

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.



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❖ **Fourth Theme: Organizing for the cause of charity**

○ 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

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

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 Superioress
- 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,

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 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.

² J. Morin, *op. cit.*, p.24-27

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