

COMMENTARY FOR USE WITH POWERPOINT

GETTING TO KNOW VINCENT DE PAUL

INTRODUCTION

'Getting to know Vincent de Paul' was designed as a stand-alone, self-explanatory PowerPoint that tells the story of how Vincent came to setup and sustain a network of charity in the first half of seventeenth century France. In putting it together there was an expectation that some audiences would share Vincent's belief system. For them it is important to see the integration of faith and action. For those who find this difficult but nonetheless are inspired by Vincent's care, compassion and good works please understand that it is impossible to truly know him without mentioning his faith. However, it is also important to know that it is possible to imitate his care for those suffering the effects of poverty without subscribing to his particular faith.

Some background supplementary information for each slide may be helpful and is presented in this commentary. References are given for source materials, where possible, particularly from the fourteen volumes of Vincent de Paul Correspondence Conferences Documents translated from Pierre Coste's 1922 collection and edited by Sister Marie Poole et al. These are referenced as CCD followed by volume number 1-14 and page number.

SLIDE 1

To make a difference is a fundamental aspiration of humankind. The differences we aspire to may vary but the notion of our unique ability to contribute to the world in which we live lurks in everyone. St Vincent de Paul was a man who made a huge difference in the world in which he lived and has continued to make a difference down through the centuries through the countless followers he has inspired to continue and develop his work. Spreading out from France around the globe these followers of different faiths and none have made significant differences in the societies in which they live and work.

SLIDE 2

Vincent was a man of his times and it is essential to view his life in that context. The Three Musketeers shown in recent years on BBC television gave a good overview of the times during which Vincent lived. It may seem strange to us to see how society was classified with clergy having a higher ranking than nobles. Maybe this was a key factor in Vincent's ambition as a young man. Although there was a bourgeoisie section in society it was not given its own ranking but was lumped with the rest of society who were not clergy or nobles. Interestingly Vincent's mother belonged to a family that was considered bourgeoisie whilst, his father owned land and was perhaps little more than a subsistence farmer. Exceptionally cold weather in Europe and its ensuing consequences made conditions very

difficult for everyone, particularly those living off the land. [*Brejon de Lavergnée M, The Streets as Cloister, p. 130*]

SLIDE 3

It is easy to forget that, apart from a couple of years, wars of some description or other were ravaging France during the whole of Vincent's life in Paris. It made travel particularly hazardous and we know from Vincent's correspondence that he and some of the services he developed often had to contend with the danger of getting caught in cross fire and attack. It must have been a constant worry; these pictures, particularly the one at the bottom capture a little of the hardship and displacement people faced. [*CCD 3: pp. 408-09, 412-13.*]

SLIDE 4

One of the after effects of the Protestant Reformation in France was a decline in the provision of medical care for the sick which had previously been provided by monasteries and some churches. There were a few hospitals providing a questionable quality of care. The common practise of several people sharing the same bed regardless of their condition meant that disease spread quicker than it was cured. Little wonder that people preferred to be looked after in their own homes. There were also scattered around the countryside small groups of unmarried women devoting their lives to God carrying on the tradition of the medieval Beguines living a frugal life of prayer and caring for the sick and needy of their local communities. It is not surprising then that the epidemics shown in this slide swept through the French countryside and cities almost annually. From 1628-31 almost a million people died of the plague. . [*Brejon de Lavergnée M, The Streets as Cloister, p. 1307 CCD, 9, p. 34*]

These first 3 slides show the bleak and hazardous conditions that form the backdrop to Vincent's story.

SLIDE 5

Vincent was born in the Gascony region of south-west France. He spent his early years in rural Pouy. He showed potential as a young boy; it was recognised by his father who sold an ox to pay for his education in Dax, the nearby town. Vincent's rural upbringing certainly shaped his thinking and view of life. His farming outlook influenced his development of services constantly stressing the importance of gauging the right time to implement new ideas. This picture of a young Vincent tilling the land shows his family home in the distance. [*Pujo B., Vincent De Paul the Trailblazer pp. 3-11, Roman Jose Maria C.M., pp. 23-35*]

SLIDE 6

During his years at school Vincent lodged with a local lawyer, Monsieur de Comet and tutored his sons, probably in return for board and lodging. Monsieur de Comet seems to have been a mentor for Vincent. The earliest letter that we have from Vincent was written to Monsieur de Comet and tells the story of how he was captured by pirates and sold as a slave in North Africa. There is minimal evidence of this ever taking place. It is a good story

but can take attention away from more important aspects of Vincent's life. The map on this slide shows the coach routes that Vincent travelled, as well as many of those involved in developing and servicing his network of charity. Interestingly, some owners of these routes with permission of the King donated a proportion of their revenue to finance Vincent's charitable works. Although the funding was welcome it was also unpredictable dependant on the donor and the King's financial needs. [CCD 1, pp 1-14, CCD 13b pp. 325-6]

SLIDE 7 (The following 3 slides maybe too much information for those who do not have a faith background)

Vincent lived in the aftermath of religious upheaval brought about by Protestant and Calvinistic reforms leading to religious wars in Europe. Paris became a centre for Catholic revival and when Vincent arrived there in 1608, still seeking to establish himself as a priest he found support and encouragement from some of the leaders of this group that later became known as the French School of Spirituality. Vincent's willingness to learn from the wisdom of others is a striking aspect of his character.

SLIDE 8

Here we see portraits of some of the key members of the French School of Spirituality who either influenced Vincent or complemented his work.

Madame Acarie or Marie de l'Incarnation 1566-1618 from a high bourgeoisie family hosted gatherings in her salon for some of the most distinguished religious leaders of the day. Together with Pierre de Bérulle and Michel de Marillac she founded the "Reformed Carmel in France". After her husband's death she herself became a Carmelite in 1614. She also shared in the foundation of two other orders, the Oratorians and the Ursulines. [Biographical data footnote CCD 1 p. 192]

Benet of Canfield 1562-1610 originally from Little Canfield, Essex, England (seven miles from Stansted airport) was a Puritan who became a Catholic and went to Paris where he joined the Franciscan Capuchin Friars. His book the Rule of Perfection had a profound influence on Vincent and many spiritual leaders of the day. A picture of him hangs in the National Gallery in London. [Brousse, J. *The lives of Ange de Joyeuse and Benet Canfield*]

Jean Jacque Olier 1608-1657 was born in Paris and later moved to Lyon. Vincent supported him as a young man and priest. He sought Vincent's advice in all the important decisions he made and for a time ministered with the Congregation of the Mission. Eventually he founded the Sulpician order. He often told his followers "Monsieur Vincent is our Father". [Biographical data footnote CCD 5. pp. 93-94]

Jean Eudes 1601-1680 was born in Ri, Normandy. After a short time with the Oratorians he left and formed the Congregation of Jesus and Mary for the direction of Seminaries and the work of the missions. Although this work was similar to the work Vincent was doing, Vincent supported and up-held Jean when others attacked him. Jean also founded an order of women, Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge, to provide a sanctuary for prostitutes. [Biographical data footnote CCD 5, p. 625]

Jane Frances de Chantal 1572-1641 was born in Dijon and married Baron de Chantal when she was twenty. They had four children. Her husband died in 1601 and a few years later she asked Francis de Sales to become her Spiritual Director. Together they established the Visitation order. When Vincent succeeded Francis as Superior of the Paris Visitation Sisters he was drawn into a working relationship with Jane Frances. Their good rapport was based on respect and mutuality. Evidence of it is found in their correspondence which still exists. After her death in 1641, Vincent attributed a heightened spiritual experience he had whilst celebrating Mass, to her entry into heaven. *([Biographical data footnote CCD 11, p. 103; Letters CCD 1:31, 120, 185, 306, 361, 552, 563, 565, 566])*

Michel de Marillac 1563-1632 was born in Paris. He was Louise de Marillac's uncle who invited her to stay in his home for a short while. He had several prominent roles in the government of Louis XIII including keeper of the Seals. He drafted the first French Code of Law but he got caught up in Marie de Medici's plans to oust Cardinal Richelieu from power. The Cardinal had him imprisoned for conspiracy, first in Caen and then Châteaudun where he died. He worked closely with Madame Acarie in financing and arranging for the reformed Carmelites to be established in Paris. *([Biographical data footnote CCD 11, p. 233])*

Charles de Condren 1588-1641 was born near Soissons and joined the Paris Oratory after completing his Doctorate in the Sorbonne. Vincent de Paul held him in high esteem as a deeply spiritual man and he was respected as an accomplished Spiritual Director. He replaced Pierre De Bérulle as Superior of the Paris Oratory. *([Biographical data footnote CCD 11, p. 119])*

SLIDE 9

These 3 men had a significant influence in shaping the future Vincent.

Pierre De Bérulle 1575-1629 was born near Troyes into two leading families of magistrates, his skills in negotiating and statesmanship bear testimony to this heritage. He was a cousin of Madame Acarie and is recognised as a mainstay in the Counter-Reformation in France. To this end he mentored and guided the most virtuous and eminent priests in Paris. Vincent sought him out when he arrived in Paris in 1608 and Bérulle, recognising Vincent's potential found positions for him; first as chaplain to the former Queen Marguerite de Valois, then as parish priest of Clichy, followed by tutor to the de Gondi family and finally parish priest of Chatillon. While he was helping Vincent, Bérulle was busy establishing the Congregation of the Oratory in Paris becoming its superior. Along with Madame Acarie and Michel De Marillac he also established the Carmelites in France. Strangely he strongly opposed Vincent's foundation of the Congregation of the Mission however Vincent did not heed his advice. Remarkably, in 1625 he was chosen to accompany the daughter of the King, Princess Henriette, to England for her marriage to the future King Charles I. Two years later he was created Cardinal. *([Biographical data footnote CCD 11, p. 51])*

Francis De Sales 1567-1622 was from a noble family in the Duchy of Savoy. He was ordained priest in 1593 and became Bishop of Geneva ten years later. An inspiring preacher who

wrote the first book on how to live a spiritual life for ordinary people, he was often known as the Gentleman Saint because of his patience and gentleness. These virtues made a deep impression on Vincent when they met in 1618 and forged the mutuality of respect and shared spirituality that marked their relationship during the last four years of his life. It is not surprising then, that Francis chose Vincent to succeed him, after his death, as superior of the newly founded Visitation community of women in Paris. Becoming superior of the Visitation Sisters was a first for Vincent, predating the founding of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity. *[Biographical data footnote CCD 11, p. 21: Pujo B., Vincent De Paul the Trailblazer p. 74-77]*

Andre Duval 1564-1638 renowned Doctor at the Sorbonne was a friend and adviser to Vincent. It is said that in the early days of Vincent recognising his true vocation to serving those suffering the effects of poverty, he never made a significant decision without first seeking advice from Duval. As well as the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission these decisions involved accepting management of the large St Lazare estate, the establishment of the Servants of the Confraternities of Charity, later known as Daughters of Charity, taking on the management of the Hotel Dieu and the foundation of the Ladies of Charity in 1634. *[Biographical data footnote CCD 11, p. 21]*

SLIDE 10

Yes, at last Vincent became a parish priest. You can visit this church and see the pulpit that Vincent built and would have preached from. He was very happy here. He had fulfilled his dream but when Bérulle suggested he become tutor in the aristocratic De Gondi household he accepted that as well. It meant that his time was spent mostly with the de Gondi's and less in the parish. The experience he gained from his short stay in Clichy proved invaluable in developing his later ministries as well introducing him to Antoine Portail, who became a life-long friend, supporter and first member of the Congregation of the Mission. *[CCD 9: p. 507, 10: p. 276]*

SLIDE 11

1617 was the all change year for Vincent. Madame De Gondi was a deeply religious woman and made demands on Vincent's time hence his accompaniment on her visit to Folleville. It was here that Vincent had his eyes opened to the spiritual poverty of ordinary people living in the country. It is important to note that it was through Madame de Gondi's instigation that this insight was revealed. But, it does beg a question about his own experience of growing up in the countryside near Pouy. *[CCD 11: pp. 162-64]*

SLIDE 12

The 25th January is recognised as the anniversary of this event and the Congregation of the Mission honours it as their foundation although they did not officially begin until 1625. From 1618 onwards Vincent was concerned and tried as much as possible, with the help of priests that he knew, to give missions in the countryside telling the story of God's love for his people. Typical of Vincent he organised and planned a programme for the first six missions in different locations. It is no surprise to learn this was done with the assistance of Madame De Gondi. *[Pujo, B, Vincent de Paul the Trailblazer p. 71-74]*

SLIDE 13

Once again Pierre Bérulle played a key role in encouraging Vincent to make a seemingly impulsive decision. He told Vincent about a parish priest vacancy in Chatillon les Dombes 264 miles from Paris. It was in Bérulle's interest to suggest Vincent fill the vacancy because the incumbent was joining the Oratorians which he had founded in Paris. Vincent left the de Gondi household without telling them his intention and not unsurprisingly they were furious and wanted him back. While in Chatillon Vincent's eyes were once again opened not only to the devastating poverty that people had to endure but also to the generosity and willingness of people to help when they were made aware of suffering. He saw that this good will and great charity needed organisation. It was the beginning of the Confraternities of Charity and the tentative start of a vast network of services for people suffering the effects of poverty. *[CCD 9: 165-66, 192-93]*

SLIDE 14

This is where the genius of Vincent emerges. All his previous experiences shaped him for what was gradually becoming clear; total commitment to relieving the spiritual and material suffering of those trapped and ground down by poverty. Once he had set up the first Confraternity of Charity with its regulations to ensure good quality service for those suffering poverty he returned to the De Gondi household. But with the proviso that he could care for the spiritual needs of people and establish charities in the various parishes where missions were held. Madame de Gondi encouraged him to think about founding a congregation of priests to help him with his mission work. Vincent was reluctant; it took Andre Duval's support of the idea to convince him. (CCD 13b: pp. 3-21)

SLIDE 15

It is good to pause and reflect on these two events. They provide insight into the ways in which Vincent achieved a network of charity which brought relief to countless people in Paris and beyond and also engaged and energised innumerable people in helping others. It might be helpful to consider the ways that you and/or your organisation respond to the needs that are brought your attention, how do you process your response, who do you involve in the solution, are those who alerted you involved and how clear are frameworks, guidelines and goals for achieving solutions?

SLIDE 16

This is the timeline of the organisations that Vincent founded and cofounded. It is worth noting that the first group was the Confraternities of Charity. Women from the nobility, bourgeoisie and poorer classes volunteered to meet the needs of the sick poor caring for them according to Vincent's regulations. However, it became increasingly evident to Louise de Marillac from her visitation (inspection visits) of these charities that there was need for more regular fulltime help; women who had time and were used to the hard work of cleaning, cooking and carrying heavy cooking pots etc., to supplement the work of the more genteel members. Eventually, after a peasant woman came to Paris offering to become a servant to one of the charities, Vincent realised the need and gave Louise the go ahead to gather a group of country women to be servants of the Confraternities of Charity later they became known as Daughters of Charity. When it was suggested by Madame Goussault that Vincent become involved with care offered at the Hotel Dieu in Paris he realised that it required more secure funding and management skills than was needed for the charities. Together with Madame Goussault he called on the wealthier ladies who had joined the charities and were prepared to donate money as well as their household management skills to the running of the Hotel Dieu. This initiative spread to other hospitals and forms of charitable services for those in poverty. It was the beginning of the Ladies of Charity as well as the beginning of the structure of management for the services that were developing. Vincent and in particular Louise de Marillac liaised between these 'Lady Managers', the needs of those suffering from poverty and the Daughters of Charity who provided front line services. The Missioners on their travels identified areas where help was needed setting up Confraternities of Charity from which other services could be developed.

SLIDE 17

The organisations that grew from the founding events in 1617 led to the development of ten different services meeting a variety of needs of people trapped in poverty. On the right Louise and Vincent are shown as hands on leaders giving the advice and training that they offered their workers credibility as well as the wisdom of their own experience. They were servant leaders. Beginning at the top on the left hand side a group of women represent the first group of helpers, the Confraternities of Charity, below is a Missioner representing, the Congregation of the Mission and the role they played in setting up Confraternities of Charity in parishes where they gave missions. Below him are two representatives of the Ladies of Charity, funders of services and overseers of many of them in collaboration with Vincent and Louise. The white arrows show connections with services developed from the two original ones, in the centre amidst the arrows is a representative of the Daughters of Charity, frontline workers in all services.

SLIDE 18

Louise de Marillac was Vincent's principle collaborator in setting up and maintaining such a diverse network of charity. Historically she has frequently been overlooked in the telling of the Vincentian story. Vincent and Louise worked together for thirty five years. They complemented each other; Vincent was a responder to the present as we have seen in Folleville and Chatillon. Louise on the other hand often saw ways forward that Vincent hesitated to take until he was confronted with them head on. This was evident in their different approaches to recruiting the servants for the Confraternities of Charity. They managed these differences with diplomacy and humour, Louise was good at waiting for Vincent to catch up with her forward thinking and Vincent teased her about going too fast.

SLIDE 19

Here we see some of Vincent's other collaborators:

Antoine Portail 1590-1660 was Vincent's auxiliary, he was the first to join the Congregation of the Mission, and he worked closely with Louise and the Daughters of Charity. He also spent three years visiting all the houses of the Congregation of the Mission on Vincent's behalf. He was indeed Vincent's right hand man with regard to the Daughters of Charity. *(Biographical data footnote CCD 8, p. 105)*

Madame Lamoignon 1576-1651 was one of Vincent's best supporters. She was married to the President of the Parlement in Paris and when he died she joined the Ladies of Charity. She funded many of the works of charity Vincent set up. She succeeded Madame Goussault as the second president of the Ladies of Charity. *(Biographical data footnote CCD 2, p. 208)*

Mademoiselle Lamoignon 1608-1687 her daughter was a very hands on Lady of Charity. She dressed wounds, cleaned rooms, as well as funding charities. . *(Biographical data footnote CCD 2, p. 247)*

King Louis XIII 1601-1643 recognised the importance of the charitable work that Vincent did. When he was dying with tuberculosis he wanted Vincent at his bedside. In his will he left a substantial sum of money to Vincent to fund the Mission in Sedan. Vincent used the money to build thirteen houses for foundling children and then, from the rent he charged the Ladies who managed the work, funded the Mission in Sedan. The King also allowed Vincent to receive a proportion of the revenue from various coach routes. The 'proportion' was not always consistent or trouble free. His son Louis XIV also collaborated with Vincent and could be said to have helped him more financially than his father. *(CCD 11, p. 120, 601-602)*

Madame de Gondi 1580-1625 from the time Vincent joined her household as tutor to her sons, she recognised his spiritual qualities and asked him to become her Spiritual Director.

She cared for the people who worked on her estate, visiting them taking them food particularly when they were sick. She encouraged Vincent to found an order to do the mission work he began in 1617 and left him money in her will for that purpose. That is why she is sometimes acknowledged as the cofoundress of the Congregation of the Mission. She also became a member of the Montmirail Confraternity of Charity. (*Biographical data footnote CCD 2, p. 15*)

Madame Goussault ?-1639 was the first to have the idea of an association of ladies to care for the sick in the Hotel Dieu in Paris. Her husband was a Councillor of the King and president of the Chambres des Comptes. When he died in 1631 she dedicated herself untiringly to works of charity, she was the first President of the Ladies of Charity. She helped to improve conditions for orphans cared for by the Paris authorities by first moving them to the Hotel Dieu before finding more suitable accommodation with the Daughters of Charity. (*Biographical data footnote CCD 9, p. 58*)

Duchess d'Aiguillon 1604-1675 was the niece of Cardinal Richelieu. She was married at the age of 16 to the Marquis de Combalet whom she had never seen and didn't love. He spent most of his time caught up in wars and died in combat two years after their marriage. She then entered the Carmelite Convent in Paris. This was against her uncle's wishes who wanted her to have a position in the Court. Eventually he persuaded the Pope to forbid her to remain in the Convent and Marie de Médici chose her as lady of the bedchamber. She was extremely wealthy and funded countless good works. She became third President of the Ladies of Charity of the Hotel Dieu after Madame Lamoignon. She had a heart shaped reliquary made after Vincent's death for his heart. Louise de Marillac, Madame Goussault, Madame Lamoignon and the Duchess d'Aiguillon worked closely with Vincent developing and funding works of charity. (*Biographical data footnote CCD 8, p. 8*)

Cardinal Richelieu 1585-1642 it may be a bit of a stretch to list him as a collaborator of Vincent's but they both worked together on the Council of Conscience. He asked Vincent for names of priests attending the Tuesday Conferences who would be suitable to become bishops. In developing his estate, which bore his name, he provided funds to establish both Missioners and Daughters of Charity to live there and care for those in need. (*Biographical data footnote CCD 1, p. 346-7*)

Louise-Marie Gonzague 1611-1667 Queen of Poland was the daughter of Charles I, of Mantua, and an early Lady of Charity. She signed a marriage contract with the King of Poland, Władysław IV in 1645 and was married by proxy in the Palais-Royal in Paris before travelling to Poland. She asked Vincent to send Missioners and Daughters of Charity to join her in Poland, under her patronage, in the 1650s. This was the first establishment of the Daughters outside of France. When her husband died she married his step brother and remained Queen until her death. Altogether she was queen for twenty two years. (*Biographical data footnote CCD 8, p. 88-89*)

SLIDE 20

It is important to understand that although Vincent's belief system underpinned his leadership style; seeking advice, working collaboratively, treating everyone with respect, recognising and affirming gifts and skills whilst kindly acknowledging weaknesses, communicating regularly and supporting endeavours with encouragement as well as non-attachment to outcome, this way of working is possible without subscribing to his belief system. Where does Vincent's style of leadership fit into the Leadership theories of the twenty-first century? Without a doubt Vincent is a seventeenth century model of Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, as well as Spiritual Leadership.

SLIDE 21

This picture of Vincent supporting a man too weak to stand alone captures a little of the essence of Vincent's zeal to embrace and assist those suffering poverty. Zeal is a word he often used to encourage total commitment to those in need it combines energy, enthusiasm, passion and eagerness. He had zeal in buckets yet, as this picture shows it was clothed in gentleness and compassion with total attention to the person.

SLIDE 22

This slide by no means presents an exhaustive list of the values and virtues that Vincent modelled in his life but it does show some of the significant ones. There is no specific significance attached to the size of the words or the colours used. In both pictures Vincent is seen to be assisting men to stand and that is what Vincent tried to do, help those crippled by poverty of whatever shape and form to recognise their inherent dignity and worth.

SLIDE 23

This quote from Bremond is a bit of a conundrum because considering the very active life Vincent lived, even from a chair in his old age, with the stillness and silence often associated with mysticism there doesn't seem to be a fit. The solution is in the picture, Vincent's gaze of encounter.

SLIDE 24

Hopefully this has helped you to have a better understanding of Vincent de Paul.