection is the sacredness of every person in the group, then, the sacredness of the coming together of different people on this given evening. Another thing that is very strong in Louise and in Vincent is the idea that every person is a member of the Body of Christ, and, consequently, is a gift. There is deep affection for each sister. It is each person as person and each person as member in communion with the others that evokes not only respect but affection and deep attention to each one's silence, presence, being and words.

I think one of the great miracles in the life of Louise is that she became such a great mother to the Daughters of Charity. Louise's basic wound is on her mother's side. She had very good relationships with the men in her life: she had an affectionate and trusting relationship with her father who claimed her in spite of illegitimacy, with her husband, with Francis de Sales, and with Vincent. On her father's side, there was great natural strength. Her wound was on the mother's side. She tried to overcome that in the way she raised Michel but without notable success. She tried so hard to be a good mother to Michel that she was chronically anxious about him. The miracle of grace, to my way of thinking, is that she became such a tremendous mother to the Daughters of Charity. She knew each one personally and held each one in her heart with affection and tender love. She passed on bits of information from one to the other in her letters, and taught them everything from the alphabet to all that the mission required. This is a remarkable story of transformation. It says something to us about our own wounds and what the grace of God does. In exactly the place where she was wounded initially, she became an absolutely wonderful mother to her Daughters and to many others. Vincent and Louise shared their apostolic and spiritual experiences with one another over a period of thirty-five years.

In our reflection on apostolic reflection, there are three beacons that guide us: (1) the sacredness and uniqueness of each person; (2) the affection for each member of the local community and of the larger community; and (3) the sharing of apostolic and spiritual experiences with one another.

In 1989, I gave a retreat in England to Daughters of Charity. I met a Daughter who was being missioned to Liverpool. Liverpool, famous as one of the nineteenth century industrial cities, is in severe decline. In the center of that city is a place called Netherly. It is inner city. The

three Daughters on mission there have a ministry of presence. Their mission is to be parishioners in that place. The Sister I met was in her early fifties when a letter went around asking for volunteers for Ethiopia. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she had the vague idea that someday she would go. She volunteered, thinking there was no chance she would be chosen. The next thing she knew she was in Ethiopia. She was there for ten or eleven years and loved it. For reasons of health she came back, expecting to return to Ethiopia, where her heart was. It did not happen. Instead, she was being missioned to Liverpool. You can see from what is written below, she has found a new life and mission. I got the letter around Christmas, just before we met to plan this day. In it she talked about how important, how central apostolic reflection was to them in their radical and in a certain way difficult mission. I asked her permission to quote from the letter. She responded that all three sisters gave their permission but could not imagine that what was said could be important to the American sisters. She was glad for whatever gift it might be. Actually, it is a great gift. She writes:

I must admit, God is so good to me . . . just wondering if I am still on the right track—and being careful not to get our little community into a rut . . . This would defeat the purpose of this difficult mission—“parishioners” in a very poor parish in a first world country, where we are struggling together to maintain a very simple lifestyle—on the beat on the streets of the estate—trusting on Divine Providence to see to our needs—and together trying to live within a budget, that is realistic but not excessive, spending only what we need and not satisfying every fad or fancy. We are helping each other to grow and in this growth process to remain full of joy—hope and love. To help us do this we have apostolic sharing on Wednesdays—where we come into His Presence and share with Him and with each other all the joy—sorrows—disappointments and visions for the future. He does speak to each of us if we listen. We love that hour sharing. Even if we have no words to say—it is still great. I remember you saying how difficult—if not impossible—for (some) to pray thus. They do not know what is missing in their

lives. I hope—no pressure of work—not any thing will take over this hour—it is here we get food for the week ahead.

This is a remarkable testimony to what apostolic reflection can become. Apostolic reflection has come to be at the very center of their lives. It is their way forward. The gift of God is communicated through the companions with whom they live and with whom they share their lives. Sharing has become the central gift. It flows from life, from the exigency of the apostolate, from a felt need for one another -- from life together.

What forms can apostolic reflection take? There are many. As an introduction to answering this question, what I want to say that there is a difference sense of corporateness among us. Today, very often, people in the same house no longer share the same ministry. In the past, very often, everyone in the same house, whether it was a school or hospital or social agency, had the same ministry. Where the ministry was shared, there was a natural inclination to talk about it over supper. The reality has changed to a large extent. If we are to be corporate at the level of mission and apostolate, we need to talk to each other about what is happening in our *diverse* apostolates and share our *different* experiences. What happened automatically in another age has to happen consciously and dialogically today. There is a new sense of corporateness, a new opportunity for corporateness in apostolic communities today. Consequently community is not simply given but has to be created. This is also true of the Church. How is the Church created? The Church is created through the Eucharist, through the sharing of the Body and Blood, the dying and rising of Jesus. The Eucharist *celebrated* and *shared* creates the Church.

The same thing is true of our communities. Our communities are no longer a given. If they are only a given, then our houses will be merely hotels. They have to be created in a way they did not need to be created before. The vehicle for creating our communities is sharing: free, deliberate, conscious willingness to share our lives, our experiences, our spirituality, our relationship with God, with one another. There is a new and important face to corporateness, something that could have been taken for granted in the past. In a hospital, you used to take for granted that employees would absorb the values of the Daughters of Charity from daily contact. That is not true in the same way today. Now you have Vice-Presidents for Mission Effectiveness.

Today the values need to be shared consciously, deliberately, intentionally, freely. You have found a way to instill the love, the knowledge and the commitment of your coworkers and employees to the charism.

Apostolic reflection, which may previously have been an exercise on the periphery of your lives, has now become your *way of life*. It has come to the center. It is the *way* in which you and we will create our communities.

I would like to suggest a useful image from John Dunne, who has written *The House of Wisdom*. The basic image he uses in his lifetime of theological reflection and writing is the image of *passing over and passing back*. He says our way of moving forward is first to honor our own experience and then to pass over from our own experience to our neighbor's experience. Touched and changed by his or her experience, we pass back to our own experience. It is a way of going beyond the presumption that my experience is normative, the only experience that counts, or the voice of inferiority which discounts my experience in favor of yours. It is a dialogical model, valuing both your experience and mine. *Passing over and passing back . . . and being transformed in the process*. That is the rhythm of our lives. You can see a little of Ruusbroec in this--the divine action of breathing--going forth and coming back.

If we live in this world by passing over and passing back, then diversity is a blessing and the differences of our sisters and of our brothers are a great gift. We pass over into the lives of people who have different points of view, who do not necessarily agree with us, who have their own experiences. The Spirit blesses us through the richness of our differences--in dialogue.

To return to the question: what form will apostolic reflection take? There are several, none is normative. The first one, the one which we are most familiar with, is the *common sharing concerning a common experience*.

The second one, which is the one we are going to experience this afternoon, is *personal sharing-corporate listening*. A group called Inter-Community Consultants, headquartered in Saint Louis, helped our province a great deal in organization and community process. The central process they used was called *simple sharing-corporate listening*. It goes like this. In a group, each person is entitled and invited to share his or her story, his or her experience. Simple sharing means all we do is share it, without dialogue or comments, without critique. We wel-

come each person's story as it is experienced and shared. It is a non-judgmental, non-critical, non-evaluative way of letting people speak out of their own lives. It is permitted to ask a question for clarification. Consequently, everyone around the circle gets a chance to share her (or his) experience. This is followed by *corporate listening*. It is a little tricky but not very. "What did we hear ourselves say?" "What did we, as a group, hear ourselves say?" It could be as simple as, we heard ourselves say it has been a difficult week, or we have heard ourselves say that our God is a God of surprises, or we heard ourselves say that our lives are far more touched by our patients, by our students, by others than we imagined. It is a way of knowing how God is present and active among us, how God is here. That is the sense of it.

A third model, which some have tried in your province, has a lot of power to it. One person shares an event or an experience, then the others enter into a common reflection and dialogue on her experience. Over time, each one has a chance to share her story and have the community reflect on it.

It is good to experiment with different ways of doing apostolic reflection. There is freedom to do so. The key to sharing is to share something that was important to you during the past week. It does not have to be something of great moment. It has to be important to you, it has to have touched your life in some way. The underlying assumption is that God is there, obliquely or directly in your experience. Remember the sister from Liverpool said, "We share with Him and with each other, joys, sorrows, disappointments, visions for the future." The greatest treasure we have is our own lives. If we find ourselves in a community which invites us to share our lives with one another, it is a very powerful thing for the future.

A person who has meant a great deal to me is a Vietnamese monk by the name of Thich Nhat Hanh. He was the head of the Vietnamese Peace delegation in 1974-76 in Paris. He met Thomas Merton one time, and after the meeting Merton said, "Thich Nhat Hanh is my brother." He is an immensely centered and spiritual person. He said in a recent talk, "People ask me, what is the way to peace. But there is no way to peace." Everyone was surprised. "Peace is the way," he said. When you think of it, it is really true. There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.

What is the way to apostolic sharing? There is no way. Apostolic sharing is the way. What is the way to discernment? There is no way. Discernment is the way. Unrestricted readiness is the way. What has

on the margins has become the center. What have been ways and means in our lives have become the substance. Apostolic sharing is at the heart of our existence. Why? Because that is the nature of community. Not just to be at the same address, or the same work, but to share our lives--a conscious, free, vulnerable, chosen communion and sharing with one another about that which is important in our lives, namely our apostolate, our lives and our spirit. Something radical is happening.

As we pursue Vincentian discernment and Vincentian apostolic reflection, we can ask ourselves: what are their benchmarks? There are a few key ones.

Firstly, *the God who called us here is here*. We come together in the belief that we have been called together. God has called us to come together, not to negotiate but to live together. The God who has called us is in our midst. We have come together in God.

Secondly, *God is present in each person and in the community*. This grouping of people will never happen again. The Spirit is present in a unique way each time we come together. A house of four or five people is a unique place of grace. If someone else comes, it is a new group. If we have a group of four people and a fifth person comes, we cannot simply expect that person to blend in. No, the new person is a new gift. There is a new mix, and there are twenty-five new relationships that have to be considered and shared. Everyone is a gift. Each community has its own uniqueness. It does not mean, of course, that there is not anyone who is hard to get along with. It simply means that this is a place of grace.

Thirdly, *do not tread on the heels of Providence*. Time is on God's side, and, consequently, on ours. We are invited to set aside our timetables and agendas, and abide in God's time. At the heart of our coming together is the Eternal Presence. We have come together to be touched and led by the Presence of God.

Fourth, in *contemplating, loving, and serving the poor, the poor one is Jesus Christ*. This is from the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity. I think from the original Constitutions. You are stating that the substance of your lives is to contemplate, love, and serve God in poor person.

Finally, *the journey is a shared and corporate one*. There is great strength in sharing your call, because of the power of the Body. Christians know that Divine Life at its heart is shared, because we know the shared life of the Trinity. When we know the Trinity, we

know that not only created life is lived in sharing, but divine life is a shared life. Louise is very strong on the Trinity and the Holy Spirit.

We are being brought back to the substance of our lives: the capacity, the vocation, the opportunity to share our lives with one another in freedom, in respect, in attentiveness, in listening and in love. Apostolic sharing is a way of life, and perhaps the gift for our time. Let us thank and praise God that the Spirit is leading us in the way of apostolic reflection.

The spirit of the Company consists in giving itself to God to love Our Lord and serve him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor, in their own homes or elsewhere, to teach young girls and children and, in general, all those whom divine providence sends you.

(*Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity, 9 February 1653*)

The following process was then used in small groups. First, they took some time for silent reflection on what had been important in each one's life in the last week. Then, in groups of five, they went around the circle and shared something that had been important to them in the past week. They did this in the manner of *simple sharing*. Then, they asked themselves as a group the question, "What have we heard ourselves saying?" This was *corporate listening*. At the end they were free to thank and bless God or intercede as they were moved to do so.

Resources for using the Examen

The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's hand at work in our whole experience and discern God's direction for us.

The method presented here is adapted from a technique described by Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*. St. Ignatius thought that the Examen was a gift that came directly from God, and that God wanted it to be shared as widely as possible.

More details and resources are available on this website:

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen#examen-part-of-your-day>



Individual Examen

This is a version of the five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius practiced:

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

More detail on these steps is on the next page.

Collective Examen - End of Meeting Examen

From Sandie Cornish

1. What am I grateful for at the end of this meeting?
2. During this meeting, what did I notice, what insights did I gain?
3. When did I feel a good energy, or a bad energy?
4. Is there something that I need to pay more attention to?
5. What do I feel called to do now (next meeting/or visit)?

It's an evaluation of your thoughts, feelings and moral conduct.

Each statement is read slowly and leave a pause after each.

This could be led by the Spiritual Adviser or put the questions on a card hand around so various people can lead it.

<https://social-spirituality.net/pray/two-forms-of-examen/>



© Sandie Cornish

www.social-spirituality.net

Five-step Daily Examen from St. Ignatius in detail

1. Become aware of God's presence: Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

2. Review the day with gratitude: Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

3. Pay attention to your emotions: One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it: Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart — whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

5. Look toward tomorrow: Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.

Complete the Daily Examen with the Our Father.

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray>

See www.ignatianspirituality.com for many more resources on the Daily Examen and prayer.

Commissioning Ceremony and Mass

This is a sample Commissioning Rite for Council and Conference Presidents, Spiritual Advisers. It may be part of Eucharist or on its own.

Setting

- The symbols of Office – Bibles, candles, bread and water, and The Rule are on a table at the front.
- Participants in the ceremony are seated at the front of the Church/Chapel.

Invocation for the Land and its First Peoples

Please remain seated.

Reader: Holy Spirit, we invoke your blessing on this country and on us as we gather for our St Vincent de Paul Society Annual Mass. We acknowledge the Indigenous elders of the N..... people, those who once lived here and into whose sacred space our forbearers came, changing forever an older way of life.

Bless us and bless their descendants. Help us to join our hands and hearts together. Help us to heal one another and the land, so that our lives may flow in harmony and we may live with love and deep respect. Amen

Gathering Hymn *Please stand*

Welcome and Introduction

If it is a Commissioning of a Central Council President then, retiring President, moves to the lectern to welcome guests and invites State President to conduct Commissioning.

If it is a Regional/Conference/Spiritual Adviser, then this could be the Central Council President or Regional President

State President or other:

Bishop/Priest, Vincentians, family and friends, the St Vincent de Paul Society is an international Catholic organisation, founded in Paris in 1833 by Frederic Ozanam and his companions. The Society was co-founded in Australia by Fr Gerald Ward (1854), for a brief period in Melbourne. Through the dedicated work of Charles Gordon O'Neill, the Society was later re-established in The Rocks, Sydney, in 1881. Its work continues to this day.

The Mission of the St Vincent de Paul Society is to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. We seek to co-operate in shaping a more just and compassionate Australian community and to share our resources with our twinned countries.

Members seek to bear witness to the love of Christ through prayer, meditation on the Scriptures, fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church, through their daily lives and in relationships with those in need. Catholic in character, it is open to all who wish to live their faith by loving their neighbour in the person of the needy.

As leader, it is the responsibility of the President to keep the members focused on this mission. The President must look outwards

with vision, to the poor, and to the wider society, the Church and the world in which our humble organisation lives and grows.

The ministry of the President is one of love and service. The President must lead and encourage all fellow members to give generously and wisely of their gifts, in loving service of the poor. It is always the poor who count the most with us.

Reader continues after a brief pause.

Call to Leadership

State President or other:

I now call: N..... to the ministry of Central Council President
And/or: N..... to the ministry of Regional Council President
And/or: N..... to the ministry of Conference President
And/or: N..... to the ministry of Spiritual Adviser

Elected stand, move to the front and face the congregation.

State President or other:

Bishop/Priest, please lead us in the commissioning ceremony of our new Presidents/Spiritual Advisers.

Questioning

Bishop/Priest: State President or other, N....., have the prescribed procedures been followed and the election held according to usual custom?

State President or other: They have.

Bishop/Priest: N....., are you prepared to accept these roles?

Elected N.....: I am, with the help of God, the support of my family and the unity of Vincentians in our Central Council.

Bishop/Priest: Such a responsibility is shared by those closest to us. Family of N....., are you prepared to support your husbands/wives/family member in this ministry?

Family stand and respond.

Family: I am/We are.

Family members sit.

Bishop/Priest: Would the members of the Elected N.....Diocesan Central Council/ Regional Council/Local Conference please stand?

Council/Conference members please stand.

Having elected your new President/Spiritual Adviser, do you promise to willingly accept co-responsibility with them, to accept delegation, to be available for consultation, to offer advice in accordance with the highest ideals of the St Vincent de Paul Society?

Council/Conference Members: We do.

Bishop/Priest: Would all members of the Vincentian family please stand?

With the Central/Regional Council Presidency or Spiritual Adviser being entrusted to this new President/Spiritual Adviser, do you commit yourselves to support them with confidence and commitment, and to co-operate with them and the Council members in accordance with the spirit of the St Vincent de Paul Society?

All Members of the Vincentian Family: We do.

Please be seated.

Bishop/Priest: N....., you have heard the community express its commitment to support you in your ministry as presidents/spiritual adviser. Assured of this support, I confirm your call and invite all gathered to express their support.

All applaud.

Commissioning

Bishop/Priest: N....., as presidents/spiritual advisers of the St Vincent de Paul Society, you are called to leadership and ministry within the Church. We commission you for this ministry of servant leadership through the presentation of important symbols of this office.

Symbols of Office

Presentation of the Bible

Bishop/Priest: N....., receive this Bible. May it remind you that in baptism you accepted the Word of God as your rule of life.

Elect receives bible.

Your ministry is to be grounded in the Word. As it was for Frederic Ozanam, may your prayer with, and reflection on, the Word lead you to a deep experience of the love of God. May you become a living word of God for the members of the society and the poor whom you serve. Let the Gospel be your inspiration and guide.

After a brief pause Bishop/Priest continues.

The Light of Christ

Light the candle from the Paschal candle.

Bishop/Priest: N..... receive this candle, a symbol of the light of Christ. May it remind you that at your baptism you were enlightened by Christ.

Your ministry is to shine the light of Christ into the darkness of people's lives: a light of justice and hope; of dignity and integrity; of encouragement and warmth; a light revealing new paths in changing circumstances.

Keep this flame of faith alive in your own hearts that it will shine brightly in the society, particularly in interactions amongst members and in the spirit in which you live out your Rule.

After a brief pause Bishop/Priest continues.

Presentation of a Loaf of Bread and Glass of Water

Bishop/Priest: N....., receive this bread and water, gifts of the earth we are called to steward for the common good. May these remind you of your baptismal responsibility to share what you have, so that all may have life, and have it to the full.

Elected presented with the loaf of bread and glass of water.

As disciples of Jesus, model your ministry on his table ministry. Jesus shared meals and conversation with disciples, family, friends and those who experienced disadvantage. Ensure the people of God are nourished and served with love and respect, with truth and integrity, creating unity amongst all.

After a brief pause Bishop/Priest continues.

Presentation of The Rule

Bishop/Priest: N....., receive the Rule of the Society. May it guide you in your service as a servant leader, true to the spirit of, Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Elect are presented with the Rule.

You have been called to this ministry because people recognise in you the gifts necessary to lead the society. Place these God-given gifts at the service of all the responsibilities inherent in the role of President/Spiritual Adviser.

After a brief pause Bishop/Priest continues.

Commissioning

Bishop/Priest: As Bishop/priest of N.....Diocese or Parish, I commission you, as President/Spiritual Adviser.....

Would you all join me in offering congratulations to N.....

The community applauds.

The following may be used if this service is part of a Eucharist

Call to Eucharist

Bishop/Priest: Let us bring this offering of servant leadership and the work of the Society to Eucharist.

In the light of the Word of God we will hear, and gathered around this table, we will offer it all to God. We will join ourselves to Christ's own offering so that through him, with him and in him, we will be changed into his body, to be given in the service of those who experience poverty and disadvantage.

The Eucharist continues from here.

Commissioning and Renewal of Commitment: Three examples

Commissioning of New Members

This is a sample of a joint commissioning for Mini Vinnies and Conference members from St Paul's Parish in Camden, NSW, held in June 2013.

Leader: Almighty God, you raised up Blessed Frederic Ozanam, as someone blazing with the spirit of your love. With this he inspired others in the service of the poor.

Help us who are also inspired by Frederic, to carry out your commandments of love and enkindle in your world compassion and justice for all. We make this prayer through our Lord...

All: Amen.

Presentation

Leader: On behalf of the people gathered here, I present the following persons to be committed as members of the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Diocese.

Insert the Name of Conference, the Conference President and Conference members

Insert the Name of the Mini Vinnies Conference, the facilitator, and the Mini Vinnies members

The Commitment

Priest: I invite all here present to join prayerfully with me as we commission our brothers and sisters to their new ministry within the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Brothers and sisters, following the Gospel of Jesus, St Vincent de Paul members are united in the Holy Spirit in the common aim of their spiritual growth and mutual support through a special relationship with those in need.

Addressing the group to be commissioned:

You have volunteered to serve this parish as members of the St Vincent de Paul Society. You will join other Vincentians in this vocation who also gather with us today. Are you ready to accept your ministry and dedicate yourselves as members of the St Vincent de Paul Society?

New Members: Yes, we do this in the spirit of Christ's love.

Priest: The Rule states that members of the Society journey together towards holiness:

- Through visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor;
- Attending meetings of the Conference or Council;
- Promoting a life of prayer and reflection;
- And transforming their concern into action and their compassion into practical and effective love.

From The Rule, Part 1, 2.2.

Do you commit yourself to join in this journey towards holiness with your brother and sister Vincentians?

New Members: Yes, we do this in the spirit of Christ's love.

Priest: *If there are Conference members in the parish congregation, please stand.*

Are you ready to accept these people as members of the St Vincent de Paul Society and commit to support and encourage them in their growth as Vincentians?

Members: Yes, we do this in the spirit of Christ's love.

Priest: *Addressing all members of the parish congregation:*

Will you, the members of this congregation, accept these brothers and sisters as servants of this community in their work in the St Vincent de Paul Society?

Congregation: We will.

Priest: *Addressing all members of the parish congregation:*

Will you encourage them in love and support them in their ministry, serving with them the one Lord Jesus Christ?

Congregation: We will.

Act of Commissioning.

Priest: Almighty God, let your Holy Spirit uphold these men and women, boys and girls and always give them the confidence in their God-given gifts as they take this further step in their Christian journey by committing themselves to the St Vincent de Paul Society. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Beloved in Christ, let us pray in silence for these people before we commission them for the work to which we believe the Holy Spirit has called them. *Pause.*

I now commission you as members of the St Vincent de Paul Society. May God give you strength to fulfil these vows. Go forth, in the name the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. May all the blessings of a provident God be with you always.

All: The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

Receiving the Rule

Priest: *Addressing the new members*

In this book is contained the wisdom and the intentions of the Society founders, Frederic Ozanam and companions. Let it be your privilege to ensure that their spirit is upheld and lived energetically by all. Do you accept this Rule as your guide for your service as a Vincentian?

New Members: Yes, we do this in the spirit of Christ's love.

All new members receive a copy of the Rule from the Leader.

All Members: We rejoice in the faith and courage of our founders, especially Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Charles O'Neill. May their spirit be renewed in the Society of today, that we may be open to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged and receptive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Closing Prayer

All: May we all become a living sign of your love.
We ask for your help and guidance
as we pattern out faith and lives on that of Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Recommitment Service examples

Here are two examples of a 'recommitment service' which can be used in a variety of settings. The first example was part of Commissioning of a new Presidents and the second example comes from a Reflection Day for members and volunteers.

Recommitment to Service in the St Vincent de Paul Society

Thanks for Wollongong Central Council for this example.

President or other person: Would all members, volunteers and employees please stand together as One Society as we recommit to our Good Works.

Bishop or Celebrant or Leader: The Mission of the Society reminds us to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

Do you recommit yourself to the Society's Mission?

All: Yes, in unity with our Vincentian Brothers and Sisters.

Bishop or Celebrant or Leader: Let us pray together as we leave this place to continue your work of service to our friends in need.

All: Loving God, you endowed Blessed Frédéric Ozanam with compassion for others and hunger for justice. He has shown us how an ordinary person can accomplish extraordinary things. May we love what he loved and follow his example as we strive to work together in united service. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Bishop or Celebrant or Leader: In the Spirit of Jesus, and with the inspiration of Vincent, Louise, Frédéric, and Rosalie, I send forth all gathered here as part of an international lay organisation, "to go to the poor with love" and to lighten their burdens.

May the Holy Spirit guide your steps with love and the power of Grace and Mercy. May your acts of justice, hope and joy strengthen your spirit.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

Renewal of Commitment

This is from the Gosford Regional Council Retreat Day in 2014

Celebrant: As members of the Vincentian family you are reminded of your Ministry to grow in spirituality in the ethos of the St Vincent de Paul Society. May you empower one another to grow in and gain a deeper understanding of Vincentian Spirituality from which to develop a more effective ministry of helping the marginalized and all those in need.

You are invited to renew your commitment to Service.
Members and Volunteers stand.

Celebrant: Will you use your individual gifts to support and walk with one another, and with those in need, to help make a difference?

All: We will walk with each other and with them to make a difference.

Celebrant: Will you listen not just to the words, but hear and acknowledge the sufferings of those you encounter?

All: We will listen, hear and respond.

Celebrant: Will you challenge unjust structures, and strengthen and nourish our Society's commitment, to act for justice?

All: We will strengthen and nourish our capacity to be just.
We will call for justice.

Celebrant: Will you serve the people as loyal servants without judgement and with hearts filled with compassion?

All: We will serve faithfully and compassionately.

Celebrant: Will you hold in trust all that is precious about the Society and still find new ways of expressing your ministry?

All: We will never tire of holding our tradition and giving creative, contemporary expression to it.

Celebrant: Heavenly Father – Your Son Our Lord Jesus Christ took the form of a servant, and became a man for others, grant these people that same spirit of service. Help them to follow His footsteps and the footsteps of St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

All: Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people. We pray that we may grow in our spiritual life, bring comfort and strength to those in need. We will do this in the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son.

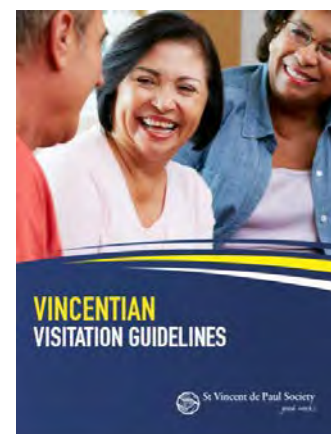
Amen.

Excerpts from the Vincentian Visitation Guidelines

The **Vincentian Visitation Guidelines** explores the qualities of a Vincentian visit whether that be in an assistance centre or in the home of the person being assisted. The Guidelines enable new and current members to understand and reflect upon the Vincentian approach to assistance.

Some brief excerpts are provided here. Reading, discussing and referring to the Guidelines frequently at Conference Meetings and other gatherings is encouraged.

A digital copy is available on MAVS.vinnies.org.au or the booklet may be ordered from the Resource Centre in Stanmore.



From Page 8

The Rule

The Rule beautifully describes what is expected of Vincentians in serving those in need. We provide not only material aid to the marginalised, the lonely and the disadvantaged; we also offer much more through our compassionate service, respect, love, kindness and friendship as we recognise in them the face and spirit of Christ. The Rule offers members a way of living and serving within the Vincentian framework by responding to the Gospel message of Christ.

Vincentian Visit

We seek to communicate that we are there, in an equal relationship, to work with them in addressing their concerns and needs. How and where we sit non-verbally communicates this relationship.

On behalf of the Society, we hold for people the vouchers, assistance funds and other resources, but we do not hold power over them. It is important to judge the situation, not the people, and act in a manner where they feel respected and acknowledged as a person of value.

As in a home visit, there are two members present in a Care and Support Centre visit. There are many reasons why we visit in pairs; safety is only one factor. Visiting in pairs carries much wisdom and brings the benefit of having the knowledge, good judgement/discernment, sensitivity and compassion of two Vincentians rather than of one. It also ensures there is someone with whom to discuss the meeting afterwards, and to consider further ways to support the person/people.

From Pages 11

The spirituality of the Society reminds us:

- that love is our first gift;
- to suspend judgement;
- to approach our work with a generosity of spirit;
- and to share our faith through our attitudes and actions.

From Page 15

Respect the choices of those we visit

The spirit of The Rule guides us in our visits

Help but don't judge. Vincentians are in a privileged position where they get a glimpse of what life is like for those they serve. Judging belittles people and devalues the work of the Society. It is important that members maintain a clear distinction between making a judgement based on a person's needs and situation and being judgmental as a result of personal bias or preconceptions.

Walk a mile in their shoes. For most of the people we assist life is difficult, and begrudging them the few joys they have in life (cigarettes, having a pet) is not in keeping with the Vincentian spirit.

Understand the power of addictions and the difficulty in overcoming addictions. In discussing how best to help in these situations, Conferences may consider that referral is often the best option. Members are encouraged to seek out local forums and workshops where they can learn more about addictions and services available in the local community.

Be aware of pre-conceptions and leave them at the door. Vincentians who themselves have struggled financially, or who have been very successful in their lives, may have difficulty in empathising with someone else who is coping as best they can in difficult circumstances. Remember that others may not have the knowledge, the education, the life skills, and the social supports that enabled our choices.

Know that all is not what it seems. People can feel humiliated and devastated by members who are being judgemental. Actions such as criticising a person without knowing the reasons behind the situation will limit our ability to establish trust with them.

Be intent on the person not on their environment. Don't worry about the tidiness of the home or the appearance of the person and resist imposing your own values regarding appearance such as tattoos or body piercings.

Be respectful in communicating that a Conference will reduce a person's assistance. If a Conference decides that a person is to receive reduced assistance, or in some circumstances can no longer be assisted with material assistance, this decision must be

From Page 32

The Rule and Frederic Ozanam's writings makes it clear that he and his companions and those who followed, were committed to giving much more than material goods to those in need. His words invite us to enter into a dialogue and relationship with those we serve, and to give of our time, our gifts, and our presence. It is often more beneficial to take the time to help people being assisted to become less dependent on charity and take control of their lives.

This may mean discussing if the needs of the person being assisted are beyond our resources. Prayer and members' discernment are invaluable at this point.

Frederic making a home visit Icon Reflection

By Sister Kieran Kneaves DC

In 1841, Frederic began to teach at the Sorbonne and it was in the classroom where his genius shone. He would address the justice issues and the suffering of the working poor, which he knew by experience in making home visits. Frederic always encouraged his students to also serve those who were poor. Frederic wrote:

“The knowledge of social well-being and reform is to be learned not from books nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs to the poor man’s garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him.”

This icon captures the grace of a home visit in a profound way by showing:

- At the door stands Frederic, a teacher symbolized by his academic robes, making a home visit in the Mouffetard district on a cold and damp winter day.
- Inside the dark, unheated, dirt floor home we see a:
 - Mother, holding a baby, who offers her hand in welcome and gratitude to Frederic.
 - Small little girl hugging Frederic in gratitude and welcome, because she recognizes and trusts him, as he has been there many times before.
 - Grandmother, holding her cane in one hand, reaching out with the other pleading for help.
 - A small wood stove with an unlit candle sitting on it, indicating that there is no fire in the stove.
- As Frederic was mentored and guided, he now inspires his young students that he brings with him (to his right). Together they symbolize the Vincentian mission of “Justice and Charity”:
 - One is holding a book and a tablet. He has come to tutor the shy and cautious young boy who is looking directly at him in expectation.
 - The other student is carrying a basket of bread to give to the family, looking out and seeing more families who need help.
- The Daughter of Charity, Sr Rosalie Rendu (in the center background) had mentored the founding members of the Society to love those living in poverty with a Vincentian heart.
- Emmanuel Bailly, (the top hat behind Sr. Rosalie) encouraged and guided the founding members and became the first President General of the Society.



Sister Kieran Kneaves DC is a Daughter of Charity and the National Director of Vincentian Formation for the National Council of the United States Society of St Vincent De Paul, Inc. Used with permission.

*Our lives begin to end the day we become
silent about things that matter.*

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Mastering Crucial Conversations

The Power of Dialogue

Crucial Conversations

*Tools for Talking
When Stakes Are High*

SECOND EDITION

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny,
Ron McMillan, Al Switzler

2012



New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto

We (the authors) didn't always spend our time noodling over crucial conversations. In fact, we started our research by studying a slightly different topic. We figured that if we could learn why certain people were more effective than others, then we could learn exactly what they did, clone it, and pass it on to others.

To find the source of success, we started at work. We asked people to identify who they thought were their most effective colleagues. In fact, over the past twenty-five years, we've asked over 20,000 people to identify the individuals in their organizations who could really get things done. We wanted to find those who were not just influential, but who were *far more* influential than the rest.

Each time, as we compiled the names into a list, a pattern emerged. Some people were named by one or two colleagues.

Some found their way onto the lists of five or six people. These were the ones *good* at influence, but not good enough to be widely identified as top performers. And then there were the handful who were named thirty or more times. These were the *best*—the clear opinion leaders in their areas. Some were managers and supervisors. Many were not.

One of the opinion leaders we became particularly interested in meeting was named Kevin. He was the only one of eight vice presidents in his company to be identified as exceedingly influential. We wanted to know why. So we watched him at work.

At first, Kevin didn't do anything remarkable. In truth, he looked like every other VP. He answered his phone, talked to his direct reports, and continued about his pleasant, but routine, routine.

The Startling Discovery

After trailing Kevin for almost a week, we began to wonder if he really did act in ways that set him apart from others or if his influence was simply a matter of popularity. And then we followed Kevin into a meeting.

Kevin, his peers, and their boss were deciding on a new location for their offices—would they move across town, across the state, or across the country? The first two execs presented their arguments for their top choices, and as expected, their points were greeted by penetrating questions from the full team. No vague claim went unclarified, no unsupported reasoning unquestioned.

Then Chris, the CEO, pitched his preference—one that was both unpopular and potentially disastrous. However, when people tried to disagree or push back on Chris, he responded poorly. Since he was the big boss, he didn't exactly have to browbeat people to get what he wanted. Instead, he became slightly defensive. First he raised an eyebrow. Then he raised his finger. Finally he raised his voice—just a little. It wasn't long until people stopped questioning him, and Chris's inadequate proposal was quietly accepted.

Well almost. That's when Kevin spoke up. His words were simple enough—something like, "Hey Chris, can I check something out with you?"

The reaction was stunning—everyone in the room stopped breathing. But Kevin ignored the apparent terror of his colleagues and plunged on ahead. In the next few minutes he in essence told the CEO that he appeared to be violating his own decision-making guidelines. He was subtly using his power to move the new offices to his hometown.

Kevin continued to explain what he saw happening, and when he finished the first minutes of this delicate exchange, Chris was quiet for a moment. Then he nodded his head. "You're absolutely right," he finally concluded. "I have been trying to force my opinion on you. Let's back up and try again."

This was a crucial conversation, and Kevin played no games whatsoever. He didn't resort to silence like his colleagues, nor did he try to force his arguments on others. Somehow he managed to achieve absolute candor, but he did so in a way that showed deep respect for Chris. It was a remarkable thing to watch. As a result, the team chose a far more reasonable location and Kevin's boss appreciated his caring coaching.

When Kevin was done, one of his peers turned to us and said, "Did you see how he did that? If you want to know how he gets things done, figure out what he just did."

So we did. In fact, we spent the next twenty-five years discovering what Kevin and people like him do. What typically set them apart from the rest of the pack was their ability to avoid what we came to call the *Fool's Choice*.

You see, Kevin's contribution was not his insight. Almost everyone could see what was happening. They knew they were allowing themselves to be steamrolled into making a bad decision. But everyone besides Kevin believed they had to make a choice between two bad alternatives.

but they then acted in ways that were far more skilled than their colleagues.

But what exactly did they do? Kevin wasn't *that* different. He did step up to a tough issue and help the team make a better choice, but was what he did more magical than manageable? Could what he did be learned by others?

To answer these questions, first let's explore what Kevin was able to *achieve*. This will help us see where we're trying to go. Then we'll examine the dialogue tools that effective communicators routinely use and learn to apply them to our own crucial conversations.

DIALOGUE

When it comes to risky, controversial, and emotional conversations, skilled people find a way to get all relevant information (from themselves and others) out into the open.

That's it. At the core of every successful conversation lies the free flow of relevant information. People openly and honestly express their opinions, share their feelings, and articulate their theories. They willingly and capably share their views, even when their ideas are controversial or unpopular. It's the one thing that, and precisely what, Kevin and the other extremely effective communicators we studied were routinely able to achieve.

Now, to put a label on this spectacular talent—it's called dialogue.

di·a·logue or **di·a·log** (dī' ə-|lŏg', -lŏg) *n*

The free flow of meaning between two or more people.

Now, although we know what people like Kevin are trying to achieve, we're still left with two questions. First, how does this free flow of meaning lead to success? Second, what can you do to encourage meaning to flow freely?

- Option 1: Speak up and turn the most powerful person in the company into their sworn enemy.
- Option 2: Suffer in silence and make a bad decision that might ruin the company.

The mistake most of us make in our crucial conversations is we believe that we have to choose between telling the truth and keeping a friend. We begin believing in the Fool's Choice from an early age. For instance, we learned that when Grandma served an enormous wedge of her famous Brussel-Sprout Pie à la mode then asks, "Do you like it?"—she *really* meant: "Do you like *me*?" When we answered honestly and saw the look of hurt and horror on her face—we made a decision that affected the rest of our lives: "From this day forward, I will be alert for moments when I must choose between candor and kindness."

Beyond the Fool's Choice

And from that day forward, we find plenty of those moments—with bosses, colleagues, loved ones, and line cutters. And the consequences can be disastrous.

That's why our discovery of Kevin (and hundreds of individuals like him) was so important. We discovered a cadre of human beings who refuse to make the Fool's Choice. Their goal is different from your average person's. Consider Kevin, the all-star. When he took a breath and opened his mouth, his overriding question was, "How can I be 100 percent honest with Chris, and at the same time be 100 percent respectful?"

Following that consequential meeting, we began looking for more Kevins, and we found them all over the world. We found them in industry, government, academia, and nonprofit organizations. They were fairly easy to locate because they were almost always among the most influential employees in their organizations. They not only refused to make the Fool's Choice,

For example, a client of ours shared the following story. A woman checked into the hospital to have a tonsillectomy, and the surgical team erroneously removed a portion of her foot. How could this tragedy happen? In fact, why is it that nearly 200,000 hospital deaths in the United States each year stem from human error? In part because many health-care professionals are afraid to speak their minds. In this case, no less than seven people wondered why the surgeon was working on the foot, but said nothing. Meaning didn't flow freely because people were afraid to speak up.

Of course, hospitals don't have a monopoly on fear. In every instance where bosses are smart, highly paid, confident, and outspoken (i.e., most of the world), people tend to hold back their opinions rather than risk angering someone in a position of power.

On the other hand, when people feel comfortable speaking up and meaning does flow freely, the shared pool can dramatically increase a group's ability to make better decisions. Consider what happened to Kevin's group. As everyone on the team began to explain his or her opinion, people formed a clearer and more complete picture of the circumstances.

As they began to understand the whys and wherefores of different proposals, they built off one another. Eventually, as one idea led to the next, and then to the next, they came up with an alternative that no one had originally thought of and that all wholeheartedly supported. As a result of the free flow of meaning, the whole (final choice) was truly greater than the sum of the original parts. In short:

*The Pool of Shared Meaning is
the birthplace of synergy.*

Not only does a shared pool help individuals make better choices, but since the meaning is *shared*, people willingly act on whatever decisions they make—with both unity and conviction.

We'll explain the relationship between the free flow of meaning and success right here and now. The second question—what you must do in order to achieve dialogue rather than make the Fool's Choice, no matter the circumstances—will take us the rest of the book to answer.

Filling the Pool of Shared Meaning

Each of us enters conversations with our own opinions, feelings, theories, and experiences about the topic at hand. This unique combination of thoughts and feelings makes up our personal pool of meaning. This pool not only informs us, but also propels our every action.

When two or more of us enter *crucial* conversations, by definition we don't share the same pool. Our opinions differ. I believe one thing; you another. I have one history; you another.

People who are skilled at dialogue do their best to make it safe for everyone to add their meaning to the *shared* pool—even ideas that at first glance appear controversial, wrong, or at odds with their own beliefs. Now, obviously, they don't agree with every idea; they simply do their best to ensure that all ideas find their way into the open.

As the Pool of Shared Meaning grows, it helps people in two ways. First, as individuals are exposed to more accurate and relevant information, they make better choices. In a very real sense, the Pool of Shared Meaning is a measure of a group's IQ. The larger the shared pool, the smarter the decisions. And even though many people may be involved in a choice, when people openly and freely share ideas, the increased time investment is more than offset by the quality of the decision.

On the other hand, we've all seen what happens when the shared pool is dangerously shallow. When people purposefully withhold meaning from one another, individually *smart* people can do collectively *stupid* things.

As people sit through an open discussion where ideas are shared, they take part in the free flow of meaning. Eventually, they understand why the shared solution is the best solution, and they're committed to act. For example, Kevin and the other VPs didn't buy into their final choice simply because they were involved; they bought in because they understood.

Conversely, when people aren't involved, when they sit back quietly during touchy conversations, they're rarely committed to the final decision. Since their ideas remain in their heads and their opinions never make it into the pool, they end up quietly criticizing and passively resisting. Worse still, when others force their ideas into the pool, people have a harder time accepting the information. They may *say* they're on board, but then walk away and follow through halfheartedly. To quote Samuel Butler, "He that complies against his will is of his own opinion still."

The time you spend up front establishing a shared pool of meaning is more than paid for by faster, more unified, and more committed action later on.

For example, if Kevin and the other leaders had not been committed to their relocation decision, terrible consequences would have followed. Some people would have agreed to move; others would have dragged their feet. Some would have held heated discussions in the hallways. Others would have said nothing and then quietly fought the plan. More likely than not, the team would have been forced to meet again, discuss again, and decide again—since only one person favored the decision and the decision affected everyone.

Now, don't get us wrong. We're not suggesting that every decision be made by consensus or that the boss shouldn't take part in or even make the final choice. We're simply suggesting that whatever the decision-making method, the greater the shared meaning in the pool, the better the choice, the more the unity, and the stronger the conviction—whoever makes the choice.

Every time we find ourselves arguing, debating, running away, or otherwise acting in an ineffective way, it's because we don't know how to share meaning. Instead of engaging in healthy dialogue, we play silly and costly games.

For instance, sometimes we move to silence. We play Salute and Stay Mute. That is, we don't confront people in positions of authority. Or at home we may play Freeze Your Lover. With this tortured technique, we give loved ones the cold shoulder in order to get them to treat us better (what's the logic in that?).

Sometimes we rely on hints, sarcasm, caustic humor, innuendo, and looks of disgust to make our points. We play the martyr and then pretend we're actually trying to help. Afraid to confront an individual, we blame an entire team for a problem—hoping the message will hit the right target. Whatever the technique, the overall method is the same. We withhold meaning from the pool. We go to silence.

On other occasions, not knowing how to stay in dialogue, we try to force our meaning into the pool. We rely on violence—anything from subtle manipulation to verbal attacks. We act like we know everything, hoping people will believe our arguments. We discredit others, hoping people won't believe their arguments. And then we use every manner of force to get our way or possibly even harm others. We borrow power from the boss; we hit people with biased monologues; we make hurtful comments. The goal, of course, is always the same—to compel others to our point of view.

Now, here's how the various elements fit together. When stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong, we're often at our worst. In order to move to our best, we have to find a way to explain what is in each of our personal pools of meaning—especially our high-stakes, sensitive, and controversial opinions, feelings, and ideas—and to get others to share their pools. We have to develop the tools that make it safe for us to

discuss these issues and to come to a *shared* pool of meaning. And when we do, our lives change.

DIALOGUE SKILLS ARE LEARNABLE

And now for the *really* good news. The skills required to master high-stakes interactions are quite easy to spot and moderately easy to learn. First consider the fact that a well-handled crucial conversation all but leaps out at you. In fact, when you see someone enter the dangerous waters of a high-stakes, high-emotion, controversial discussion—and the person does a particularly good job—your natural reaction is to step back in awe. “Wow!” is generally the first word out of your mouth. What starts as a doomed discussion ends up with a healthy resolution. It can take your breath away.

More important, not only are dialogue skills easy to spot, but they’re also fairly easy to learn. That’s where we’re going next. We’ve isolated and captured the skills of the dialogue-gifted through twenty-five years of nonstop “Wow!” research. First, we followed around Kevin and others like him. Then, when conversations turned *crucial*, we took detailed notes. Afterward, we compared our observations, tested our hypotheses, and honed our models until we found the skills that consistently explain the success of brilliant communicators. Finally, we combined our philosophies, theories, models, and skills into a package of learnable tools—tools for talking when stakes are high. We then taught these skills and watched as key performance indicators and relationships improved.

Now we’re ready to share what we’ve learned. Stay with us as we explore how to transform crucial conversations from frightening events into interactions that yield success and results. It’s the most important set of skills you’ll ever master.

My Crucial Conversation: Bobby R.

My crucial conversation began on the night before my first deployment to Iraq in 2004. There was a lot of tension between members of my family caused by past events and conflicting perspectives. The stress of my leaving to combat only increased the tension. On that night, one well-intended but deeply loaded question from my father sent me through the roof. The way I reacted over the next couple of hours started a downward spiral that affected my entire family. Siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, parents, children, and grandparents all took sides.

My family ties continued to unravel as I led a platoon of soldiers through the streets of Baghdad. My wife was home with our one-year-old and pregnant with our second. During my tour, additional family encounters only worsened the situation, and when I came home after fourteen months in combat, I came home to a family that was completely broken at every existing generation. The silence between me and my father continued for five years.

Crucial Conversations saved my relationship with my parents. A neighbor who is a Crucial Conversations trainer invited me to his class before my third tour in Iraq. A couple of weeks before I deployed I reached out to my father to let him know about the two children he had never seen and that I was leaving for combat. I told him I couldn’t make the same mistake I had made five years earlier, and we agreed to meet.

On a beautiful sunset balcony in Houston, my dad and I spent three tense hours dealing with a lot of pain and built-up resentment. I kept in mind what I had been taught and, rather than promising candor, tried my best to create the conditions where we could be both honest and respectful. It was incredibly difficult. Sometimes the honesty threatened to put us right back in the

angry state that got us there. But I kept focusing on what I really wanted—a relationship with my family.

At the end of the conversation, we met my mom for dinner. She had been the most hurt by my anger in the past and was skeptical that I was still the argumentative, sarcastic, spiteful, and arrogant child of my youth. She gave me a chance based on my father's assessment of my respect, remorse, and clear demonstration of Mutual Purpose. While we haven't dealt with everything, I am now in a loving relationship with my wife, four children, and parents. We have agreed to never bury our concerns in silence again.

I attribute the relationship I have today to the success of that one crucial conversation on the balcony. Had I not practiced what I had learned, my relationship with my father would have died from anger and indifference. That conversation happened because of a friend who introduced me to Crucial Conversations.

—Bobby R.

HERE'S WHERE WE'RE GOING

Throughout the remainder of the book we'll explore the tools people use to help create the conditions of dialogue. The focus is on how we think about problem situations and what we do to prepare for them. As we work on ourselves, watch for problems, examine our own thought processes, discover our own styles, and then catch problems before they get out of hand, everyone benefits. As you read on, *you will learn how to create conditions in yourself and others that make dialogue the path of least resistance.*

Next, we'll examine the tools for talking, listening, and acting together. This is what most people have in mind when they think of crucial conversations. How do I express delicate feedback? How do I speak persuasively, not abrasively? And how about lis-

tening? Or better still, what can we do to get people to talk when they seem nervous? And how do we move from thought to action? As you read on, *you will learn the key skills of talking, listening, and acting together.*

Finally, we'll tie all of the theories and skills together by providing both a model and an extended example. Then, to see if you can really do what it takes, we provide seventeen situations that would give most of us fits—even people who are gifted at dialogue. As you read on, *you will master the tools for talking when stakes are high.*

Active Listening

Hear What People Are Really Saying

Listening is a key part of being a Vincentian and spiritual adviser. This article discusses some simple steps for effective listening.

We listen for a variety of reasons:

- We listen to obtain information.
- We listen to understand.
- We listen for enjoyment.
- We listen to learn.

Given all the listening that we do, you would think we'd be good at it! In fact, most of us are not, and research suggests that we only remember between 25 percent and 50 percent of what we hear, as described by Edgar Dale's Cone of Experience. That means that when you talk to others for 10 minutes, they pay attention to less than half of the conversation.

Turn it around and it reveals that when you are receiving directions or being presented with information, you aren't hearing the whole message either. You hope the important parts are captured in your 25-50 percent, but what if they're not?

Clearly, listening is a skill that we can all benefit from improving. By becoming a better listener, you can improve your effectiveness, as well as your ability to support, influence, and negotiate. What's more, you'll avoid conflict and misunderstandings.



About Active Listening

"Active listening" is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, the complete message being communicated. In order to do this, careful attention to the other person is needed.

Avoid becoming distracted by whatever else may be going on around you, or by forming counter arguments while the other person is speaking. Nor can you allow yourself to get bored, and lose focus on what the other person is saying.

Tip: If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating his or her words mentally as he says them – this will reinforce their message and help you to stay focused.

To enhance your listening skills, there are ways to let the other person know that you are listening to what they are saying.

Ask yourself if you've ever been engaged in a conversation when you wondered if the other person was listening to what you were saying. You wonder if your message is getting across, or if it's even worthwhile continuing to speak. It feels like talking to a brick wall and it's something you want to avoid.

Acknowledgement you are hearing another person can be as simple as a nod of the head or a simple "uh huh." You aren't necessarily agreeing with the person, you are simply indicating that you are listening. Using body language and other signs to acknowledge you are listening can also help you to pay attention.

Try to respond to the speaker in a way that will encourage them to continue speaking. While nodding and "uh huhing" says you're interested, an occasional question or comment to recap what has been said also communicates that you are listening and understanding his message.

Tip: Be aware that active listening can give others the impression that you agree with them, even if you don't. It's also important to avoid using active listening as a checklist of actions to follow, rather than really listening.

Becoming an Active Listener

Here are five key active listening techniques to become a more effective listener:

1. Pay Attention

- Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.
- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.
- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language.

2. Show That You're Listening

- Use your own body language and gestures to show that you are engaged.
- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Make sure that your posture is open and interested.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and "uh huh."

3. Provide Feedback

- Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect on what is being said and to ask questions.
- Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is...", and "Sounds like you are saying..." are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say..." "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarise the speaker's comments periodically.

Tip: If you find yourself reacting to what someone said, say so. If needed, ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX. Is that what you meant?"

4. Defer Judgment

Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

5. Respond Appropriately

Be candid, open and honest in your response and if it's appropriate, share your thoughts respectfully.

Key Points

It takes a lot of discipline and commitment to be an active listener.

There are five key techniques you can use to develop your active listening skills:

1. Pay attention.
2. Show that you're listening.
3. Provide feedback.
4. Defer judgment.
5. Respond appropriately.

Adapted from <https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>

Other aspects of active listening include:

1. You may help the speaker to be more aware of what they are feeling.
2. You encourage the speaker to speak about the feelings part of the situation.
3. When the speaker heard their feelings being reflected back, they feel understood.
4. If a person chooses to/is gently encouraged to speak freely about their feelings, there may be a catharsis that brings about a change in them. It just might help them to see things clearly, take control of the situation and help themselves.

Reactive Listening

"No, I didn't..."

"Absolutely not, I never..."

"At least I don't..."

"That's not true, I always..."

Active Listening

"What did you mean by..."

"Tell me more about..."

"What specifically bothered you about..."

"So you're saying that..."

The Gottman Institute

Giving and Getting More Affirmation



A D V I C E *You will be happier if you give and receive more affirmation in your life.*

Early in our lives someone started telling us what we were doing wrong: don't touch that, don't go there, don't do that. As we got older, more mobile, and more autonomous, we received more and more messages about what we shouldn't be doing. Don't slouch, don't talk with your mouth full, don't put your elbows on the table, don't yell, don't get out of your seat, don't speak unless spoken to, don't swear, don't wear those clothes, don't hang around those people.

Although we may have also been praised, negative behavior usually gets more attention, and there is more energy behind the communication. There is less need for comment if a child is playing quietly in the middle of the living room floor than if she is pounding on the cat or sticking a pair of scissors in a light socket.

Most of our institutions—families, schools, churches, organizations, the workplace—demand a high level of fitting in. Institutions rely heavily on critique to make that happen. Conformity and compliance are encouraged, if not enforced.

It is appropriate to learn how to behave in public, to know how to fit in with others, and understand the balance between individual and community needs. But what is the cost of living in a culture of critique?

We lose our sense of choice, of individuality, of expressiveness and abandon, of ecstasy, creativity, discovery. We may be unable to tell when we need to behave and when we can let go. If we are criticized too severely, we may lose our sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Affirmation needs to be practiced as much as possible to balance the amount of criticism in our lives.

To have affirmation is to shift the way you look at life, at others, and at yourself. You look at what is right rather than what is wrong. You focus on what is to be celebrated rather than what needs to be fixed.

We believe that affirmation can create just as much growth and change as criticism can.

Criticism is hard on the body. It makes us tight, closed, reluctant, and resistant. Just imagine someone calling you a stupid fool. How does that feel in your body?

Affirmation, on the other hand, is good for the body. It makes us open, energized, relaxed, and responsive. It increases self-esteem and decreases our insecurity. It encourages truthfulness rather than denial. Imagine someone telling you that you are smart or beautiful. How does that feel?

When we focus on critique, we rob our bodies of pleasure. If I focus on what I didn't like about a performance I have just seen, for example, I may drown out any of the positive experiences I had. I will be left with the negative in my body.

Are you a critic or an affirmer? During the drive home after a party, do you praise the other guests or gossip about them? When you have just completed some job or project,



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do you celebrate the accomplishment or catalog its shortcomings? When someone praises you, do you bask in it or brush it aside?

Much of our self-image is based on how others respond to who we are and what we do. **We are hungry for these messages, especially the positive ones.** We need to be told what we are doing right, what others appreciate in us, what gifts they see. “You are so patient with your children,” “I really appreciated the support you gave me when my mother was sick,” “You are really great at organizing things,” “I love your cooking!”

Personally, I can never get enough affirmation. Therefore, I assume that I can never give too much to others. To practice affirmation is to give and receive grace. To learn to affirm others is a great first step to take toward affirming ourselves. **If I look for the best in others, I may learn to be more forgiving of myself and to celebrate who I am and what I do.**

Sometimes we are our own worst critics, obsessing about our shortcomings and mistakes, feeling guilty about what we have done or not done. We dwell on every small negative detail. We focus on our imperfections.

It may be a good thing to be able to admit what we have done wrong, or see where we might improve, but I think we are overpracticed at this. We have been taught to be modest and humble, to deflect praise, and to avoid claiming credit—“tooting our own horn.” But what does this do to our sense of self? What does it do to our self-confidence to be encouraged to accept blame but discouraged from asking for or receiving affirmation, reassurance, or praise?

Affirmation is a practice, a spiritual discipline. It is simple to do but may be unfamiliar. If we are primarily used to criticizing or being criticized, it may seem like a daunting pattern to reverse. But by taking the simple steps of finding ways to affirm ourselves and others, it will become easier to both do and “have.”

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Begin by noticing those around you. What do you like about someone else—who they are or what they do? Be more aware of that and enjoy it. “Have” the grace of that appreciation in your own body. If it is possible, tell the person as well. You will both benefit. **Practice focusing on the positive aspects of the information that surrounds you. What do you see, hear, taste, touch, smell, sense, remember, or imagine that increases your sense of enjoyment or well-being?** Pay attention to that. When you see a performance, for example, practice noting to yourself or others what you really liked or enjoyed. Don’t even bother to articulate what you disliked. When you think about someone, look for the good, notice it to yourself, and say it aloud.

We know about the power of positive reinforcement. Often, though, we pair it directly with criticism. We use a few positive remarks about someone or a situation to lead up to a critique: “I like this and this and this about you, but....” Don’t we know that it is the part that comes after that big “but” that is really the truth? The affirmation that came before is completely negated. As a practice, it is possible to say only the first part of the statement, even if in the beginning the critical conclusion still rings in our heads.

What would happen if we assumed that it was not our job to judge or “fix” other people, situations, creations, or even ourselves? Would the world fall apart? This may be a radical idea. Imagine yourself as a manager in a business. Could you operate primarily through a process of affirmation? And could you do that as an activity of grace-making rather than seeing it as a subtle way to manipulate others? Can you imagine the members of one party in

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What would happen if we assumed that it was not our job to judge, or “fix” other people, situations, creations, or even ourselves. Would the world fall apart?

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Congress affirming the members of the other party? Can you imagine only giving positive messages to your spouse or partner? If this sounds difficult or unlikely, it is an indication of the power of the culture of critique.

I am not suggesting that we eliminate all criticism but that we find a balance between affirmation and critique. **It is not necessary to be ruled by a culture of criticism. The repeated practice of small acts of affirmation can change our own lives and the lives of others.**

To decrease the amount of judgment in our lives is transforming and liberating. To be easier on ourselves and others can radically increase the amount of enjoyment we get from life. We carry within us a stream of negative critical voices, which we in turn communicate in direct and subtle ways to others. Giving and receiving affirmation is the simplest and most direct way to reduce the effect of the critical voice in ourselves and in our culture.



R E S U L T S *Affirmation is one of the simplest but most rewarding spiritual disciplines to practice. It is a great joy to our bodyspirits to both give and receive it.*

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I truly believe that I deserve attention and affirmation for the good things I do, even if they are routine and expected. Take housework, for example. I know it is my duty to make my bed, keep the dirty dishes from overwhelming me, and to occasionally dust and vacuum. Millions of people across the country and around the world perform these tasks all the time with little fanfare. I will fulfill my housework obligation, but I want the fanfare, too.

I have found, though, that it is pretty easy to get the applause that I want. First, I look for someone to whom I can point out my

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good deeds. It doesn't work to wait until someone notices what I have done. I seek out recognition and ask for it! Hopefully the person I choose will respond in a positive and appreciative manner.

Sometimes this doesn't work. The other person may not be getting the applause they deserve, making them stingy about giving it to me. In this case, I immediately move into the applause-giving role. Hopefully this will change his or her sour disposition.

But even if there is no one around, I can congratulate myself. Actually or imaginatively, I throw my hands in the air like a gymnast after a perfect routine and shout out a big fat "yes!"

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The Gift and Power of Deep Listening

Deep Listening

By Alan Seale

To truly listen from a place of deep presence is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another. We all yearn to be heard and seen – to be recognised for who we truly are. Listening from a place of deep respect for the humanity, wisdom, and experience we each carry calls forth both speaker and listeners to their full authentic presence.

In **Transformational Presence** work, we make a distinction between conversation and dialogue. Conversation is an exchange of information, opinions, and thoughts. We tell stories of what happened to us or make plans for the future; we talk about interests or people that we have in common. We share ideas and perhaps enjoy one another's company.

When good communication skills are employed, conversation can be very effective in getting things done and moving things forward. It's an essential part of our relationship to one another. Yet there are times when another level of awareness and understanding is called for. This is when shifting into dialogue can be helpful.

This shift allows the communication to move beyond agendas, analyzing, and strategizing and into discovery and unfolding. Understanding the distinction between conversation and dialogue, and intentionally choosing which form will serve the best at any particular moment, can lead to important discoveries and breakthroughs.

The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen.

Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. When you listen generously to people, they can hear the truth in themselves, often for the first time.
Rachel Naomi Remen

Let's look at this distinction a little deeper.

In everyday conversation, though we might think we are hearing what the other person is saying, too often our focus ends up being on what **we** are going to say next. We jump in with our own story to share how we can relate to what's being said, or we want to make sure that our opinion is heard. As a result, we fail to truly listen to what others are saying. In fact, subconsciously, we're often looking for validation or affirmation of our own opinions, thoughts, and perspectives rather than seeking new ideas, understanding, or awareness. Because we've been more focused on speaking than on listening, we leave the conversation with the same perspectives, opinions, and thoughts that we had when we entered.

While conversation is usually focused on telling stories from the past or anticipating the future, dialogue is focused in the present - what is arising in our thoughts, feelings, and emotions right here, right now. Dialogue has no agenda other than to explore meaning and to discover deeper insights and awareness. In dialogue, the words emerge from "what wants to be said."

As we surrender to the dialogue process, it's as if we transcend the present moment. Without even realizing it, we step out of linear time into an experience of eternal or simultaneous time - past, present, and future all seem to coexist in this moment. The process somehow invites us into our full, authentic presence. We recognize ourselves as part of a greater whole.

Dialogue is much more about listening than about speaking - listening beneath the words and the gestures to find the source of those words and inviting the source itself to speak more clearly and directly. Perhaps that source is a deep feeling or truth; perhaps it is a greater wisdom that is showing itself in that moment for the first time. In its highest form, dialogue is consciousness having a dialogue with itself. We become a voice for that which wants to be expressed.

Several guidelines can help you learn how to use dialogue most effectively and develop your ability to listen deeply. First, "deep listening" goes beyond the conventional practice of "active listening." In "deep listening," the role of the listener is simply to be open, clear, and receptive, holding a space for the speaker to access his or her own well of deep awareness and wisdom.



The listener sits quietly and comfortably with the speaker and offers no verbal or physical responses, gestures, or acknowledgment. This is not a passive response. Holding the space in this way actually invites a much deeper level of engagement from the listener than if he was making sure that the speaker knows he is listening! In fact, when the listener remains quiet and consciously holds the space for the speaker with no outward response, the speaker usually senses the listener's presence and support in a much more profound way.

Through this practice, the listener becomes aware of her habits around listening and reacting, many of which often keep her listening more on the surface. The speaker may also become aware of how he looks for validation or approval from the listener. Though this approach may feel uncomfortable for both speaker and listener at first, by surrendering to the process and trusting that a meaningful experience can unfold, new doors of awareness, discovery, and expression usually open. Every time we do this process in a workshop or training, participants find it one of the most powerful parts of our work together.

When using this practice in daily life and work, begin by setting up these simple guidelines. When you recognize it would be helpful to shift from conversation into dialogue, pause and invite the person or persons you are with into the dialogue approach. Simply make an agreement with all participants that, while listening, each person will be fully present with the speaker, yet refrain from outward response. Not responding allows the speaker to express herself and be the voice for what wants to be said with no worry about reactions, judgment, agreement or disagreement, or interruption. In one-to-one dialogue, the listener waits until the speaker is finished speaking before responding. In a group setting, a talking stick or

similar structure can be used to make it clear who is in the role of speaker while everyone else remains in the listener role.

As the listener, your role is to take in what the speaker is saying on as many levels as you are able. Listen for the essence behind the words so that you will be able to respond directly to the essence rather than just responding to the words or your interpretation of what was said.

Then when the speaker has finished for the moment, the listeners may respond, one at a time, to what they heard. This response is not a report of what was said or a re-telling of the story, but rather a response to the essence and energy behind what was said. The listeners' responses are not summary statements, but rather responses to meaning and essence. This process can take both speaker and listeners further into discovery as the dialogue continues.

Dialogue and deep listening are learned skills. For some of us, these skills come relatively easily, while for others, they may require a great deal of heart focus and self-management at first. However, the more you practice listening deeply and engaging in intentional dialogue with others, the easier it becomes. The benefits to all participants are access to greater wisdom, new insights, and deeper awareness. And on the most personal level, there is the gift of truly being heard.

In your conversations with others in the coming days and weeks, be aware of when a deeper level of communication wants to happen. Gently shift into this deeper way of listening and being present with one another and see what happens.

P.S. When you first begin practicing Dialogue and Deep Listening, having a specific structure to follow can be helpful. The exercise on page 89 of my latest book, *Create A World That Works*, will give you a place to start. A variation on this practice can also be very helpful when exploring a particular topic or project with a group. See pages 91 - 93 for a description of that process and a structure you can follow. The book is also available in digital format.

Reference:

<https://transformationalpresence.org/alan-seale-blog/the-gift-and-power-of-dialogue-and-deep-listening/>

