



Vincentian Attitudes towards COVID-19

"God never abandons his people, he is always with them, especially when the pain becomes more present." Pope Francis

A virus has appeared in our world that has changed the ordinary rhythm of our personal and social life. We are living through a unique time in the history of humanity: a pandemic that is affecting all of us, perhaps in different ways, but all of us. An invisible virus has crossed borders to reach everyone, destabilizing humanity and bringing thousands of people to encounter God.

The pandemic has left the poor even poorer and has even created new poverty. As the fatal virus becomes a prevalent factor in the future and the economy suffers, more kinds of poverty are generated, and the numbers of people in poverty multiply. We therefore need more resources, great strength and sustainable strategies to respond efficiently to these new forms of suffering. We can only do this with others: greater collaboration, strategic cooperation and efficient coordination.

Faced with this situation, Pope Francis reminds us:

"We are not alone, the Lord precedes us on our way, removing the stones that paralyse us."

"All the life of service and love that you have given in this time will pulse again. It is enough to open a crack so that the anointing that the Lord wants to give us expands with unstoppable force and allows us to contemplate suffering reality with a renewing outlook."

"Each individual action is not an isolated action, for better or for worse; it has consequences for others, because everything is connected in our Common Home. And if the health authorities order confinement at home, it is the people who make that possible, aware of their co-responsibility to stop the pandemic. An emergency like that of COVID-19 is overcome with, above all, the antibodies of solidarity."

"The civilisation of love is built daily, without interruption. It involves the committed effort of everyone. Therefore, it involves a committed community of brothers and sisters."

(Pope Francis's "Plan for Rising Again", 17th April 2020)

"This period that we are living through, on the one hand, obliges us to look for new forms of communication with each other, and on the other hand and very importantly, to look for new ways to reach out with our charitable evangelizing action to our brothers and sisters who are poor. So there are two very specific challenges of which we must not lose sight." (Fr. Benjamin Romo, CM)

In reviewing the history of our foundation, we recall that St. Vincent and St. Louise also experienced times of severe epidemics that struck France and some neighboring countries in the 1650s. The numbers were overwhelming; France alone lost almost a million people.

St. Vincent often spoke of “war, plague and famine” as the scourge of the poor. In his letters, he mentioned the plague more than 300 times and offered practical advice on how to help the victims. Much of what he said and how he reacted is relevant and illuminating to us at this time.

Father Robert Maloney, CM, in his text “COVID-19: Some Wisdom from the Past. The Experience of St. Vincent de Paul”, makes the following observations about St. Vincent:

1. ***“As he struggled with painful emotions, Vincent remained convinced that, no matter what the circumstances, we must never abandon the poor.”***

[...] “He was firm in telling the members of his Family that, even in extremely difficult circumstances, we must be creative in finding ways to tend to the needs of the suffering. [...] Vincent wrote to Alain de Solminihac, [...] “There is usually someone in each area capable of doing this act of charity, especially if they do not have to come into direct contact with the plague-stricken.””

2. ***“In advising his Family members on how to serve in the midst of the plague, St. Vincent chose a middle ground.”***

“On the one hand, he urged them to stay near the plague-stricken and not abandon them; on the other hand, he encouraged the Family to observe the cautions that civil and ecclesiastical leaders were recommending.”

Today, we are facing COVID-19, which for most of us is an unprecedented crisis. We should therefore:

1. **Adapt services according to the current needs of the beneficiaries.** We can surely assist them with the basic needs of food, health and housing and then, as far as possible, support them in the problem of unemployment. Creativity is what is asked of us now. We should not abandon our services, but perform them differently.
2. **Seek donations** to meet the urgent needs of those living in poverty, which are even greater at this time.
3. **Unite ourselves in prayer** as Pope Francis has asked us, doing so with our family and our community. This is a simple suggestion from St. Vincent: *“God himself tells us, “A short, fervent prayer pierces the clouds.” That’s what I urge you, my sisters and brothers”.*

Individually, you often do not have to do big things to help others... you just have to BE THERE AND LISTEN.

Questions to be answered preferably with your group:

1. How do you feel about this situation?
2. Do you think you have learned anything during this time? If so, what?
3. What Vincentian responses do you think you can give based on the situation you are experiencing?

Suggestions for further reading:

- Pope Francis’s “Plan for rising again” in the face of the sanitary crisis:
<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-04/pope-francis-plan-rising-vida-nueva-reflection-coronavirus-covid.html>
- Vincentian Family Statement on the pandemic caused by COVID-19:
<https://famvin.org/en/2020/03/21/vincentian-family-statement-on-the-pandemic-caused-by-covid-19/>

Training Committee:

Guillermina Vergara, AIC-Mexico

Clara Inés Díaz, AIC-Colombia

Alicia Duhne, AIC-Mexico





Vincentian Attitudes towards COVID-19 (Part II)

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has caused changes in our everyday emotions. Sometimes we may be afraid of an uncertain future, sometimes we may feel sadness due to the suffering around us, or because of the loss of loved ones. Each of us has reacted to this situation differently, and always in ways that affect both our bodies and our behavior.

As Vincentians, we feel a great responsibility, and not only to support our family and loved ones. We also wish to support the most vulnerable, both the people we already served and those who today, because of this crisis, are now experiencing poverty.

This reflection aims to provide some recommendations to better manage the emotions that arise in these times of crisis.

1. OUR EMOTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Emotions allow us to relate to others even if we often try to hide them.

The essential emotions are: sadness, anger, fear, displeasure and joy. Of these, joy seems to be the only positive one, but depending on how we experience the other four, we can also turn them into positives, or continue to see them as negative.

We are all living, totally or partially confined, with the fear of contagion, with the uncertainty of when the pandemic will end and with the difficult economic situation, and in one way or another we have to help each other to move forward.

Using assertiveness to help manage our emotions

- a) **Our emotions are important:** if we don't pay attention to them, ignore them or hide them, they will hurt us in the long run. Expressing and letting out a “negative” emotion can be liberating. We have been taught that we must be strong and not feel, or at least not express, fear, sadness, anger and rage before others. These are beliefs that have been instilled in us.
- b) **When releasing emotions we need to be aware of how we express them:** when we are not aware, we tend to explode in front of the wrong person, provoking feelings of guilt.
- c) **We should let our feelings out when we need to:** just consider the way we do it, where and with whom.
- d) **We should be careful not to dwell too much on our emotions:** they are momentary and arise from specific situations. When we dwell on them, they become an emotional state,



from which it can be difficult to free ourselves. For example, sadness is an emotion that, if sustained, causes anxiety, distress and deep despair.

- e) **We should be aware of our environment:** if we find ourselves in an environment where we are constantly being told not to cry, not to be afraid, not to show joy openly, we should let it be known in a respectful way that we need to express what we feel and that this is not bad. We must not let what we feel hurt us just because it makes others uncomfortable.

We have all experienced many and varied emotions, but in the end, the important thing is what we do with them and how we do it. These suggestions should help us feel better. By being good to ourselves and our environment, we will be able to continue our services towards those living in poverty.

2. GUIDE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

- a) In order to keep calm, let us try to see the situations that are presented to us **not as a problem, but as a challenge.**
- b) **We can reflect on the crises we have experienced in our lives.** We have all had to face big problems. At the time everything looked black, we couldn't see a way out. But with God's help and our efforts, we came out stronger. This is one more crisis that will help us learn what we need for the future.
- c) It is important to understand that **"I am not a victim of the world, I am a victim of the effects of how I perceive the world"**. By realizing that the emotions we are experiencing not only depend on our environment, but also on ourselves, we can change them if we set our mind to it. *"Life is a space in which individuals invent themselves. We are born with the ability to decide how we want to be, we can play an active role in designing the kind of being we want to become... We can design the person we want to be, and influence the environment around us."* (Carmen Duhne, Mapas para el Observador)
- d) **We can have two choices when faced with challenges: "YES I CAN" or "NO I CAN'T"**. The statement "I can" is one of the bases of success in life. It is true that not everything is in our hands, but by putting in a lot of effort, we can achieve great things.

In the face of the situations that present themselves to us, accepting life as it is will lead us to peace, tranquility and productivity. For this, we must be aware and understand that there are things we can change, and others we cannot. Listing them can help to work on them.

3. QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON WITH YOUR GROUP:

- a) What struck you most about what you have just read?
- b) What emotions have you felt during this time of pandemic?



- c) If you don't feel good about these emotions, which of the above strategies could help change them?
- d) Which of these ideas do you think could help the beneficiaries in the service you provide? Why?

CONCLUSION

Before we finish reading this reflection, let us remember that the most important thing is to remain united with Jesus through prayer, talking to Him, trusting in Him and listening to what He is telling us at this time.

"Men and women who pray know that **hope** is stronger than discouragement." - Pope Francis

VINCENTIAN FAMILY PRAYER IN THIS TIME OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC:

*Gracious God, protector of the defenseless,
look with compassion on your people
who are suffering from the dangers of this global pandemic.
Be compassionate toward us,
show us your infinite mercy
and guide the hands of those
who are attempting to overcome this situation!
Instill within us a spirit of generosity
so that we might know how to assist those who are weakest:
the elderly, the homeless and the impoverished ...
those who bear the brunt of this crisis.
Let us approach these individuals
and assist them in these difficult times!
Protect the doctors and nurses
and all health-care professionals
who are on the frontlines of this pandemic!
Enlighten their minds
so that they might find a cure.
We ask all of this
through the intercession of Jesus Christ, your Son
Our Lord, the protector of those in need. Amen.
We pray the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary together.*

