Reflection #1
The First Rule (1617)

First Theme: The Origin of the Confraternities or the Associations of Charity

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

We propose using the method of Lectio Divina

1. Read this reflection
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant)
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God)
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

Prayer:

Blessed are you Lord, God, for through the inspiration and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit you allowed Vincent de Paul to form this Association in which Louise de Marillac would become a collaborator. Through the participation of countless men and women who during the past four hundred years have served as volunteers in this Association, the physical and spiritual needs of the poor and the needy have been provided for.

Do not forsake us Lord but accompany us on our journey, enlighten our path and give us the strength to not lose heart, even during the most difficult moments of our apostolate. Amen.

Prayer written by Josefina de Palmieri
AIC Guatemala

First Theme: The Origin of the Confraternities or the Associations of Charity

Reflection:

In August 1617, Vincent de Paul, at the age of 37, began a movement that has continued to the present day.
On August 1st, 1617, Vincent de Paul was appointed as pastor in Châtillon-les-Dombes (known today as Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne)... a town with about 2,000 inhabitants.

A short time before, Châtillon had been an area that experienced much violence as a result of war... many of its buildings had been destroyed and many people had converted to Protestantism.

As pastor, Vincent faithfully served the people of that area. His primary sermon revolved around the theme of charity. As a result of this new method of instructing and inviting people to practice charity, Vincent was able to touch the most hardened hearts.

A short time after his arrival in Châtillon (August 20th), some parishioners approached him about the needs of a family whose members were infirm. This event sparked a change not only in Vincent’s life but also in the lives of the people who surrounded him.

Let us allow Vincent to speak for himself: while I was living in a small town near Lyons, where Providence had called me to be the Pastor, I was vesting to celebrate Holy Mass one Sunday when I was told that in an isolated house a quarter of a league away everyone was ill. None of them was able to help the others, and they were all in indescribable need. That touched me to the heart. During the sermon, I made sure to commend them zealously to the congregation, and God, touching the hearts of those who heard me, moved them with compassion for those poor afflicted people1.

In the evening Vincent visited this family and met many people on the road who were coming and going from the same house and each person brought some food for the family. Since it was a warm day, many people sat on the side of the road to rest and to refresh themselves. It appeared as though Vincent was participating in a pilgrimage. Vincent arrived at the home of the family and saw with his own eyes the extreme need of those people. He administered the sacraments to the more seriously ill and seeing the large amount of food that the parishioners had brought there Vincent reflected: this undoubtedly shows that these people have great charity, but is it well organized? The poor sick family will be overwhelmed with so much in such a short time, most of which will spoil. Afterward they will be no better off than before2. It became clear that there was a need to organize this charitable activity.

That same evening Vincent put his plan into motion: three days later, on Wednesday, August 23rd, he organized the first group of pious women who were touched by the spirit of compassion. He encouraged them to create an association that would care for the infirm in their homes. Among these women were: Mlle. De la Chassaigne, Mlle. De Brie, Mme. Philiberte and Mme. Denise Beynier (CCD:XIIIb:3-4).

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1 VINCENT DE PAUL, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume IX, p. 192; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:IX:192.

Vincent provided these women with a provisional Rule (cf. CCD:XIIIb:3-5) that he had written and in which he defined their objective in the following manner: *to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually*. Vincent then highlighted the reason for this: *charity toward the neighbor is an infallible sign of the true children of God* (CCD:XIIIb:8). The women committed themselves to begin this work following day and to do so in accord with the manner in which their names were listed.

The provisional Rule highlighted three essential elements:

1. The organization of the service that they were to accomplish;
2. The help (both physical and spiritual) that was to be provided to the infirm in their homes;
3. The gospel spirituality and professional competency that was to be developed through their caring and tender service.

This first Confraternity of Charity came into existence as a result of people being touched by the spirit of compassion: a pious woman, the pastor, faithful parishioners.

The fact that this occurred during the celebration of the Eucharist reveals the fact that the Eucharist is the source of charity and we can affirm the fact that the International Association of Charities was born during the celebration of the Eucharist ... it was the Eucharist that made it possible to organize the charity that in turn enabled countless men and women to serve the poor.

When Vincent distributed the official Rule (longer than the provisional Rule) to the members of the Confraternity in Châtillon, the Archbishop of Lyon officially recognized the Confraternity (November 24, 1617 and decreed such on December 8, 1617)

- **Words of Saint Vincent:**

  *Doing good isn’t everything; we have to do it well, after the example of Our Lord*  
  (CCD: XII:148).

  *Vicente de Paúl.*

(We attach, as an appendix, the provisional Rule of August 23, 1617)
Appendix:

Document 124a:
Foundation of the Charity in Châtillon-les-Dombes
(August 23, 1617)
SVP 13b p. 3-5 Document 124a

Jesus, Maria!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

On this day, August 23, 1617, the Ladies named below have charitably joined forces to take their turn to assist the sick poor of the town of Châtillon, having decided unanimously that, for an entire day only, each will be responsible for all those whom they have decided together to be in need of their help. To do so, they propose two aims, namely, to assist body and soul: the body by nourishing it and tending to its ailments; the soul by preparing those who seem to be tending toward death to die well, and preparing those who will recover to live a good life.

And because, when the Mother of God has been invoked and taken as patroness in important matters, everything can only go well and accrue to the glory of Jesus her Son, the Ladies take her for patroness and protector of the work, most humbly entreating her to take special care of it, as they also entreat Saint Martin and Saint Andrew, true examples of charity and patrons of Châtillon.

Starting tomorrow, the feast of Saint Bartholomew, they will begin, with God's help, to function in this good work in the order in which they are listed here: First, the chatelaine on her day; Mlle. de Brie on hers; Mme. Philiberte, wife of M. des Hugonieres; Benoite, daughter of M. Ennemond Prost; Mme. Denise Beynier, wife of M. Claude Bouchon; One of the daughters of Mme. Perra; Mme. Colette; And, lastly, Mlle. de la Chassaingne.

After her the chatelaine will do the same service on another day, and the others will take their turns successively, according to the above order, unless one of them is unable for some justifiable reason to carry out this ministry on her day. In that case, she will notify the person next in line --- or have her notified --- that she will be unable to take her turn, so that she can replace her on that day in caring for those who are poor. If that Lady can do so, she should not refuse because, in so doing, she will be freed of the responsibility for the following day, which she would have had according to the above order.

They should daily ask our good Jesus to kindly maintain this order and to shower with His divine blessings all those men and women who will work with their hands or contribute from their resources for its support. He will undoubtedly do so, since He Himself is the one who assures us by His own mouth that, on the great, awesome Day of Judgment, those who assist persons who are poor will hear that gentle, pleasing voice of His saying: "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world," and, on the contrary, those who have taken no care of them will be rejected by Him with those other harsh, appalling words: "Out of my sight, you condemned, go into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

To the Father the Judge, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen
Reflection #2
The First Rule (1617)

Second Theme: The Purpose and the Spirit of the Association

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization.
We propose using the method of Lectio Divina:

1. Read this reflection
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant)
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God)
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

❖ Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, may your presence fill the depths of my being and may your image enflame my heart so that I might walk in the light of your life! In this way I will be able to think as you thought, to act as you acted, to speak as you spoke, to dream as you dreamed and to love as you loved. Amen.

❖ Second Theme: The Purpose and the Spirit of the Association

Reflection:

The purpose of the Association is what we desire to achieve through it and what we desire to achieve is service.

Every Catholic Association has a purpose: to love God and to love the neighbor. Those are characteristics that the gospels highlight. Saint Vincent taught us to love the neighbor through service on behalf of those living in poverty. Such was his initiative, which was quite novel at that time. The Official Rule of the Confraternity at Châtillon (December 1617) reveals the depths of Vincent’s heart, his compassion for the poor, his heart rooted in Jesus Christ and his talent as an organizer.
In this Rule everything was carefully considered: the spirit and the purpose of the Association, the spiritual life of the members, the manner of serving and caring for the infirm and the procedure to be followed in the election of officers.

The Rule assures continuity in the work that is rooted in the gospel. Thus all the volunteers are servants of those living in poverty. According to the Rule “each of the Servants of the Poor will prepare their food and serve them for an entire day. The Prioress will begin, the Treasurer will follow, then the Assistant, and so forth, one after the other, in the order in which they were received, up to the latest arrival. Afterward, the Prioress will start over, and the others will follow, observing the order begun, so that, by this continual rotation, the patients will be served always in line with this organization. Nevertheless, all will be done in such a way that, if one of them falls ill, she will be excused from her service, informing the Prioress so that the latter can continue the succession with the others”¹.

**Its Purpose:** “The Confraternity of Charity was instituted to honor its patron Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother, and to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually in places where it is established” (CCD:XIIIb:5).

**Its Name:** “The confraternity will be called Confraternity of Charity, in imitation of the Charity Hospital in Rome, and the persons of which it will be mainly composed will be called Servants of the Poor or of the Charity” (CCD:XIIIb:9).

**Its Patron:** “Since, in all confraternities, the holy custom of the Church is to propose a patron, and since the works gain their value and dignity from the purpose for which they are performed, the Servants of the Poor will take for patron Our Lord Jesus” (CCD:XIIIb:9).

**Its Members:** “The confraternity will be composed of women: widows, wives and unmarried women, whose piety and virtue are known and whose perseverance can be counted on. Nevertheless, the wives and unmarried women must have the permission of their husbands or parents” (CCD:XIIIb:9).

**Number of Members:** “To avoid the confusion that comes from too large a number, it should be limited to twenty, until further orders” (CCD:XIIIb:9).

**The tasks of the leaders:** Vincent described with much detail the tasks of the leaders: prioress, assistants and treasurer (their term of office and their responsibilities). Vincent insisted that the members should meet together on a monthly basis, they were to pray together and were to treat one another with respect. The accounting was to be done in a transparent manner (for this reason two persons were appointed to

¹ VICENT DE PAUL, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XIllb, p. 12; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XIIIb:12.
do the accounting). **We can see that these were wonderful organizational structures that can be useful to us even now in the twenty-first century.**

**A spirituality of communion:** “They will cherish one another as persons whom Our Lord has united and bound together by His love; they will visit and console one another in their afflictions and illnesses; will go as a body to the funeral of the members who die” (CCD:XIIIb:7).

We find in the Rule many of the distinctive elements of the Confraternities which would be developed later and which would give the Confraternity a specific spirituality. These elements include the ecclesial character of the Association, its lay membership, the fact that its members would be mostly women, a concern for holistic service on behalf of those living in poverty and a concern for the organization of the Confraternity and the training of its members.

- **Words of Saint Vincent:**

  “We are to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire.”

  (CCD:XI:25)

  *Vincent de Paul*

(If you want to read the whole document that contains the First Rule of the Confraternity that was given to the members on December 8th, 1617 you can visit our website at: [www.aic-international.org](http://www.aic-international.org)).
Reflection Paper
The First Rule (1617)

Third Theme: Serving people living in poverty means that we enter into a relationship with those who are poor.

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization. We propose using the method of Lectio Divina

1. Read this reflection
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant)
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God)
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

Prayer:

Almighty and eternal God, you filled Vincent de Paul, our Founder, with a spirit of charity; listen to our prayer and bestow on us your love. Following the example of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, enable us to recognize and to serve Jesus Christ, your Son, in our sisters and brothers who are poor; following your teaching enable us to learn how to love. Amen.

Third Theme: Serving people living in poverty means that we enter into a relationship with those who are poor.

Reflection:

To serve those living in poverty is both a gift and a task; it demands humility, perseverance and a strong commitment. We have to be careful to protect ourselves, especially in situations where service on behalf of those living in poverty is threatened with being reduced to some selfish strategy. Indeed, we must remember that those who live in poverty are the beloved sons and daughters of God, our Father. To serve them, then, means that we value these sisters and brothers of ours, value every aspect of their lives.
Father Jean Morin states that the Rule that is preserved for us, that is, the Rule that was given to the first members of the Confraternity, contains two important elements: fidelity and stability. Saint Vincent viewed these elements as essential because they involve the development of a faith centered on Jesus Christ, caring for those living in poverty and deepening the relationship between faith and service or between Jesus Christ and the poor (cf. Matthew 25:31ff.)¹.

Vincent did not order people to reach out and to serve others; yet he himself personally served others on Sunday, August 20th, 1617... (cf. the First Reflection which narrates the events surrounding the establishment of the first Confraternity of Charity).

The Rule of December 1617 provided structure and organization for charity and did so from the perspective of service. It established in great detail the manner in which service was to be rendered to those living in poverty. In previous months we have reflected on the manner in which the Confraternity ought to function and we have also reflected on the responsibilities of its leaders: the prioress, assistants and treasurer.

Mission: “to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually”: to provide them with clothing, food and medicine, but also to invite them to confess to reach out and to serve others; yet he himself personally served others on Sunday, August 20th, 1617... (cf. the First Reflection which narrates the events surrounding the establishment of the first Confraternity of Charity).

Vincent’s tenderness and foresight is revealed in these small details which enabled the members of the Confraternity to provide material assistance to the infirm. Let us listen again to the beautiful words that Vincent has given us as a heritage: “the person whose turn it is ... will prepare the dinner and take it to the patients, greeting them cheerfully and kindly. She will set up the tray on the bed, place on it a napkin, a cup, a spoon, and some bread, wash the patient’s hands, and then say grace. She will pour the soup into a bowl, and put the meat on a plate. She will arrange everything on the bed tray, then kindly encourage the patient to eat for the love of Jesus and His holy Mother. She will do all this as lovingly as if she were serving her own son - or rather God, who considers as done to Himself the good she does for persons who are poor. If necessary, this person will also cut his meat or pour him something to drink. Once she has him beginning to eat she will leave if he has someone with him, and will go to find another patient, acting with him in the same way, remembering to begin always with the person who has someone with him and to end with those who are alone so she can spend more time with them”².

This direct and personal encounter with those living in poverty is like a seal of quality, it is what characterizes men and women who consider themselves as heirs to the Vincentian charism. Therefore, we know the names of those we support, we know their story and situation; we are concerned about them and we make every effort to reach to them (and we prepare ourselves professionally and on a human level).

¹ J. Morin, op. cit., p.24-27
² VINCENT DE PAUL, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilad, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XIIIb, p. 12-13; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XIIIb:12:13.
In Saint Vincent’s eyes, the poor gave meaning to his existence. Let us allow Vincent’s words to echo in our minds and hearts, words that he spoke with regard to service on behalf of the sick poor: “The first motive,” said a Sister, “is that poor persons have the honor of representing the members of Jesus Christ, who considers the services rendered to them as done to himself. The second is that the souls of poor persons have the image of God imprinted upon them, and therefore we’re bound to honor the Blessed Trinity in them. The third is that the Son of God has recommended this service to us by word and example. To show the disciples of Saint John that He was the Messiah, He told them that the poor had the Gospel preached to them and the sick were healed. The fourth is that to assist a soul to save itself is to cooperate in the perfect fulfillment of God’s plan in the death of Jesus Christ” (CCD:IX:51).

“You see, brothers, that the essential aim of Our Lord was to work for poor persons. When he went to others, it was only in passing. But woe to us also if we become lax in carrying out the obligations we have to help poor souls” (CCD:XI:122).

○ Words of Saint Louise:

“Be careful about your service on behalf of the poor ... love the poor, honor the poor because in doing so you honor Jesus Christ”.

Louise de Marillac
Reflection Paper

The First Rule (1617)

Fourth Theme: Organizing for the cause of charity.

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization.
We propose using the method of Lectio Divina

1. Read this reflection
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant)
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God)
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

❖ Prayer:

Praised be God, Our Lord, who in the person of Saint Vincent de Paul, saw his son filled with charity, mercy and goodness. Praised be God, Our Lord, who trusted Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac to continue his mission on behalf of those persons most in need. Praised and blessed be the members of the AIC for their 400 years of accepting and continuing the noblest ministry that a human being can offer, namely, to provide for and assist those persons who are poor and needy... children, women and the elderly. Blessed be God, Our Lord, who trusted Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac to continue his mission on behalf of those persons most in need... Long live AIC! Amen.

Katina Suescum Olivo, AIC Venezuela

❖ Fourth Theme: Organizing for the cause of charity

o Reflection:

AIC or the Teams of Saint Vincent or the Association of Vincentian Volunteers or the Ladies of Charity, is an association of parish women that was formed in 1617 in an effort to serve the sick poor1 in the parish

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1 Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary

This document was prepared by Father Álvaro Mauricio Fernández, CM, with the collaboration of María Eugenia Magallanes and Laurence de la Brosse and translated by Charles Plock, CM.
of Châtillon-les-Dombes (near Lyons, France). As seen in the Rule of 1617, it was there that Vincent de Paul organized those individuals who desired to serve the poor and recommended that “having decided unanimously that, for an entire day only, each will be responsible for all those whom they have decided together to be in need of their help” (CCD:XIIIb:3). Vincent does not impose anything on these women. The individual, whose turn it was to serve, was free to make the decisions that needed to be made and was not burdened with trivial matters. Vincent reminded the women that their objective was “to assist the poor” (CCD:XIIIb:3).

Everyone cannot take care of everyone else at the same time and therefore, there is a need to be organized and also a need to be sincere with regard to the service that is being offered.

In the Rule of August 1617 Vincent is very practical and we see that everything is developed from the perspective of Providence… thus we see the beginning of the Confraternities.

Later on, in the official rule of December 8, 1617, Vincent outlined a plan that would be utilized in all the various Confraternities that would be created. This rule was called the General Rule.

Vincent was careful about the various details and here we recall the outline of that Rule:

- Aim of the Confraternity of Charity
- Membership
- Direction
- Office of the Superior
- Office of the Treasurer
- Supervisor of Furnishings
- Duties of Each Lady

The duties of each member are stated as follows: “To serve the sick each on her designated day; rise early for this purpose, hear Mass, go to confession and communion, or at least make an act of contrition” (CCD:XIIIb:2). These rules that were preserved by all the Confraternities, in addition to reflecting the spirit and the ordinary activity of the members, also reveal to us (according to Father Jean Morin2) two important realities: fidelity to a certain number of principles (stability) and continual evolution as a result of on-going adaptation. Vincent viewed fidelity and stability as essential and these qualities are revealed in a faith that is focused on Jesus Christ, care for those who are most poor, the relation between faith and service or the relation between Jesus Christ and the poor (cf. Matthew 25:31), community structure and democratic form (assemblies, secret vote, decision of the majority).

How can we live by the words of Vincent that are found in the Rule of 1617 today? We can live by those words by preparing ourselves physically and spiritually for an encounter with those who are most poor,
for an encounter with those who are a reflection of the Father’s love. We are happy to be able to reach out to those who live in poverty, to be able to serve. Nevertheless, good intentions are not enough. We must prepare ourselves as a group so that we have appropriate responses as we go out to those on the peripheries. In that way we can all rejoice in the fact that everything that we do is done for the benefit of our brothers and sisters. The secret of good organization with regard to charity is found in the love with which we engage in such service on behalf of our brothers and sisters.

○ Words of Saint Vincent:

“Turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor is represented to us by these poor people” (CCD:XI:26).

Vincent de Paul
Reflection Paper

The First Rule (1617)

Fifth Theme: Vincent’s practical recommendations with regard to the administration of the Confraternities

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

We propose using the method of Lectio Divina

1. Read this reflection
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant)
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God)
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Savior of the world, during your earthly life you practiced charity and helped others in an incomparable manner. Guide and inspire our practice of this virtue so that we might contribute to the realization of God’s plan. Thus as we imitate Jesus may we give glory to God while at the same time encouraging others to serve you and to serve our brothers and sisters most in need. Amen.

Braakhuis (Praying #7)

Fifth Theme: Vincent’s practical recommendations with regard to the administration of the Confraternities

Reflection:

In the December 8th 1617 Rule, Vincent wanted to be very clear about all those matters that were important with regard to the administration of temporal goods and rendering of accounts ... today, we refer to that as “fundraising”. Vincent insisted on complete transparency in financial matters.

In this regard, let us reflect on the words of Vincent that reaffirm what has just been stated above:
“The Pastor, the Prioress, the two Assistants, and the Procurator will be responsible for all the temporal goods of the confraternity, movable as well as immovable. Consequently, they will have the authority to give orders in its name to the Procurator to do whatever is necessary for the preservation and collection of these goods. The Treasurer will keep the money, documents, and furnishings, as has been stated, and give an annual report...”

“After his accounts have been reviewed, the Procurator will report to the same gathering the state of the temporal affairs of the confraternity and what he has administered and negotiated during the year so that the Lord, Syndic, Administrator, and Council members of the town may be adequately informed by the report of the management of the temporal welfare of the confraternity. If they find it faulty, they may have recourse to our most honored Prelate the Archbishop to have it put in order...”

“...and the Prioress will keep a book of expenditures, in which she will record the responsibilities of the Treasurer for the documents, money, and furnishings of the confraternity. In the event that neither she nor anyone else is willing to take on this responsibility, except for the furnishings and part of the money that will be needed for a few months for the food of those who are poor, the confraternity will instruct the Procurator to take charge of the rest and to give an account of it...”

“The collection box in the church, placed there for the upkeep of the confraternity and the relief of those who are poor, will be opened every two months in the presence of the Pastor, the Prioress, the Treasurer, the Procurator, and the Assistant. The Treasurer will be given whatever is in it (CCD:XIIIb:15-17).

It is obvious, then, that our Founder was aware of the many different situations that might arise and as a result formulated the Rule that we continue to follow at the present time.

Another important aspect that Vincent referred to was the procedure to be followed in the event that one or more of those persons in a position of leadership were to become negligent. He stated: “The Prioress, Treasurer, and Assistant may be removed from office before the end of their term by the confraternity, if, in its judgment, they do not carry out their duty well” (CCD:XIIIb:17).

Vincent recommended that we be “contemplative in action” thus imitating his own lifestyle. In the Rule that has been the subject of our reflection we read: “Those who know how to read will read unhurriedly and attentively a chapter of the book by the Bishop of Geneva, entitled Introduction to the Devout Life. Before the reading, they will raise their minds to God and will implore His great mercy in order to derive the fruit of His love from this devotional practice” (CCD:XIIIb:19).

When concluding the first Rule, it was clear that Vincent wanted our groups to be true fraternal communities and so he wrote: “They will take care in practicing humility, simplicity, and charity, each deferring to her companion and to others, performing all their actions for the charitable intention of persons who are poor and with no human respect” (CCD:XIIIb:19).

○ Words of Saint Vincent:

“The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones.”

Vincent de Paul (CCD:XI:33)
Reflection Paper

The First Rule (1617)

Sixth Theme: Participation and collaboration among the volunteers of the Association

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

We propose using the method of Lectio Divina

1. Read this reflection.
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant).
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God).
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

 Prayer:

Lord, Jesus, you became poor so that we might have eyes and ears for the poor and so that we might also recognize you in them... in their thirst, in their hunger, in their loneliness and in their misfortune. Inspire in our Vincentian Family unity, simplicity, humility and the fire of charity which inflamed Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Give us strength in order to be faithful to the practice of these virtues and in order to contemplate and serve you in the poor. Then, one day we will be united with you and with them in your Kingdom. Amen.

 Sixth Theme: Participation and collaboration among the volunteers of the Association

o Reflection:

We have no hesitation in stating that collaboration is fundamental in each and every one of the groups of our association and that no volunteer can be excluded from participation. Collaboration and participation go hand in hand, one needs the other: those who do not collaborate, do not participate and those who do not participate, do not collaborate in achieving the association’s mission. In the Rule that was
developed by Vincent de Paul, there were two aims which bound each of the women who sought membership in the Confraternities. From an ecclesial perspective, those women participated in building up the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church. Jesus is the head of the Church and everyone else participates as an instrument in the work of salvation. It was for that reason that Vincent insisted upon the fact that all those who became part of the association should be willing to collaborate and participate. Such collaboration and participation is necessary since the volunteers were “responsible for all those whom they have decided together to be in need of their help. To do so, they propose two aims, to assist body and soul”¹. The Association is not composed of one single person but rather there are numerous women who continue to give life to Vincent’s project of prolonging the mission of Jesus Christ, who called various individuals to become part of his group of disciples and apostles.

Vincent was very practical and in the Rule of 1617 he highlighted various details of collaboration: “if one is unable for some justifiable reason to carry out this ministry … she will notify the person next in line that she will be unable to take her turn, so that she can replace her on that day in caring for those who are poor” (CCD:XIIIb:4).

In this reflection we want to emphasize an element that Vincent insisted upon in each of the rules that followed from this first rule, namely, that participation and collaboration are essential for the volunteers who want to become members of this association... and that collaboration must be part of the manner in which volunteers relate to one another. The Founder insisted on that and stated: “so that the Company may be preserved in sincere friendship according to God, when one of the members is ill, the Priress and the others will take care to visit her, see that she receives the last sacraments of the Church, and pray for her together and privately” (CCD:XIIb:18). We note here that participation and collaboration are equally important when referring to the relationships that ought to exist among the members. Indeed, it is in that way that the volunteers themselves become the beneficiaries of such collaboration. We are part of one large family, the Vincentian Family and as such we participate in the spiritual benefits that have been bestowed upon this family of Saint Vincent de Paul.

**Participation and Collaboration demand action**: Joint action, which confronts all the various forms of poverty, supposes a common plan so that we might create a community of love and charity. Nothing can be accomplished unless we all work together towards the same ideal. “We are all in the same boat, headed in the same direction”. The principles which characterize our reflection enable us to discover the demands of solidarity, respect, and a common spirituality. Furthermore, these same principles are

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¹ Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Elyyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XIIIb, p. 3; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XIIIb:3.

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essential to the fulfillment of our mission. Charity supposes the witness of a life of service expressed in a fraternity that arises from our vision of a life lived in communion with one another. In his Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Paul VI affirmed that more can be expressed through our witness than through our words: “Modern men and women listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #41).

○ Words of Saint Louise:

“So that obedience might be such as God demands of us, it is essential to obey with great simplicity and humility” (SWLM:781 [A.68]).

Louise de Marillac