

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**

○ 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 Prioress 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

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 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.

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