

# *E*choes *of the Company*

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Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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## Letter of March 24, 2014

To all Daughters of Charity

My dear Sisters,

*“Here I am Lord; I come to do your will.”*<sup>1</sup>

We are offered in the liturgy of the mass for the Annunciation of the Lord this refrain to the psalm, which in the letter to the Hebrews is put on the lips of Christ<sup>2</sup> and on those of the Virgin Mary in the gospel of St. Luke:

*“I am the servant of the Lord;  
 let it be done as you have said.”*<sup>3</sup>

May the renovation of our vows, that we will have the grace of renewing tomorrow, anchor us more radically in our vocation, in the gift of our life that we freely make to the Lord!

*“O my God, we give ourselves entirely to you.  
 Grant us the grace to live and die in...true poverty...  
 to live and die chastely...  
 of living in the perfect observance of obedience.  
 We likewise give ourselves to you, my God  
 to honor and serve our lords the poor all our lives.”*<sup>4</sup>

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1. Psalm 40:8-9  
 2. Cf. Heb 10:7  
 3. Luke 1:38  
 4. Saint Vincent, July 19, 1640, Coste IX, p. 22



*Spiritual Life*

Letter of March 24, 2014

Let us have a particular thought for our older and sick Sisters, for those who are living in extreme difficulties in many countries, most especially in Syria. In Beirut recently, Sr. Françoise and I had the opportunity to meet with the Sisters from the Communities in Damascus. They shared with us their everyday life – the service of the poor in the hospital and the school and despite the insecurity and the bombardments how they continue to make home visits. They have come to live with the anxiety in simplicity; finding the strength, which exceeds their own limits, to serve and to encourage all those who surround them. They entrust themselves to the Virgin Mary and asked us to thank you for your prayers.

To these Sisters and to you all, I wish a wonderful Feast of the Annunciation and with all my heart assure you of my devoted affection in St. Vincent and St. Louise.

Sister Evelyne FRANC  
*Daughter of Charity*

**FATHER PATRICK GRIFFIN, DIRECTOR GENERAL**

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Conference in Preparation for Renovation  
March 22-23, 2014

**“Making Things New”**

All of us know that when a new version of an established product comes to market, it is accompanied by a significant ad campaign. We read that it is “new and improved,” that it has “extra something,” that it is 80% better than the old product, that 9 out of 10 experts prefer this new version. The product is often packaged with different and more vibrant colors. Sometimes the box is shaped differently with more or less content. The seller wants to make sure that we know that what we will be purchasing will be different and better than what we had. It is really new—and thus worth the extra cost.

As we consider our desire to renew our vows, we might ask ourselves some of these same questions: are we ready to be new and improved; are we prepared to bring that something extra to our ministry; has our commitment been increased by 80% in the past year; would 9 out of 10 of our Sisters notice the improvement in us? Are we packaged differently this year with more or less content? (I mean through increased faith and charisma with less selfishness, not weight.) Would the Company really want to use us as the model for a Daughter of Charity? How new and improved are you at renovation this year? What progress is still necessary?

Let me consider this question with you as we think about renewing our vows. I will select some passages from the Scripture and allow the images to offer direction for our prayer and reflection. Two passages will be from the Gospels as Jesus urges people to a newness of life. One passage will be taken from the writings of St. Paul, who was a man who truly understood what renovation could and would mean in a person’s life. One passage will be from the Book of Revelation as we look with hope to the end for

## Making Things New

which we all prepare. In the last part of my presentation, I will consider some examples of people who did become “new and improved” in the way in which they responded to the Gospel message.

### **“NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS”: RENEWING THE WHOLE PERSON**

One of the wisdom sayings of Jesus in the Gospels highlights the need for personal commitment, which is necessary for the person who chooses to change her life. The whole person is involved. We read:

*“No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”* (Mt 9:16-17)

Two images are offered here. First of all, we are told that no one sews a new patch on an old cloak. The reason for that might seem obvious to many of us—particularly those who come from the era when cloth shrank considerably after washing. An old cloak would already have been washed numerous times, and it was not going to shrink any more. A new patch, however, would be unshrunk. Thus, when this new patch was sown over a hole in an old cloak, it would shrink and tear an even bigger hole in the garment.

Similarly with the wine: new wine would still be bubbly and effervescent; it needs room to expand and breathe. An old wineskin, however, would have become hardened and set to its size. When new wine was poured into an old wineskin, the wine would burst it, and all would be lost. Clearly, one needs to put new wine in new vessels that are prepared to respond to the new content.

The examples in the ministry of Jesus for placing new wine in new wineskins are numerous. He offers practical examples on the ways in which sinners and those who are marginalized by disease should be treated. People find these teachings difficult to hear because they already have their own ideas on how these people touched by sin should be regarded.

Jesus offers new guidance about the way the Sabbath rest should be understood and practiced, but people already believe that they know all about the character of Sabbath observance, and so they cannot listen.

Jesus extends his ministry to women and Samaritans and Gentiles, and people cannot understand this teaching. These people already hold specific places in their thinking, and there is no room for movement.

All these people are like old wineskins: to receive the new wine that Jesus offers would be too much for them. It would burst their old world vision. What he says requires a suppleness and openness which they will not allow.

Even the story of the rich man who comes to Jesus asking what he needs to do to be worthy of heaven reminds us of our settled thinking (Mk 10:17-25). This man is a good person who professes to obey the commandments as Jesus instructed him. He is looking for another patch to place on his established garment of Jewish observance. When Jesus tells him to sell all that he has, give the money to the poor, and follow him, the man is crestfallen. This is no new patch! To act in this way would tear a huge hole in his established thinking and practice. He cannot put on the new garment which Jesus holds out to him.

Similarly, consider Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus in the evening (Jn 3:1-21). He wants to listen, but he is unable to fit Jesus’ teaching within the structure of his established thinking. A patch will not hold. He would have to be prepared for a new garment.

We can see the point Jesus is making. Those who choose to follow him cannot keep all their old ways of thinking and acting, and then simply add his teaching as a patch on their lives. It will not bind but cause a bigger hole in their way of believing and serving.

What about us, Sisters? In this time of renovation, are you ready to change your wardrobe? Are you ready to test the boundaries of your commitment? A person who wants to take Jesus more fully into her life cannot accept his new and exciting call and then try to fit it within the old person with her prejudices and patterns. The teachings will burst forth. Jesus calls for a complete change of a person’s life: he is not a patch to

## Making Things New

be sewn on a favorite way of thinking or a new wine that can be poured into an old heart.

### **How would you apply this principle to your vow of poverty?**

- To what are you so attached that it would be difficult for you to separate yourself from it?
- Is there a patch which will fit over this desire in your life, or is a freshness of thinking called for?
- Does the call for a renewed simplicity of life stretch the boundaries of your resolution?

### **“I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”: EXAMINING THE WHOLE OF ONE’S LIFE**

I love having a good light. Like most people, I cannot see what I am doing well when the atmosphere is dark. It also depresses me. I appreciate mood lighting, but, generally speaking, I like it to be bright so that I can see what I am doing and where I am going.

Light is one of the central images that emerges in the Gospel of John. It is found in the prologue of the very first chapter and in several places thereafter. In this past year, we have been given by the Holy Father an encyclical that invites us to think about the light of faith (*Lumen Fidei*) and Christ as the central light of our beliefs. At the heart of this teaching is Jesus’ own instruction:

*“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (Jn 8:12)

This instruction receives further elucidation by Jesus later in the Gospel:

*“The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light.”* (Jn 12:35-36)

Jesus as the light enables those who follow him to see where they are going and what they are bringing.

This is a helpful image as we consider renovation. We are invited to consider where we have been and where we need to go. Today, in particular, we have the opportunity to allow the Lord to cast his light into every aspect of our experience and thinking so as to illumine our mind and heart. This light can highlight those areas that we prefer to be kept hidden and in the dark, and (perhaps) most often ignored. It also enables us to see our virtues with clarity and humility. We allow ourselves to be aware of the blessings that have been poured upon us and of how we need to be grateful as well as committed. In the light of Christ, we see the truth, and we want to renew ourselves so as to respond to that truth in the best possible way. (*Lumen Fidei* spends considerable time on this question of truth, #23-28.)

*Lumen Fidei* reminds us that our growth and renovation always needs to be in the direction of our faith:

*“Faith is born of an encounter with the living God... On the one hand, it is a light coming from the past, the light of the foundational memory of the life of Jesus... Yet since Christ has risen and draws us beyond death, faith is also a light coming from the future and opening before us vast horizons which guide us beyond our isolated selves toward the breadth of communion... It is this light of faith that I would like to consider, so that it can grow and enlighten the present, becoming a star to brighten the horizon of our journey...”* (LF, 4)

Thus, the light gives clarity to our past practice, offers the encouragement for future success, and gives guidance to the present moment of renovation. It gives us new insights, new tasks, and new companions.

### **How about your vow of obedience?**

- Is that so easy for you that you do not need to think about it?
- What if you allowed the light of Christ to shine upon your thinking and action in this area, would you discover something about what this practice really means to you?
- Would you find that you are obedient in heart as well as mind, in spirit as well as body?
- Do you need to renew yourself in this arena?

**PUTTING ON THE NEW SELF:  
RENEWAL LEADS TO RESOLUTIONS**

Few have understood the need for change in the Christian life with as much clarity as Paul. This was certainly a Spirit-driven insight given him for the good of the Christian community—for us. He needed to experience this change himself, and he shared what he had come to know with his brothers and sisters in the early Church. He uses various means to speak about this renewal. For example, in his second letter to the Corinthians, he writes:

*“Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”* (2 Cor 4:16)

His distinction here is between the “outer” and “inner” self. Paul knows that the body may continue to lose energy and ability—we all know the slower steps and weaker vision, which may accompany our maturing—, but the spirit continues to flourish and become more enlivened. At least, that is the way it should be. He says that our “inner self” is renewed day by day, and we pray that it is true.

As we continue to hear the Word of God, receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, serve Christ present in the poor, know fidelity in our community life and the blessings of our charism, and so on, we have the possibility of continually being built up—renewed—each day. This should sound a note of hope for us but also offer a reflection point for our renewal: is the inner self being renewed or do I let concerns with the outer self dominate my thinking?

Paul uses another idea along these lines when he writes to the Ephesians. This time, he speaks about the “old self” and the “new self”:

*“You should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth...”*

*Do not grieve the holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling*

*must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.”* (Eph 4:22-24, 30-32)

Again, he invites the community to be renewed, and he suggests the means for doing this: first, by noting what they should avoid, and then highlighting what should characterize their life together, as it should define ours. We hear the encouragement to be open and attentive to the Holy Spirit. We are reminded of our need to do away with bitterness and malice. But most of all, we are told to be kind, compassionate and forgiving toward one another and those whom we serve.

**How about chastity?**

- Is there a richness to this practice, which expresses and enlivens your inner self?
- Is it easier to be chaste because you are getting older or because you are more committed to its essence and giving-of-self nature?
- Are you ready to renew yourself because of the grace that chastity brings into your life and your service?

**“BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW”:  
RENEWAL SPRINGS FROM AND LEADS TO HOPE**

The vision of the Book of Revelation is in keeping with that of the prophet Isaiah (65:17-25) as it calls attention to the newness that the Lord God brings.

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.’ The one who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”* (Rev 21:1-5)

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When one reads this passage carefully, one sees that the heart of the new order that the Lord establishes—the new heaven, the new earth, the new Jerusalem—is God’s dwelling among his people. Listen again:

*“Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God].”*

What characterized the “old order”—tears, death, mourning, wailing and pain—will be no more. The living God comes among his people, and he makes all things new. One cannot avoid thinking of the link between this truth and the truth that Adam and Eve knew in the Garden of Eden. Their initial experience of intimate closeness with God when the universe was young was disrupted by sin. The separation from the Lord that followed was accompanied by a separation from the created order. Now, in the end time, all is healed; the world is restored, and God draws close to his people, never to be separated again. All is made new.

In our renovation, we are invited to think of the way we too must be renewed in our relationship with the Lord through our vows. This needs to be the year when we will come closer to him and we will allow him to dwell more deeply in our hearts and minds and efforts. We all yearn for that closeness, but yearning is not enough. We need to take the steps which grant him greater access into our lives. As John the Baptist (quoting Isaiah) invites:

*“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”* (Mt 3:3)

To be renewed in this effort, we need to reflect on our dedication to prayer, meditation, and the sacramental life.

The vision of hope that arises from the passage from Revelation is expressed in the eagerness with which we renew our vows. We believe in the newness that God can bring and does bring into the lives of people by our ministries. We believe that God does dwell with us and that this dwelling provides for the needs of the human community.

*“Behold, I make all things new”* is God’s promise to the human community, which is realized in this time and this place through us.

Your specific vow to give yourself for your entire life to the service of those who are poor proclaims hope; it insists that you will seek to make a difference in the lives of people. You promise to be true to these people and make things new for them as you renew yourself. The tears, the mourning and the pain that are part of the lives of the poor are lessened by your service and presence.

- How filled are you with the hope of carrying out this promise effectively and without reservation?
- Are you ready to renew yourself in this way?

The Lord promises to renew the earth. One of the ways he does that is through our efforts and heartfelt commitment towards those whom we serve faithfully.

## **PEOPLE ARE MADE NEW**

It is easy enough to create a catalogue of people who have been made new by the grace of God.

We might begin with **St. Paul**, whom I have mentioned several times in this presentation. My affection and admiration for him should be evident. We all know his story. He was a great persecutor of the Christians, but he encounters the resurrected Lord, and everything changes. He is renewed. Before the encounter, he was willing to bring suffering and persecution into other people’s lives; afterwards, he is the one who is willing to accept suffering and persecution for the sake of the Gospel. Before the encounter, he was convinced of the error of those who followed the Christian way; afterwards, no one is more dynamic in the proclamation of the Gospel or the teachings of Jesus than he. Before the encounter, Paul was ambitious and sought to make a name for himself; afterwards, he is the servant of the Lord who will take on any role, no matter how humble, in order to advance the Gospel. In the New Testament, Paul is a great example of a person who is renewed in his faith and life as he responds to the urge to follow the crucified Christ more closely. Paul does not seek to allow Christ to be a patch on his old beliefs; he accepts Jesus like a new wineskin.

When we look at **St. Vincent**, we find another example of a person who



### Making Things New

allows himself to be renewed. The story of Vincent's self-absorption early in his life is well known. He was a gifted man who sought a benefice that would provide for his needs and those of his family. He was not a bad man, just someone who seemingly placed his own needs ahead of the needs of others. He is converted, however, and made new. Did it begin with the parish encounter with the good people of Châtillon or the serf at Gannes? Was it the encouragement he received from the de Gondis or his success at Folleville? Could it be that Vincent heard the Gospel for the first time in its power and challenge as he began to preach the missions? Vincent was renewed. Many elements probably contributed to this change, but it certainly involved a conversion to hearing and responding to the Gospel in his life. He put on the new self and cast off the old self, as Paul would say, and this renewed him to become the great missionary of charity which defined his future.

**St. Louise** cannot be left out of this group of persons who came to be renewed. Her story begins as a woman who might be considered a bit scrupulous. She was very concerned with the state of her soul, which is not a bad thing, but it absorbed much of her attention and energy. Her *lumière* experience at St. Nicolas des Champs highlights both her limitations and the areas in which she knew extensive growth and development, areas of her life in which she allowed herself to be renewed. The gifts and intelligence, which were the Lord's gifts to her by nature, were too inner-directed as she began her conversion. She learned to use these gifts for the benefit of others and for the glory of God, and thus she experienced a renewal that was a great boon for the Church. Each year, she grew in her commitment as she responded to the guidance of the Spirit. She was renewed as she allowed the light of Christ to shine upon her heart and life. It illuminated every corner of her soul and became the beacon which gave direction to her steps.

When we begin to think of those who were enlivened by their service of the poor and who thus renewed the face of the earth, we can thankfully create a long list. Among our Sisters, we can begin to list Rosalie Rendu, Giuseppina Nicoli, Marguerite Rutan, Anna Marta Wiecka, Lindalva Justo De Oliveira, and many who will remain unknown. How many examples can we list of those who allowed themselves to be renewed by the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit: Archbishop Romero, Dorothy Day, John XXIII, Frederic Ozanam, and so many others.

### CONCLUSION

Sisters, we speak about the renovation of our vows, but we know that what we really mean is the renovation of ourselves in the living of these vows. Poverty, chastity, obedience and the service of the poor remain ever new. We seek some hint of their depth in the Scriptural witness as well as within our tradition and experience. We find the ways in which they are challenged and the ways in which they offer challenges in our particular times, places, and cultures. Yet, it is always us who need to be renewed. That renewal begins and ends with finding a deeper place for the Lord in our lives. Listen to the exuberance of St. Louise as she writes to St. Vincent:

*“My heart is still overflowing with joy on account of the understanding which, I believe, our good God has given me of the words, ‘God is my God,’ and the awareness I had of the glory which the blessed render to Him as a consequence of this truth. Therefore, I cannot help communicating with you this evening to ask you to assist me to profit from this excess of joy and to suggest some practice for me tomorrow which is the feast of the saint whose name I have the honor to bear. It is also the day for the renovation of my vows.”* (L. 369 “To Monsieur Vincent,” August 24 [before 1650]. *Spiritual Writings*, p. 341)

With this joy that claims God as our God, we ask the Holy One for the grace to be renewed in our vows and commitment to him, to one another, and to the beloved persons who are poor.

Father Patrick GRIFFIN  
*Director General*

General Assembly 2015

### *“For A New Missionary Momentum”*

One might discern the hand of Providence in the issuance of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, at this time when we are preparing for our General Assembly—an Assembly that points us towards a “new missionary momentum.” This Exhortation seems in keeping with our charism and mission. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise would have no difficulty in seeing the will of God in this happy event. Sister Evelyne used this Exhortation consistently in her February 2nd letter to further her reflections on “the missionary spirit of the Company.”

In the past year, we had the opportunity to reflect on “the boldness of charity” as glimpsed from a biblical and charism perspective. This year, our thoughts could find a particular focus on “a new missionary momentum.”

This presentation will be divided into four parts.

- In the first, we will consider some of the ways in which “the boldness of charity” leads to a “new missionary momentum” as inspired by some of the Gospel stories.

- In the second part, we will use *Evangelii Gaudium* to organize our thinking around our Assembly theme, in the light of our own charism and our Inter-Assemblies Document.

- In the third section, which is brief, we shall think about the nature and power of “newness”.

- In the fourth part, we shall turn our attention toward the lesson of our logos, that of the Assembly and the seal of the Company.

### **I. BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON “THE BOLDNESS OF CHARITY” FOR “A NEW MISSIONARY MOMENTUM”**

### **HOW DOES THE “BOLDNESS OF CHARITY” GIVE RISE TO “A NEW MISSIONARY MOMENTUM”?**

**\* Is the relationship like that of a cause to an effect?** Does our boldness in acting out our charity, in making decisions which are new and even exciting, lead to a driving force that gathers power and energy as it is lived out in ministry?

**\* Is the relationship like a mutual dependence?**

- Does one naturally and inevitably require the other?
- Can we be bold in our charity and then not be led into new fields of action?
- Can we embrace new approaches to mission without being bold in the decisions that open us up to change and uncertainty?

**\* Is the relationship like a desire to an action?** One begins in our head and heart only to get expressed by the other in our hands and feet.

- Are we ready to convert hope into help?
- What is the relationship between the two parts of our theme?

It is an honest question, which allows for some analysis and different responses.

Let us consider some illustrations from the Word of God:

#### **1. WALKING ON WATER (Mt 14:25-32)**

*“During the fourth watch of the night, [Jesus] came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. ‘It is a ghost,’ they said, and they cried out in fear. At once [Jesus] spoke to them, ‘Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.’ Peter said to him in reply, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come.’ Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how [strong] the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ After they got into the boat, the wind died down.”*

### For a New Missionary Momentum

The first reaction of the disciples to their experience is fear: “It is a ghost!” Peter, however, begins to find courage as he listens to Jesus, and he begins to move toward him. There is clearly boldness as Peter steps out of the boat to walk on the water like him. He makes those first steps courageously but then becomes more tentative. Rather than keeping his eyes fixed on the object of his love, Jesus, he begins to pay attention to the wind and the waves, and he begins to falter—literally to sink. He cannot generate sufficient momentum in those first steps to carry him to the Lord, lacking confidence and assurance.

We cannot be critical of Peter. But there is no such thing as tentative boldness; there must be a resoluteness and a “no turning back” firmness. We keep our eyes fixed on the Lord, and we move toward him with a sure and steady step. The reality of wind and wave are undeniable, but they cannot be our deciding factors. The further we get from the boat and our “comfort zone,” the closer we get to Jesus and a new place to stand and from which to move forward. Let us envision those last steps to Jesus as generating momentum both because we want to be gathered into his arms and because standing on the water alone and in-between is frightening.

The opportunity to make the Gospel known in a new way looms before us. “Walking on the water” and standing with the Lord open up new possibilities for mission. We can go places where we have not been before because we can do something that we could not accomplish before. Other people would want to be bold, encouraged by our example. The mission carried forth with energy and direction becomes a force for evangelization. Boldness naturally leads to momentum. Charity leads to mission.

## **2. MULTIPLYING BREAD (Mt 14:14:21)**

*“When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, ‘This is a deserted place and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.’ [Jesus] said to them, ‘There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.’ But they said to him, ‘Five loaves and two fish are all we have here.’ Then he said, ‘Bring them here to me,’ and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke*

*the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over—twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.”*

The story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish is told six times in the Gospels. It clearly was an important one for the early Christian community. One can easily point to its Eucharistic overtones, but there is much else that the story can teach us when we listen without presumption and with a little creative imagination.

Jesus wants the hungry to be fed. His disciples, however, seek the most reasonable and standard solution: send everyone away so that they can take care of themselves. Jesus, however, has a different idea. He tells the disciples to “*give them some food yourselves.*” The disciples do a quick inventory and determine that they have only five loaves and two fish. Jesus does not moan about what he does not have; he begins with what they have and uses that to feed the people. This willingness to share accompanied by the Lord’s blessing gets the deed done. People are fed.

We cannot resolve the actual “how” of the miraculous feeding: it is a miracle. A clear result ensued: people were fed, and there was more than enough for everyone.

Can you imagine the boldness of the disciples who would take Jesus at his word and begin to distribute the food? Can you imagine the momentum that they generated as they fed the first dozen and then hundred and then thousand people? What might have started tentatively and cautiously became joyful and generous.

This story suggests to us how only “boldness in charity” can give rise to a “momentum” that drives the mission. The cry that there is not enough cannot justify a lack of effort. Using what one has with generosity and commitment allows for God’s blessing to take hold and spread. Boldness leads to momentum. Charity leads to mission.

## **3. HEALING THE AFFLICTED (Mt 15:21-28)**

*“Then Jesus went from that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and*

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*Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, 'Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, 'Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But the woman came and did him homage, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He said in reply, 'It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.' Then Jesus said to her in reply, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed from that hour."*

Note in this story, once again, the first reaction of the disciples: "*Send the woman away; she is a nuisance.*" Jesus, however, begins to engage her in conversation.

The Canaanite woman is a courageous character. Her daughter is tormented, and she will do anything for her sake. The "boldness of charity" sends her to the feet of Jesus despite the prejudices of gender and religion. At first, she attempts to seek his help by calling from afar, but when this is not sufficient, she comes to his feet, does him homage, and says simply "*Lord, help me.*"

When Jesus offers her a seeming rebuke ("*It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.*"), she is not driven away but emboldened yet humble in her reply ("*Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.*"). Nothing is going to drive this woman away. Her love for her daughter is too great and bold. Jesus is impressed. The woman is not simply eager for a free gift that means little to her. She is a figure with whom to reckon. And Jesus gives her the healing which she has so desperately sought. He recognizes determination and true love when he sees it, and he responds to it with positive action.

We might wonder if this woman had a genuinely significant influence on Jesus. His original understanding of his mission might have been re-evaluated because of her. Now, he saw that his mission was not just to the house of Israel, but to the whole world, beginning now. His new missionary momentum would drive him farther and wider in the world

of his time. It would make him new adversaries but also new listeners. He would welcome Gentiles as well as Jews, including those who were marginalized, into his numbers. The "boldness of charity" of the Canaanite woman may have led to a "new missionary momentum" in the career of Jesus. All this may well have been part of the mysterious plan of God. Boldness leads to momentum. Charity leads to mission.

Could other stories of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament further explain our theme, for example, the Wedding Feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-10)? Mary's "boldness in charity," derived from the need of the newly married couple, drives her to confront Jesus and leads to the action that began his public ministry, "a new missionary momentum".

### **II. A NEW MISSIONARY MOMENTUM AND *EVANGELII GAUDIUM***

The Apostolic Exhortation offers us an abundance of riches for reflecting on the second part of our General Assembly theme, "a new missionary momentum". Its focus on the Gospel and the need for a "new evangelization" are very much in keeping with the call of our charism and the *Inter-Assemblies Document* (IAD). In this exhortation, Pope Francis has a wonderful confession of gratitude regarding those who have provided him with a beautiful example of living the Christian life with sacrifice and effort:

*"[M]any Christians are giving their lives in love. They help so many people to be healed or to die in peace in makeshift hospitals. They are present to those enslaved by different addictions in the poorest places on earth. They devote themselves to the education of children and young people. They take care of the elderly who have been forgotten by everyone else. They look for ways to communicate values in hostile environments. They are dedicated in many other ways to showing an immense love for humanity inspired by the God who became man."* (EG, 76)

These words, close to our charism, define who we should be and steer us toward the new missionary momentum.

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A question may be asked: What should characterize our missionary momentum? How would we know that we are propelling ourselves in the correct direction?

The “boldness of charity” that leads to a “new missionary momentum” is not necessarily a call to new works and new places, but can be a renewed dedication to serve those who are poor. The new evangelization begins with an examination of one’s current convictions, recognizes the reality of the moment and seeks authentic ways to hear and proclaim the Good News. This can be done with renewed insight and fervor where we now live and work and worship. The “new evangelization” recognizes the nature of the current culture and seeks to address it with a recognition of its strengths as well as limitations.

In his exhortation, Pope Francis illustrates not only the elements which can give rise to a new evangelization, but those attitudes which hinder evangelization. He presents the shadow side of ministry with a practical clarity that suggests painful experience. We can read these sections (76-109) as an examination of conscience as well as an invitation to “a firm purpose of amendment.” Among the many superb elements that can be used to portray a “new missionary momentum,” let us select three: hope, community, and the Gospel.

### 1) HOPE

*“May the Spirit come to quench our thirst, and to satiate our longing for truth and consistency so that we may be **bearers of hope** in this world.”* (IAD, p. 7)

Against attitudes of defeatism or pessimism, *Evangelii Gaudium* reminds us of the importance of a firm and positive hope in carrying forth our ministry. In three paragraphs (84-86), we find numerous treasures of hope:

- “With the eyes of faith, we can see the light which the Holy Spirit always radiates in the midst of darkness, never forgetting that ‘where sin increased, grace has abounded all the more’ (Rom 5:20).” (84)
- “Our faith is challenged to discern how wine can come from water and how wheat can grow in the midst of weeds.” (84)

- “Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by human effort and even beyond all expectations, are directed to the fulfillment of God’s superior and inscrutable designs . . .” (84)

- “[T]he Lord said to St. Paul: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor 12:9).” (85)

- “Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil.” (85)

- ““In the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive’ (Benedict XVI). In these situations we are called to be sources of water from which others can drink.” (86)

Listen to the way each of these statements puts forward the features of a new missionary momentum! “Aggressive tenderness!” (85)

We trust that all our labors are in the hand of God and that it is he who provides both the seed and the growth. In situations in which people have lost hope due to their powerlessness, their voicelessness, or their exclusion, the Daughter of Charity is called to make provisions and be counted among them—to be “*bearers of hope*” (IAD, p. 7). Our response is to both the spiritual and material needs of those who are poor. St. Louise encourages us: “*Let us then, my dear Sisters, apply ourselves diligently to the corporal and spiritual service of the sick poor for the love of Jesus Crucified*” (L. 531b, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 515).

- Where can this momentum carry us as we are attentive to “*profound thirsts, ardent longings, and pressing calls*” (IAD, p. 5)?

One example we can identify is the ministry for those who are victims of “human trafficking”—particularly women and the young.

- Are there any persons whose situation leads to less optimism for the future?

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- To what other groups are we carried by the boldness of charity to respond with a missionary momentum as bearers of hope?

### 2) COMMUNITY

*“Guided by the Word of God, with a passion for the world into which we are sent, **together we commit ourselves** to respond to the calls of the Spirit today.”* (IAD, p. 18)

For Daughters of Charity, who have chosen to live consecrated lives, community is an integral part of our lives. We know the support that we give one another and the opportunity to love and share that each day provides.

*“The Gospel witness of the local community is an even clearer sign of the presence of Jesus Christ, loved and served in persons who are poor.”* (C. 59)

Being together demands that we learn how to speak and listen; this practice helps us in our prayer and our interpersonal skills. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis holds up the value of community as one of the goals and gifts of the new evangelization. Again, in a few paragraphs (87-92) some marvelous affirmations are made:

- “Greater possibilities for communication . . . turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity with everyone.” (87)
- “The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction.” (88)
- “The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.” (88)
- “Genuine forms of popular religiosity are incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture.” (90)

• “The way to relate to others which truly heals . . . is a fraternal love capable of seeing the grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others just as their heavenly Father does.” (92)

• “Here and now, especially where we are a ‘little flock’ (Lk 12:32), the Lord’s disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel.” (92)

One likes to think that Francis’ Jesuit life in fraternity led to some of these insights and experiences. The incarnational character of community is deeply in keeping with Vincent and Louise who had a theology of practical charity. Others are invited to carry out this communal action with us:

*“[Daughters of Charity] collaborate with associations and organizations working to combat the root causes of poverty, in order to promote justice, peace, and respect for life.”* (IAD, p. 24)

In his ministry, Jesus called a group of disciples around himself, and he taught them as he reached out to the marginalized, the excluded, and the rejected. See how the Gospel stories are filled with that lesson. Inviting people to be members of a society where they can feel the support of others as well as the joys of human companionship is a great gift—a “revolution of tenderness” (88). Learning to live together in peace points the way to eliminating war, prejudice, and need. Dealing with others personally helps us to recognize and respond to their needs. These are all gifts of community.

To what people does our “missionary momentum” lead us as we seek to share the treasures of being part of a community: perhaps those who know the pain of rejection as immigrants who travel to a new country seeking a better life; perhaps refugees who are forced to leave their homeland due to war, hunger, or prejudice; perhaps persons who are challenged mentally or physically or by disease; perhaps children without families who have no hope of resources. With the tolling of each group, it can be easy for us to remember how Vincent and Louise responded to just

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such persons in their time and place. Sister Evelyne reminds us of what the future calls for today:

*“The new evangelization needs bold Daughters of Charity, committed to going against the tide, seeking new ministries, and developing a way of being present that makes the Lord’s compassion and mercy for suffering humanity, thirsting for life, even more visible. In some cases, what exists must be strengthened; in others, the courage to innovate is needed.”* (Letter of February 2, 2014, p. 7)

Many of these people, our brothers and sisters who are poor, do not know the consolation of a caring other, of a community. The boldness of charity that can motivate a Daughter of Charity leads to a dynamic missionary response, which is interpersonal and treasures accompaniment.

### 3) THE GOSPEL

*“[Let us] give **the Word of God a central place** in our lives of faith: recognize that God speaks to us through Scripture, the Church and life events; rediscover the power of the Word at work in us.”* (IAD, p. 9)

Pope Francis indicates that the Gospel must be at the center of the new evangelization. One might think that observation is so obvious that it hardly bears mentioning. But, then he begins to describe the ways in which the Gospel has been compromised and misinterpreted—even, sometimes, by people of good will (93-97). Sometimes a “worldliness” seeps into the message (93-95). We are subject to the same teachings and dangers as we speak of our “missionary momentum” and its roots in the Gospel. Sometimes we must listen more carefully to the word that is spoken to us and not the word that we think we hear or prefer to hear. The Gospel has been too often misinterpreted or misused to the harm of the Judeo-Christian people. The heart of the Gospel is not always what people think. It is much more challenging and creative, yet simple and gentle. It is never completely grasped or ever domesticated. The Apostolic Exhortation addresses this truth of the foundational Christian message:

• “In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine, and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that

the Gospel have a real impact on God’s faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time.” (95)

• “How often we dream up vast apostolic projects, meticulously planned, just like defeated generals! But this is to deny our history as a Church, which is glorious precisely because it is a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work, tiring as it may be, for all work is ‘the sweat of our brow’. . . We indulge in endless fantasies and we lose contact with the real lives and difficulties of our people.” (96)

• [We need to make] “the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor.” (97) The centrality of the Scriptures to the lives of Vincent and Louise is well-known. Abelly writes: *“The life of our divine Savior and the lessons of the Gospel were the sole rule of [Vincent’s] life and actions. They were his book of morals and his book of politics, and they guided him in all the matters that passed through his hands. They were, in a word, the sure foundation on which he built his entire spiritual edifice.”* (Abelly I, p. 103)

Louise speaks about her desire to read the New Testament each day and learn about the life of Jesus; the fruit of this discipline is harvested in the instructions that she gives her Sisters, which are so full of biblical insight. The call is always to express the lived Gospel by responding to the physical as well as spiritual needs of the poor. For our founders, the words of the Lord did not remain safely encased in a book, but were taken to prayer and then leapt onto the streets of 17th Century France through the arms and feet of dedicated men and women who embraced the charism.

The “boldness of charity” provides a lens through which the Gospel may be read to reveal the heart and soul of Jesus. Daughters of Charity are encouraged to prepare themselves for prayer by reading the Word of God (S. 3b). From this engaged reading and reflection, the missionary momentum emerges in the lives of present-day Daughters of Charity who hear the words sending them forth into hospitals and homes (cf. C 25c). The Gospel stories and the mystery of the cross all become contemporary spurs to action on behalf of those most in need of God’s presence in their

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lives. One of the great gifts which we bring is the nourishment of the Gospel itself, and those who are poor live it for us (IAD, p. 10).

The field of education - schools, catechism classes, adult education programs - is a clear place to teach people what they need to lift themselves up in practical matters as well as in human dignity. The same is true for social outreach, health care ministries, and family guidance. The Word of God can be embraced with confidence and offer a challenge in one's life. Ultimately, the Gospel takes flesh in practical and generous action. The opportunity to invite others to share in this ministry (which was one of the real gifts of Vincent) can also be extended.

The Word of God is a seed. When it is planted among people of faith, it grows and begins to influence lives and decisions. It does not guarantee an expected success nor the solution to all problems, but it does remind people that they are loved, that we need to care for one another, and that all is in God's hands.

### III. SOMETHING "NEW"

*"Let us allow the Spirit to touch us, the Spirit who wants to make all things new and who, today, wishes to renew the very depths of our hearts and heal our wounds and those of all humanity."* (IAD, p. 8)

Little has been said in this presentation on the concept "new" as contained in the Assembly theme ("a **new** missionary momentum"). It is a significant word and suggests an important attitude. For the Renovation retreat this year at the Mother House, we reflected on the Scriptures and the lives of our founders to explore the theme of "making all things new." In the conclusion, we remembered how our "renovation" of vows always calls forth this renewal.

One of the wisdom sayings of Jesus in the Gospels highlights the need for personal commitment, which is necessary for the person who chooses to change her life and her ministry. The whole person is involved. We read:

*"No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine*

*spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."* (Mt 9:16-17)

Two images are offered here. First of all, we are told that no one sews a new patch on an old cloak. The reason for that might seem obvious. An old cloak would already have been washed numerous times, and it was not going to shrink any more. A new patch, however, would be unshrunk. Thus, when this new patch was sown over a hole in an old cloak, it would shrink and tear an even bigger hole in the garment. Similarly with the wine: new wine would still be bubbly and effervescent; it needs room to expand and breathe. An old wineskin, however, would have become hardened and set to its size. When new wine was poured into an old wineskin, the wine would burst it, and all would be lost. Clearly, one needs to put new wine in new vessels that are prepared to respond to the new content.

One of the Guides for our Assembly speaks of how "newness" implies "creativity, conversion, and change." These are valuable assets as we consider the "new wineskins" of a vibrant mission into which we pour the "new wine" of our boldness in charity. As we harness this energy, we "give new impetus to the missionary spirit of the Company" (IAD, p. 15).

When we begin to think of those who were enlivened by their service of the poor and who were thus enabled to "renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30), we think of Louise de Marillac.

Her story begins with a woman who might be considered a bit scrupulous. She was very concerned with the state of her soul, which absorbed much of her attention and energy. Her *lumière* experience at St. Nicolas des Champs highlights both her limitations and the areas in which she knew extensive growth and development. Her gifts and intelligence were too inner-directed as she began her conversion.

She learned to use these gifts for the benefit of others and for the glory of God, and thus she experienced a renewal that was a great boon for the Church. Each year, she grew in her commitment as she responded to the guidance of the Spirit. She was renewed as she allowed the light of Christ to shine upon her life and became the beacon that gave direction to her steps in her mission to most deprived.



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“Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5) is God’s promise to the human community, which is realized in this time and this place through us. Your specific vow to give yourself for your entire life to the service of those who are poor proclaims hope; you promise to be true to these people and make things new for them as you renew yourself. The tears, the mourning and the pain which are part of the lives of the poor are lessened by your service and presence.

- How filled are you with the hope of carrying out this promise?
- Are you ready to renew yourself in this way?

The Lord promises to renew the earth. One of the ways he does that is through our efforts and heartfelt commitment towards those whom we serve faithfully. With God’s help, we assume a “**new** missionary momentum.”

#### **IV. THE LOGO FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Let’s look at the **logo for the General Assembly and the seal of the Company:**

*“We are witnesses of the Spirit at work, releasing new energy, because we also see...” (IAD, p. 6)*

You have probably noted how the logo which we are using for our General Assembly is a re-imagined version of our community logo. In this breakdown, we have: the crucified Lord; the fire of zeal; and the path that leads one outward and forward, like the heart.

The motto of the Company is then expressed as the theme of the Assembly: “The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum.” In this “newness” we find the solid roots of our heritage as well as a summons to future fidelity. The bold decision for life and love that led Christ to the cross also drove the Christian community forward in courageous mission. It needs to be the same for us now.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The opportunity to reflect on the theme of the General Assembly offers a challenge to the Company and its Sisters.

We are invited to decide on a future together that respects where we have been, but also feels the urge to go forward along this same path with boldness. The call to respond to the urgent needs of the Church cannot simply be programmed; these needs must first be recognized. Out of this process emerges a sense of mission which enables us to respond to those who are poor with a newness of vision and hope and with great compassion.

Yes, we embrace “*The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum,*” which gives new strength to the motto of the Company, “*the Charity of Jesus Crucified Urges Us.*”

Father Patrick GRIFFIN, CM

**APPOINTMENT  
OF PROVINCIAL DIRECTORS**



PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AMERICA: Father Ismar Conrado DE LEON HERNANDEZ was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, January 22, 2014.

*News  
from the  
Provinces*

PROVINCE OF VIETNAM: Father Pierre Minh TRAN VAN was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, February 26, 2014.

PROVINCE OF JAPAN: Father Amado CABALLERO was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a term of three years, March 28, 2014.

Province of France South

**Experiencing illness with the Virgin Mary**

In our life stories, the Virgin Mary is always very much present, and this is especially noticeable for persons who are sick, no matter their age or their circumstances. They recognize the presence of God in Mary who listens to them and supports them in their most difficult moments. For many of them, Mary represents God's maternal tenderness, His sensitivity to the smallest details of their life, like a real mother. They often speak to Mary through the simple prayer of the rosary.

The members of the Hospital Chaplaincy Service, to which I belong, observe that the Virgin Mary has a special place in the prayer of sick persons whom they meet and accompany on a daily basis.

I am going to share with you my encounter with Yvette, who was hospitalized in a hospital in the Landes region of France, in Dax, a city located near the birthplace of Saint Vincent de Paul. In her journey and that of those around her, I observed some mysteries of the rosary. Sometimes Yvette and sometimes those who accompanied her, the presence of the Church, made me think of the Virgin Mary.

**VISITING SICK PERSONS  
AND THE MYSTERY OF THE VISITATION**

Yvette had just been hospitalized for some tests. A family member asked me to visit her, indicating that Yvette was a practicing believer.

With these precious details, I met Yvette in her hospital room. She was alone, looking tired and seated in an armchair. I introduced myself as a member of the chaplaincy team, telling her that her relatives had contacted me to let me know she was in this ward. Yvette immediately smiled and

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welcomed me. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. Have a seat.” I sat down beside her and asked how she was. She explained her situation to me: I lost my husband two years ago. After having cared for him at home for several years, almost to the end, he died at the hospital. He was a good man, and we loved each other a lot. He had worked very hard throughout his life, but on Sundays, we would go to Mass together. I had also gone to work as household help when I was very young, and those for whom I worked were good. I met my husband in the city where I worked. We got married and had two children. My son is married with two children; my daughter is finishing school. We raised our children in the Christian faith. It isn’t the same anymore today; my grandchildren started catechism classes but then stopped, and they haven’t made their first Communion. I don’t know where they are with that now. My son, my daughter-in-law and their children are very kind to me. They know how important prayer is to me, but I don’t try to influence them; I don’t want to make them uncomfortable. They have their own lives and work hard to raise their children. I have lived alone since my husband’s death; my daughter who is studying isn’t here, but when she can, she spends weekends with me. She gets along well with her brother and sister-in-law: we have a real sense of family. I miss my husband. My house isn’t far from the church, so I can go pray there when I want. I am also part of a Rosary group, and I like to pray to the Blessed Virgin. She has greatly helped me throughout my life, especially in difficult times. I entrust my whole family to her.

### ***FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF OUR LADY OF THE VISITATION, THE MEMBERS OF THE CHAPLAINCY TEAM GO OUT TO MEET SICK PERSONS.***

*“In those days Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth” (Lk 1:39-40).*

Through the visit of the hospital chaplain, it is, in a way, the Virgin Mary who sets off to meet sick persons, allows herself to be welcomed simply by them and listens to them.

During my accompaniment of Yvette, I imagined that the Virgin Mary was in my place, and here is how I thought of it, thanks to what I personally

experienced with Yvette as the days went by.

After having sat down beside Yvette and having asked about her, the “Virgin Mary” began to leaf through Yvette’s family photo album: she looked at her husband, her former employers, her two children, her two grandchildren, the rosary group, her church... The “Virgin Mary” was attentive to everything that makes up her life: her joys, her sorrows, her work, the place given to God in her prayer and other commitments. In this listening, the “Virgin Mary” didn’t stop at a surface level of things but went deep to grasp their meaning. She saw how Yvette took on her Christian identity, her vocation as wife and mother in the joyful moments of life as in the most painful ones. The gift of self and service flavored her relationships: with her husband, she built their family around fundamental values like faith, prayer, work, respect and raising their children. They desired to pass these values on to their children through their lifestyle. The “Virgin Mary” reflected with Yvette on her paths of faithfulness to God and recalled her own life and her way of living with Joseph and Jesus in love, faith, prayer and work. She understood Yvette from the inside; she saw her bravery during the trying time of her husband’s illness. She saw the quality of the love Yvette had expressed to her husband through her gift of self by serving him, unconditionally and without limits, until the end of his life.

The “Virgin Mary” lingered with Yvette over her commitment to raising her children, with her concern for passing on love and faith to them. She accepted as legitimate the choices each one had made as adults, in freedom, about the principles they had received. Listening to Yvette’s story, the “Virgin Mary” remembered the time when Jesus, at the age of 12, had distanced himself from her, and how much it cost her to reconcile herself to his words and behavior.

Then, Yvette continued her story and spoke kindly of her former employers, her children, her Rosary group... The “Virgin Mary” contemplated the quality of Yvette’s perspective that was able to recognize what is right and good in each individual. In Yvette’s perspective, the “Virgin Mary” perceived that of her Son Jesus, He who saw beyond the appearances of those He met and spent time with: a way of looking that did not judge but that inspired trust, lifted up and helped them to progress. This is why the “Virgin Mary” wasn’t surprised to hear Yvette reveal the source

### Testimonies of the Sisters

of her attitudes of love, strength and courage. Then, Mary's words from her Magnificat, exalting the Lord, quite naturally filled my visitor's heart!

#### **WAITING FOR A DIAGNOSIS AND THE MYSTERY OF THE ANNUNCIATION**

During our next meeting, a tired Yvette felt the need to express to me what she was feeling and her current situation:

“For several months, I have felt tired and had a terrible backache. I, who so loved to walk, had trouble walking. As soon as I took a few steps, I felt tired, out of breath...I didn't have any appetite. I lost a lot of weight. I have been hospitalized for tests, but they're never ending. I am tired...My children are worried...I don't want to worry them...they have their lives...”

Then, I asked her: “And you, are you worried?”

“You know, I suffer...I don't know what I have...the doctors don't have all the results yet...I watched by husband suffer...All that I ask God is to not suffer too much and to not be a burden for my children...They have their lives...I don't want to worry them... My son comes to see me almost every day after work...He stays a little while and wants to help me eat, but I can't. I know that hurts him, but I can't...He has to see the doctor for details about the results of the tests.”

I asked her again, “And you, how do you feel waiting for these results?”

“I pray to the Blessed Virgin that she help me to accept what God wants.”

A little like the Virgin Mary in Nazareth on the day of the Annunciation, Yvette prepared to welcome a message.

Yvette's path was not traced out in advance. Her illness was a unique experience; she knew that she alone must travel her life journey, taking this new reality into account: she noticed the disruptions in her body, the pains that surely have a cause, a state of fatigue and weakness that can't be a good sign. Waiting for results was full of worries, doubts, questions, of hope as well; this waiting seemed endless to her.

She was very much aware and prepared for the worst; she knew from experience that it would not be easy to accept what the doctors have to say. Close to the Blessed Virgin, Yvette knew that Mary received painful messages throughout her life, beginning with the prophecy of Simeon in the Temple of Jerusalem until the death of Jesus on the cross, which she nonetheless accepted with faith and courage. Like the Virgin Mary in the most sorrowful moments of her life, Yvette looked to what had supported her; as she waited, Yvette prayed with Mary to sustain her hope in this painful time.

Yvette was waiting for me the next day and looked serious. “The doctor came by; he told me that we are going to try a chemotherapy treatment and see how I react...”

“How do you feel about that?” I asked her.

“I am tired, I don't feel like fighting...but at the same time, I don't want to upset my children. My daughter took her father's death very hard. She is rebelling against God. For their sake, I am going to agree to try the treatment. And I ask that you help me, accompany me, support me with your prayer; this is very important to me.”

At the hospital, Yvette wanted to continue to be the Servant of the Lord. Like the Angel Gabriel in Nazareth, the doctor in the hospital comes close to Yvette as a messenger. But it is bad news that unsettles Yvette. This is beyond her! She needs time to process it; these are serious words. Yvette lets them sink into her mind and heart in order to understand the message's meaning and consequences.

Yvette, wondering what the Lord wants of her, turns toward the Blessed Virgin and remembers Simeon's prophecy: “*a sword will pierce your heart.*” Yet the Virgin Mary didn't let this painful announcement crush her. Quite the contrary, strong in her faith in God and in His fidelity to His promises, she prepared herself to go all the way in her mission as Mother of Jesus.

Supported by her heart's close union with Mary, Yvette decided to act like her: she thought, above all, of her children; her response would simply be the expression of her love for them. She chose not to do her will, but

### Testimonies of the Sisters

the will of those who loved her: she committed to fighting the disease, and, despite the anticipation of suffering she'd go through, she accepted the treatment suggested to her.

#### **THE TIME OF HOSPITALIZATION AND THE MYSTERY OF ORDINARY LIFE IN NAZARETH**

The following days, the chemotherapy began. Yvette suffered. The weakness of her body and the discomforts of the treatment were visible on her face. She waited for my daily visit to pray with me and to receive communion, which comforted her. When she received the Eucharist, her face lit up for a moment. Then we exchanged a few words and, afterwards, she liked to remain silent.

The days went by, and her condition didn't seem to improve. We spoke about the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick that she had already received during a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Her children demonstrated great closeness, care and sensitivity. Her grandchildren sent her drawings covered with little hearts and loving words. Some friends came to visit her. Yvette showed her interest in their lives; she asked for news about people she knew without ever dwelling on her own situation. Love was expressed simply and modestly but intensely.

Like Mary in Nazareth, Yvette in the hospital led a life that was seemingly ordinary. Yvette simply lived her everyday life quietly. Her hospital room had become her home. No longer able to speak with her neighbors and friends, she welcomed and listened to those who came to visit her. She asked about their joys and sorrows and didn't weigh them down with her tiredness. In her listening, Yvette didn't stop at a superficial understanding of what was happening in the lives of those around her; she strove to find signs of friendship and faithfulness. She did not complain about those who came to visit her nor about those who seemed to have forgotten her. She welcomed those who were present and excused those who were absent.

#### **YVETTE'S CHILDREN WELCOME THEIR MOTHER AND THE MYSTERY OF JOHN WHO TAKES MARY "INTO HIS HOME"**

Days passed, and new tests were scheduled. Waiting is an anxious time for everyone; there is no control, and fear and hope become confused. We think of the worst as if to ward it off...but the doctor told Yvette in front of her children, "The current treatment is not producing the expected effect." The disease continued its course.

The children considered the situation with the doctor and tried to see the possibilities. Palliative care was considered. Yvette understood that her days were numbered and wanted to be cared for at home. Her son decided to welcome her into his home as soon as possible. He would set up a room for her; his wife and children would be there for her, and his sister would come to her as often as she could.

Everything was organized to receive Yvette, who grew weaker day by day. She spoke little but understood everything. She expressed the benefits of spiritual accompaniment and prayer and wanted them to continue until she would be in the home. The children wanted to help their mother until the end. Despite their personal position in relation to God and to the Church, they accepted the idea that someone from the parish come regularly to visit their mother. In connection with the parish priest, home spiritual accompaniment in shifts would be put in place.

Like the beloved disciple who listened to Jesus' words, Yvette's children listened to their mother's words.

Welcoming the words of their mother who was near the end, they put everything in place to meet her desires. Yvette saw her children's openness of heart and their way of respecting her by listening to her and responding to her wishes. Yvette continued to focus on what her family and the Church put in place to help her.

Like Mary at the foot of the cross simply let herself be welcomed by the beloved disciple, Yvette let herself be welcomed by her children without bemoaning her own fate and the misfortunes affecting her. She believed in the presence of God who never abandoned her and would give her the necessary graces to live what she would have to live.

### Testimonies of the Sisters

#### **ACCOMPANYING LIFE TO THE VERY END AND THE MYSTERY OF THE PRESENCE OF MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS**

Yvette was welcomed into her son's home. There, everything was organized to assure the greatest level of comfort and care for Yvette, especially by respecting the quiet and rest that she needed. Her grandchildren accepted these instructions. The regular visits by the Evangelical Ministry for the Sick were discretely accepted by the family. Yvette, exhausted but clear-headed, waited for the time to be united to Jesus and the Blessed Virgin whom she loved. From time to time, the pain was intense. She slept more and more, and spiritual accompaniment became a silent presence, a simple and faithful presence; her children saw this.

Like Mary at the foot of the Cross of Jesus, the Church stood near Yvette "crucified." Humbly, through its tactful presence, the Church bore witness to the power of Love of a God who, to the very end, stands beside those who suffer and are the weakest.

As Mary fell silent before her crucified son, the Church also stood in silence before Yvette's emaciated body, contemplating this mystery of God where only the Spirit could allow light to be glimpsed.

#### **BELIEVING IN THE POWER OF LOVE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

After three weeks, Yvette commended her spirit into God's hands. Her two children had mixed feelings: sorrow because of the separation, relief that her suffering was over, satisfaction that they had been with her until the very end, showing her their love in that way, which gave each of them a sense of peace and deep communion.

During the preparations for the funeral, Yvette's children expressed their gratitude for how the Church was close to and accompanied their mother. The words they shared were simple but real. Suddenly, as if pushed by an inner force, her daughter-in-law announced, "*From now on, we will go to Mass on Sunday, and I am going to enroll our children in catechism class for next year.*"

#### **AFTER JESUS'S DEATH, MARY CONTINUED HER MISSION WITH THE DISCIPLES**

As Mary accompanied the disciples after Jesus' death, a team of parishioners continued to accompany Yvette's children in the name of the Church, trying to be a Marian presence with them, wiping away all tears and opening up paths of trust. The wind of Pentecost breathed upon them. Now, they will have to struggle on to remain faithful to this breath that seems to draw them further... If they continue to believe, they can always count on the faithfulness of the Virgin Mary who, at the foot of the cross, received this mission from Jesus.

Sister Elise BORTHEIRIE  
*Daughter of Charity*

Province of Krakow

## Meeting of the Slavic Provincial Councils *BLESSED SISTER MARTA WIECKA GROUP*

The meeting of the Slavic Provincial Councils took place in Krakow **October 18-22, 2013**, with Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, Sister Zofia Danisackova, General Councillor and Father Patrick Griffin, Director General. The “Blessed Sister Marta Wiecka” Group brings together the Provinces of Poland (Chelmno, Krakow and Warsaw), Slovakia and Slovenia and the Region of Albania.

October 18, after the Eucharist presided by Father Jozef Lucyszyn, Director of the Province of Krakow, the participants gathered in the retreat room to get to know each other. Presentations, group work, time for personal reflection, sharing and prayer were scheduled for this meeting; there was a gathering with the children and youth of the Saint Vincent Residence, a tour of the city of Krakow and a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Divine Mercy and the “John Paul II Center”.

The next day, during the Eucharist, Father Patrick Griffin said in his homily, *“In the two teachings which our liturgy offers us today in the Word of God, I hear the invitation to be dynamic in the adherence to and proclamation of our faith, and I hear the summons to be directed by the Holy Spirit in new and exciting ways. For me, these two elements bring together the call of the New Evangelization, which requires that we are sure of what and in whom we believe and an active witness to that belief.”*

In her presentation the same day, Sister Evelyne gave us some suggestions for reflection on the role of the Visitatrix in her accompaniment of Sister Servants. She also presented several topics to stimulate reflection in our Provinces during this period preceding the General Assembly. We first reflected on them in groups and then had a discussion with her.

In the afternoon, the participants visited the Saint Vincent Residence, located near the Provincial House. Administered by the Daughters of Charity, it receives young people from families experiencing difficulties. Together with volunteers, Sister Malgorzata, who is responsible for the work, presented the Residence’s educational plan: it emphasizes the youths’ individual efforts and their responsibility for their own lives. The youth, for their part, shared their skills and the results of their work in various disciplines, especially sports.

October 20, Father Patrick spoke about the spirituality of the service of authority, drawing from Sacred Scripture, Church teaching and the Founders’ teaching. He stressed the necessity of good formation for this ministry in order to live it in a spirit of joy and faith. The same day, the participants visited Krakow, an ancient royal city.

That evening, a time of recreation, prepared by the young Sisters of the Province, allowed us to become familiar with some Polish traditions. The evening concluded with a presentation on the life of Sister Izabela Luszczkiewicz, a Daughter of Charity from Krakow, who spent many years in prison, where she was tortured because of her activity for the liberation of Poland from communism.

October 21 was a new day of reflection, sharing, and evaluation. After the Eucharist celebrated at the Shrine of Divine Mercy in the Saint Faustina Chapel, the participants visited the recently built “John Paul II Center”. Its goal is to promote and highlight the heritage left by John Paul II: spirituality, culture, and traditions connected to his life and pontificate.

October 22, Father Patrick presided at the Eucharist and shared with us in his homily: *“Our longing is a holy restlessness put in us by God to push us toward the infinite. When we long for God in a divine way, we are not drained but energized. We recognize a task and a goal and a means of achieving it.”* Next, Sister Evelyne, Sister Zofia and Father Patrick

### Testimonies of the Sisters

shared with the Sisters in initial formation and visited the Senior Sisters in the retirement facility, who were eagerly awaiting them.

This meeting was a time of grace, of looking more deeply at the mission the Company has entrusted us, a time to listen to what the Lord is saying today to the Church and to the Daughters of Charity, a time for getting to know each other better and for establishing closer connections among our Provinces.

Sister Monika DLUBACZ  
*Daughter of Charity*

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## SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

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Province of San Vincenzo - Italia

### **Erection of a new Province of the Daughters of Charity**

May 30 – June 1, 2013

May 30, 2013, at Casa Immacolata in Rome, more than 200 Daughters of Charity gathered for the erection of the new province of San Vincenzo - Italia. They represented the local communities of the three Provinces of Rome, Turin and Sienna.

In the name of all those present, Sister Maria Pia Bertaglia, Visitatrix of the Province of Turin, greeted Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, Sister Rosa Maria Napolitano, General Councillor, and Father Patrick Griffin, Director General, who had come from Paris for the event. She said, *"Today we are tracing out the path of a new Province. Providence has gone before us and been with us to achieve this goal. Today, we are experiencing an event that marks the beginning of other events. With God's grace, let us cultivate an open heart, free and accepting, in order to welcome all those who knock at our door, starting with our Sisters. We must build a new Province together: our strength is a communion of hearts to go out to and serve with love all those who are poor."*

Then Sister Evelyne addressed the Sisters present and all those who, by internet, were able to follow the event live: *"In this time of reconfiguration of Italian Provinces, Saint Louise has much to say to us. All of us want to learn from her and Saint Vincent, under whose protection you have placed this new Italian Province."* Referring to the mystical experience of the *Light of Pentecost* and commenting on Saint Louise's spiritual testament, Sister Evelyne spoke about the vitality of the charism, the fruit of the Spirit always at work in the Church. She emphasized the



### Testimonies of the Sisters

Christological and ecclesial dimensions of our vocation and our specific virtues. In her commentary on Saint Louise's spiritual testament, she stressed the importance of the spiritual life, the mystique of service and community lived in acceptance and mutual trust, forbearance and communion: "*what we pass on through deeds has more power than what we say with words.*" In the current context, it is important to emphasize the evangelizing aspect of charity: "*charitable and social activity begin with life witness and consistency.*" Finally, Sister Evelyne invited us to rediscover the Founders' writings and the documents of Vatican II.

Then, Father Patrick Griffin, Director General, spoke about the different gifts of the Spirit that lead us to follow Christ more closely. He focused on three gifts of the Spirit based on the lived experience of three Daughters of Charity: Marguerite Naseau, Rosalie Rendu and Giuseppina Nicoli.

\* Marguerite Naseau, **so zealous**, is the model of all Daughters of Charity... "*As we reflect upon the creation of a new Province, we can identify Marguerite Naseau's willingness to go where she was asked and do whatever was necessary.*"

\* Sister Rosalie Rendu demonstrated great **hope** and encouragement, *important gifts so that a Province can look at the future with faith and live the present with strength.*

\* Sister Giuseppina Nicoli, for her part, always bore witness to great **joy** to all those around her: *a joyful community speaks of God's goodness.*

Then, all the participants gathered in the chapel of Maria Immacolata to celebrate the Eucharist presided by Father Griffin. After the reading of the Gospel of the healing of the blind man, Father Patrick remarked, "*Sisters, you as well, like Bartimaeus, you should believe that Jesus listens to you, that he waits to hear what is really important for the future of your new Province and be ready to accept what He provides...*"

The day concluded with a prayer vigil at the parish church of Saint Joachim, in which many parishioners and members of various Vincentian associations participated.

### **MAY 31, 2013: THE HISTORIC MOMENT**

The following day, May 31, the celebration of the feast of the Visitation, began with prayer accompanied by symbols and meaningful gestures: each Visitatrix of the three former Provinces of Rome, Turin and Sienna handed the list of Sisters and the Provincial Plan to Sister Evelyne. Then, each of them carried a flask of oil and poured it into a lamp that Sister Evelyne lit and offered to Sister Beatrice Priori, designated as the Visitatrix of the new Province of San Vincenzo - Italia.

After the prayer service, two Sisters recalled the path traveled to reconfigure the three Italian Provinces, a journey marked by difficult decisions and courageous choices. Then, Sister Evelyne officially presented the Visitatrix with her Council and the Director of the new Province of San Vincenzo - Italia, made up of 812 Sisters and 69 local communities.

### **WALKING BOUND TOGETHER**

Sister Beatrice Priori, welcomed with warm applause, spoke to the Sisters: "*I will walk beside you, putting my entire person in an unqualified way at the service of the Province of San Vincenzo - Italia...I do not know how things will go, but I place my trust in Christ...today we set off with hope and confidence; bound together, we set off. Walking bound together means we must adjust our pace to that of the others...Together we will seek where God wants us to go with Him in order to do His will.*" She then thanked the Sisters who were ending their mission as Visitatrix.

Finally, Father Passerini, Provincial Director, spoke to the Sisters: "*We are all workers in the vineyard of the Lord, with our limitations and our resources.*" He stressed the importance of living a spirituality of communion and that each individual's participation is necessary in order to discern well.

### **THE BLESSING OF THE NEW PROVINCIAL HOUSE**

After the Eucharistic celebration presided by Father Gregory Gay, Superior General, the blessing of the "Saint Louise" Provincial House for the new Province of San Vincenzo - Italia took place.

### Testimonies of the Sisters

The day concluded with a concert by the “Blue Notes” Choir of San Ponziano, with a diverse musical repertoire, performed skillfully. The presentation carefully blended the music and Vincentian texts.

Saturday, June 1, in Saint Peter’s Basilica, His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Comastri presided at the Eucharistic celebration in which the Sisters and nearly 700 members of the Vincentian family participated.

Each of us went back to our communities with joyful hearts with these words of encouragement from Sister Rosa Maria Napolitano, General Councillor: *“A new Pentecost begins for Italy. We can start off with renewed confidence and enthusiasm.”*

Sister Patrizia BIN  
*Daughter of Charity*

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## SISTERS’ TESTIMONIES

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Province of the Near East

### **Ministering to youth with difficulties in an Egyptian school**

Saint Vincent de Paul School is located in the heart of the Egyptian capital of Cairo, at the foot of the citadel. It brings together 1,220 students from kindergarten to high school, the majority of whom are Muslim. The Christian students, Orthodox and Catholics, are a small minority.

Our community includes four sisters who work at Saint Vincent de Paul School of Helmieh and one sister who runs a clinic that treats more than 250 patients a day. The school receives many children from poor or middle-class families. It provides them quality education that allows them access to a better future. This education is not limited to academic work, but includes development of each young person’s character to help expand his or her capacity for acceptance, listening and understanding. We offer them the possibility to participate in various Catholic movements: Eucharistic Movement for Youth, Scouts and especially Vincentian Marian Youth. We imbue them with the Vincentian spirit, love of God and others, especially the most disadvantaged.

The school offers remedial classes for the children and youth who are struggling academically, and free snacks are provided for the poorest students. One day I saw little girls on the playground sharing their snack with their classmates who didn’t have one, or they whisper to the Sisters that one of them didn’t have anything to eat. Their care and generosity teach me a lot. I am always touched by gratitude of the students, especially the poorest ones, who return after completing their studies and obtaining a job and present me with a sum of money, saying, “It is thanks to the Sisters that we managed to have this status in society today, so in turn, we should help others to have this opportunity.”

### Testimonies of the Sisters

“No suffering should be foreign to you.” Our service with youth puts us face to face with various forms of poverty: lack of love, of security, of principles and of money. We also teach catechism to children and youth and work for women’s promotion in a very poor neighborhood, Boulac. With them, I have learned a more modest lifestyle, to be satisfied with what I have and especially to rely on Providence. These poor people with nothing in their homes evangelize me because, when we distribute bags of food for the holidays or at times of dire poverty in their families, they accept them with faces covered with smiles and tears at the same time, giving thanks to God, saying, “The Lord has visited his people.”

Service of those who are poor edifies me because it is in serving the most destitute that I have discovered that the hand of the Lord extends to his “brothers” the poor, and that we are only instruments in his hands who strive to show them the love God has for them. Despite their difficult situations, poor persons always maintain their trust in God.

The events that have been taking place in Egypt for more than two years cause dysfunction at all levels, putting the poorest households in a precarious situation: unemployment, poverty, lack of security, persecution... Our people have gone through difficult times with the Muslim Brotherhood: threats, houses destroyed, churches burned, but they have never given in to violence or revenge, saying, “Let them burn the church; our hearts and our houses will be churches, but it’s not acceptable for them to burn Egypt.” For me, this was a lesson about faith and the sense of belonging. Some of the patients at the clinic and the parents of Muslim students demonstrated their love and solidarity with us. Even if we sometimes have a sense of powerlessness, we continue to believe that the Lord goes ahead of us to help us support those around us. With my Sisters, I give thanks to God for our charism that helps us discover poor persons’ dignity and their capacity for love.

Sister Hanane ADIB  
*Daughter of Charity*

### **A Providential Encounter: Frédéric Ozanam and Sister Rosalie Rendu**

In his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI states, “Being a Christian is...the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”<sup>1</sup> The Holy Father is speaking here of the transformational encounter of the Christian with the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. Through the course of history, however, there have been providential human encounters which have also brought about, for the persons involved and those whose lives they touched, a “new horizon and a decisive direction.”

Such was the encounter in seventeenth-century France of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac which led to some thirty-six years of friendship and collaboration in service to Jesus Christ suffering in the person of those who were poor. Together with their collaborators the Ladies of Charity, the Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity, they opened a new horizon of outreach to those in need and transformed the face of charity for their era and beyond.

Another such unlikely but providential encounter would occur two centuries later, in 1833, also in France, between the young intellectual, Frédéric Ozanam, and the then

1. Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI GOD IS LOVE, Deus Caritas Est, To the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, Men and Women Religious, and All the Lay Faithful, on Christian Love* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 1.



## A Provincial Encounter

forty-seven year old, simple Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie Rendu. Their direct collaboration would be of shorter duration but would lead to the transformation of the Conference of Charity into the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and to the Vincentian Vision informing Frédéric's dream of "a network of charity that would encircle the world."

The story of the origin of the Society is well-known and was frequently recalled during this past year when we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Ozanam's birth. Now that the celebrations have drawn to a close, let us rather focus on the role of Sister Rosalie in its formation, development, and vision.

Much more attention has been paid to this since, on 22 August 1997, Pope John Paul II evoked Sister Rosalie's name in his homily at Frédéric's beatification at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. The Holy Father stated, "The bonds among the members of the Vincentian Family have been strong since the origin of the Society because it was a Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie Rendu, who guided the young Frédéric Ozanam and his companions toward persons who were poor in the Mouffetard section of Paris."<sup>2</sup>

When Frédéric and his earliest confreres made their way to the offices of *La Tribune Catholique* on that evening in 1833, they were already aware of their Christian obligation to make their lives correspond to their words and to reach out in charity to those in need. They were also mindful of the life and example of Vincent de Paul, the Patron of Works of Charity, of whom Ozanam would later say, "His is a life that we must continue, a heart where we must warm our hearts, an intelligence where we must seek light."<sup>3</sup>

Their spiritual advisor and mentor, Emmanuel Bailly, owner of the newspaper, had surely seen to that. In his youth, Bailly had thought of becoming a Vincentian priest or Lazarist, as they are known in France. While he did not join them, the discernment process deepened his love

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2. *Discours du Pape et chronique romaine*, "Béatification de Frédéric Ozanam," Notre-Dame-de-Paris. 22 August 1997 (Paris, 1997).

3. "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to François Lallier," 17 May 1838, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*, 1: 308-309.

and veneration for Saint Vincent de Paul, which was a long held tradition in his childhood home. Indeed, his oldest son would be named Vincent de Paul.

Frédéric had come into contact with Bailly in 1830, not long after his arrival in Paris to pursue his law studies at the Sorbonne. He was only eighteen years of age, homesick, and appalled by the violently anti-Catholic atmosphere of Paris, "one of the capitals of unbelief." Bailly was a former professor of philosophy at the Oratorian College, a secondary school for boys, in Juilly outside of Paris. In 1830, he had opened a boarding house for students in the capital, at 11, Place de l'Estrapade, adjacent to his own home and near the Law School and the Panthéon. He transformed it into a focal point of spiritual and intellectual activity, which later turned to works of charity. Bailly's personal experience as an educator and as a member of associations dedicated to the apostolate of service to those in need had prepared him well to be the spiritual advisor for the earliest members of the fledgling Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Moreover, Bailly and his wife knew Sister Rosalie well and shared her love for and desire to come to the assistance of the inhabitants of the most poverty-stricken quarter of Paris. Her reputation as the "Apostle of the Mouffetard District" was firmly established by 1833, and the little house of the Daughters of Charity on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois had become the "Headquarters of Charity" for the French capital. It drew the rich and the powerful as well as the desperately poor, the young and the old, students and seminarians, women and men, all of whom were, to a greater or lesser degree, an essential part of Sister Rosalie's vast network of charity.

Ozanam and his companions had certainly heard of her, especially after their group turned toward works of charity. Once it became apparent that they were ready for this new undertaking, Bailly, quite naturally, sent them to her. So it was that, in these early days, Frédéric and his companions became what he would call, "auxiliaries of the Sisters of Charity."<sup>4</sup>

Let us now examine how the service of those who were poor in their homes, which was the first work of both the Ladies of Charity (1617)

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4. Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Frédéric Ozanam, Positio*, XXIV.

### A Provincial Encounter

and the Daughters of Charity (1633), became the primary service of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The House of Charity on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois was an excellent place for these young men to begin their service in the Vincentian spirit not only because of Sister Rosalie's total dedication, but because the house had a tradition of welcoming young Catholic students and initiating them to the service of those in need. In his life of Ozanam, Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, O.P., describes the initial steps of the founding members:

*“These eight [they were in fact seven] thus had this inspiration to prove once again that Christianity can accomplish in favor of those who are poor what no doctrine could do before or after it. While innovators wore themselves out with theories for changing the world, these [young men], who were more self-effacing, set about climbing up to the floors where the misery of the quarter hid. These students of yore could be seen in the prime of youth, visiting, without revulsion, the most abject hovels and bringing the vision of charity to the inhabitants who knew only misery.”*<sup>5</sup>

For her part, Sister Rosalie would welcome these eager young men with open arms, her heart filled with joy. She would often repeat to her sister companions, “Oh, how good these young people are, oh, how good they are.” The needs of the destitute inhabitants of the Mouffetard district were so great that there was more than enough work for these willing and generous volunteers. It must be remembered, however, that they were young, from the provinces of France, with no experience of Paris, let alone the sections, like the Mouffetard district, where the teeming masses, drawn to the capital by the illusory promises of the Industrial Revolution, huddled together in wretched hovels which were breeding grounds for misery, disease, and crime.

And they were students, which meant that money was in short supply and that they had meager resources to bring to those whose existence they hoped to alleviate. Thus, they enthusiastically placed themselves at Sister Rosalie's school. Accompanied by her and the Sisters of the little house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, they began their apprenticeship as

5. Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, *Notice et panégyrique sur Ozanam* (Paris, 1872), 223-224.

Vincentian servants of those who were poor. The Conference of Charity was evolving into the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Even the Bureaus of Public Assistance, which the Napoleonic Government had created in each arrondissement to oversee the Houses of Charity, looked favorably on the project. A certain Monsieur Lévêque, a friend of Bailly, recounts:

*“For seven or eight years, as administrator of the Bureau of Charity of the [XIIth] arrondissement, I had... from 450 to 500 indigent households, for whom Sister Rosalie was... the visible [hand of] Providence. [Among them were] families worthy of greater interest. I asked Sister Rosalie to make a choice and put the Conference in contact with those she considered better disposed to welcome the visits of our novices in this practice of charity.”*<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the inexperienced little group became a vital part of the already fruitful collaboration between Sister Rosalie and the Sisters of the House of Charity on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois and the administration of the Bureau of Public Assistance. One important service they provided was the distribution of vouchers for food, clothing, blankets, and firewood to eligible inhabitants of their district. The recipients, however, many of them elderly or ill, had to go to their offices personally in order to obtain the vouchers. Sister Rosalie had persuaded the administrator to give them to her for distribution, thus saving her “beloved poor” from this added burden. In turn, she furnished the members of the Society with some of them, allowing them to obtain the goods and bring them to those in need.

It is perhaps worthy of note here that, at the time of Sister Rosalie's beatification, the descendants of one of the administrators, Monsieur Colette de Beaudicourt, gave the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity 405 requests for vouchers which he had received from her, detailing the needs of each person and how the funds would be dispersed. It is significant that Monsieur de Beaudicourt kept what seems to simply be business correspondence. The gesture reveals one of Sister Rosalie's greatest qualities: her ability to collaborate with government officials,

6. Cited by Marcel Vincent in *Ozanam, une jeunesse romantique* (Paris, 1994), 275-276.

## A Provincial Encounter

whatever their political persuasion. And the government in power in France changed frequently and radically during her nearly fifty years at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois.

Personally she was apolitical. For her, all that mattered was that the government in place be reminded of its obligations to its citizens in need. Monsieur de Beaudicourt and others in his position, even the most anti-clerical, admired and respected her focus, which was always on her “beloved poor.” This was, likewise, a valuable lesson for Frédéric and his companions as they set about navigating the sometimes troubled seas of public and private assistance. They learned early on that, despite their generosity and dedication, they could not provide vital relief alone. A network of charity was essential. Armand de Melun, Sister Rosalie’s close collaborator for 18 years and a member of the Society from 1839, tells us, in his biography of her, how his mentor viewed this necessity:

*“In her eyes, nothing less than all the forces of public and private charity were necessary to fight against the invasion of poverty. The collaboration of Church and State, of organizations and individuals seemed indispensable to her in the [struggle] against so terrible an enemy. In this arena, she did not understand rivalries, oppositions, jealousies, or fear of seeing funding sources dry up because of the multiplication of works. Charity is like God. The more one asks of it, the more it gives.”*<sup>7</sup>

But she did not simply refer families and supply vouchers for food and clothing. She shared with the young students her heartfelt convictions on the manner in which each poor person was to be served. It was in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, who told his early collaborators that they must not be deterred by the appearance or behavior of persons who were reduced to misery but rather, “turn the medal and...see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Melun, when Sister Rosalie met with the members of the Society, either alone or as a group:

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7. Armand de Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie, Fille de la Charité*, 13<sup>e</sup> édition (Paris, 1929), 87-88.

8. Pierre Coste, C.M., Ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, Conférences, Documents*, XI, p.26.

*“She recommended to them patience, which never considers the time spent listening to a poor person as wasted, since this person already takes comfort in the good will that we demonstrate by attending to the recitation of their sufferings; understanding, more inclined to pity than to condemn faults that a good upbringing did not ward off; and finally, politeness, so sweet to a person who has never experienced anything but disdain and contempt.”*

She would then continue to defend her “beloved poor”:

*“Oh! My dear children, ...love those who are poor, don’t blame them too much. The world says, ‘It’s their fault. They are cowardly, ...ignorant, ...vicious, [and] ...lazy.’ It is with such words that we dispense ourselves from the very strict obligation of charity. Hate the sin but love the poor persons [who commit it]. If we had suffered as they have, if we had spent our childhood deprived of all Christian inspiration, we would be far from their equal.”*<sup>9</sup>

And they listened. These intellectuals from the Sorbonne, these elite in law and medicine, placed themselves at the school of this humble Daughter of Charity whose own formal education was limited indeed. Her name opened the doors of the hovels of the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district to them. Because her “beloved poor” trusted her, they trusted them. And when their visits were over, they returned to her little parlor to recount what had happened and to receive her advice and encouragement. Well before Vatican II, Sister Rosalie and her young collaborators were practicing “apostolic reflection,” a sharing together of events and situations occurring in the service of those in need in order to discern more clearly what God was asking of them. This practice has become widespread in parishes and religious congregations in recent years. However, it was not in common use during Sister Rosalie’s era. This exercise is also an answer to Sister Rosalie’s critics, who accused her of activism. Neither she nor her collaborators lost sight of the spiritual foundation of their service. Under her guidance, the Society took form with each confrere focused on its “peaceful goal of honoring Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of a few people who were poor.”<sup>10</sup>

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9. Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 99-100.

10. “L’origine de la Société” in *Manuel de la Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul* (Paris, 1845), 185.

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In her usual way, Sister Rosalie took no personal credit for the good accomplished. Rather, she rejoiced that the work of God for her “beloved poor” was being carried out by these dedicated young men. Once again, it is Melun who tells us of his friend’s reaction:

“Seeing so many poor people led back to the Church through the ministry of this Conference, so many children being sent to Christian schools, so many workers enrolled in pious associations. In seeing, above all, the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul support one another [against] the weaknesses of human respect, follow the law that they taught to poor persons and practice the virtues they preached, she blessed these young men and thanked her holy patron for having showered on them a breath of his spirit and a ray of his charity.”<sup>11</sup>

And Sister Rosalie’s companion on rue l’Épée-de-Bois, Sister Saillard, adds from her personal experience:

“Sister Rosalie sometimes told us how happy she was to see young men, like Ozanam..., bringing assistance to their poor [families] and carrying wood on their shoulders that they were happy to deposit in their miserable hovel.”<sup>12</sup>

The work of visiting those who were poor in their homes continued to expand under Sister Rosalie’s steady guidance and encouragement. The number of young men involved grew from the original seven in 1833 to at least 70 by May 1834.<sup>13</sup> While the increase was welcome and more of the poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district could be better served, dealing with growth would prove to be a painful process for the nascent Society. The question arose of how to handle both the service of those in need and the meetings, which were becoming cumbersome. Mutual support among the members remained an essential element of their service, so preserving it became a greater concern as membership expanded.

Thoughts of reorganization and expansion began to take form. In a letter to Ernest Falconnet, Ozanam put forth the idea of extending throughout

11. Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 123-124.

12. Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 63.

13. Georges-Albert Boissinot, S.V., *Un autre Vincent de Paul: Jean-Léon Le Prevost (1803-1874)* (Montréal, 1991), 105.

France, “a vast and generous association for the assistance of the working classes.”<sup>14</sup> It must be remembered that Ozanam is referring here, as elsewhere when he writes of “workers”, to the definition that Paul Droulers, S.J., puts forth in his *Politique sociale et christianisme*, namely, “in common parlance the word ‘worker’ is a synonym for ‘poor’ and this poverty becomes misery, a lack of the strict necessities of life, the moment there is the shortest layoff from work.”<sup>15</sup> It was to respond better to the urgent wants of these people, whom Ozanam was convinced had “too many needs and not enough rights,”<sup>16</sup> that his dream for the Society was that it would one day “encircle the world in a network of charity.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, on November 3, 1834, Ozanam wrote to Bailly from Lyons, cautiously broaching the possible division of the Conference saying, “the meeting of the charity, which has become more numerous, could be divided into two sections.”<sup>18</sup> He wanted to proceed slowly so as not to upset his mentor. Nonetheless, he presented the idea to the group at the December 16 meeting. The subsequent discussion was heated, the depth of the opposition apparent. The great fear seems to have been that any division into sections would lead to weakening the bonds of friendship and support that had existed among the members from the beginning.

Nothing would be resolved at this meeting or at the subsequent two. Commissions were created, reports given, and finally, after the dust had settled, it was decided to go forward with two sections. Bailly was to remain president of both. Ozanam would be vice-president of the first section, the Conference of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, while Levassor was to be vice-president of the second section, the Conference of Saint-Sulpice. Each held its own meeting on March 3.

The little Conference of Charity had survived its first crisis, a crisis of growth. From now on, it would go forward throughout Paris, throughout France, and ultimately throughout the world, and “receive into its bosom

14. “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet,” July 21, 1834, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam* 3 vols. (Paris, 1978) 1:143.

15. Paul Droulers, S.J., *Politique sociale et christianisme* (Paris, 1969), 24-25.

16. “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Joseph-Théophile Foisset,” February 22, 1848, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam* 3 vols. (Paris, 1978), 2:379.

17. “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Léonce Curnier,” November 3, 1834, *Ibid.* 1:152.

18. “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Emmanuel Bailly,” November 3, 1834, *Ibid.*

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all those young men who desire to unite themselves to it by prayer and to participate in the same works of charity in whatever country they are found.”<sup>19</sup>

With the division, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul took on its true physiognomy. It would no longer be limited to the parish of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Indeed, Sister Rosalie would request and receive a conference for the parish of Saint-Médard. Rather than coming from the Sorbonne, these students would come largely from l'École Polytechnique and l'École Normale Supérieure. We have no exact date for its establishment, but Ozanam would refer to it as the “most pious Conference in the capital.”

The question arises as to what role, if any, Sister Rosalie had in the process leading to the division of the Society. The minutes of the pertinent meetings do not mention her.<sup>20</sup> However, a report by a member, Claudius Lavergne, goes so far as to claim that unanimity was reached when it was learned that Sister Rosalie favored the division.<sup>21</sup> It is not our purpose here to enter into the debate surrounding this matter. Rather, it seems that while Sister Rosalie's name does not appear in the minutes, she could well have influenced the outcome. She did, indeed, want a Conference at Saint-Médard, and she worked in close contact with all involved. She understood the importance of mutual support in the very demanding service these young men were undertaking. Nonetheless, her focus was ever the same: the better service of those who were poor. If she believed, and it appears that she did, that dividing the group into sections would further this goal, then she surely communicated this to the confreres. So, one way or another, she played a significant role at this decisive moment in the history of the Society.

While the school and dispensary were vital aspects of the service provided by Sister Rosalie and her sister companions in the little house on rue l'Épée-de-Bois, visiting the poverty stricken inhabitants of the Mouffetard district in the miserable hovels they called home was their primary activity. It was to be the focal point of the service the young

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19. *Règlement de 1835*, article I (Paris, 1836).

20. *Extraits des procès-verbaux de la Première Conférence (1833-1835)*, ASSVP, Registre 101.

21. *Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio*, 165-166.

“Vincentians” shared with the sisters and other volunteers who came to the house for formation as servants of those who were poor.

There is a painting by the American artist, Gary Schumer, called “The Home Visit,” which beautifully illustrates this and which was widely circulated this past year as we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Frédéric's birth. It shows Frédéric, dressed in academic garb, making a home visit in the Mouffetard district. He is accompanied by two students, one with a tablet to tutor the little boy and the other with a basket of bread for the family. In the background are the Society's two mentors: Emmanuel Bailly in a top hat and the simple Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie Rendu.

Ozanam had completed his doctorate in law at the Sorbonne in 1836. Three years later, he earned his doctorate in literature there. In 1841, he began teaching foreign literature at the Sorbonne and, in 1844, he became a full professor. He was a gifted instructor who not only taught literature brilliantly but who inspired his students to serve those who were poor directly. Frédéric himself felt qualified to address the social justice issues of the working poor because he knew their sufferings first hand. He encouraged his students to likewise place themselves at Sister Rosalie's school and to learn in the garrets of the Mouffetard district, together with those subject to its misery, the formidable problems they faced and to work to find solutions.

And they did. When they returned home after completing their studies, they established Conferences in their own parishes. At the time of Frédéric's death in 1853, just 20 years after he and the other young founding members had first approached Sister Rosalie for guidance and support, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul had spread to all five continents. Frédéric's dream for the society “to encircle the world in a network of charity”<sup>22</sup> had become a reality.

While home visits would remain central to the service of the Sisters and of their generous volunteers, events sometimes overwhelmed them, and their focus had to shift, at least for a time. Frédéric had arrived in

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22. “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Léonce Curnier,” November 3, 1834, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam* 3 vols. (Paris, 1978), 1:152.



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Paris in 1830 when yet another revolution was rocking the capital. The following years, concluding with the Revolution of 1848, were filled with turmoil. This was the period of the barricades when the exploits of Sister Rosalie, the heroine, occur. It is also the time when Ozanam raises his voice in defense of the working poor and the cause of social justice, his credibility anchored in his direct service of the suffering inhabitants of the Mouffetard district. Armand de Melun became a member of the society in 1839. He was elected to the National Assembly in 1848 and is recognized for the most significant body of social legislation of the era. He too had learned the essential needs of those who were poor and possible solutions for their plight under Sister Rosalie's guidance and was able to convince his wealthy colleagues in the Assembly to support him. Thus, although Sister Rosalie herself remained apolitical, she had a profound influence on Catholic social thought and legislation of the time.

As if war were not enough, flood, famine, bitterly cold winters, and three cholera epidemics (1832, 1849, and 1854) would decimate thousands more poor and unfortunate people. The heroism that had characterized Sister Rosalie during the revolutions would appear again as she, the sisters of her house, and her many collaborators – including the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul – struggled against this invisible enemy. Just as she had fearlessly mounted the barricades, so she would run a perhaps even greater risk, as she went about tirelessly bringing aid and comfort to the sick and dying and their families and even burying the dead of the Mouffetard district, which was particularly ravished by the epidemics.

In the *Bulletin de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul*, for 1849, Frédéric Ozanam recounts the work of the confreres during the epidemic. For a two-month period, some of them placed themselves under Sister Rosalie's guidance and direction "as the first founders of the Society had come together fifteen years earlier."<sup>23</sup> And, when calls for help came to Sister Rosalie from outside Paris, she sent some of her volunteers, although this added to the work of those who remained in the Mouffetard quarter.

Thus, more than 2,000 victims received physical and spiritual assistance. In addition to food and medicine, they brought hope, and "faith returned to the houses they visited."<sup>24</sup>

When cholera struck again in 1854, Sister Rosalie was sixty-eight years of age and in failing health. Nevertheless, she once again gave her all as she, her companions, the doctors, and her valiant volunteers, including members of the Society, worked tirelessly to bring succor to the victims and support to the survivors of the scourge. On August 16 she wrote to the pastor in her native village of Confort telling him, "We are very busy and the cholera only spreads. We are losing many people. There is desolation."<sup>25</sup>

This epidemic, like its predecessors, finally ended, leaving behind devastation and misery. Those who had worked at Sister Rosalie's side or under her direction, among them the confreres of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, even after the death of their principal founder, Frédéric Ozanam, the previous year, would continue to struggle with her to bring relief to the people of the Mouffetard district, who had suffered so much from its ravages.

Although not specifically mentioned, there are two other areas in which Sister Rosalie's influence on Frédéric and the early members of the Society was certainly key: the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Rule of 1835. Let us examine them briefly here.

First, the *patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul*. As stated earlier, from its earliest days the members of the Conference of Charity had devotion to Saint Vincent de Paul owing, no doubt, to the influence of Emmanuel Bailly whose spirituality and service were permeated with his spirit. But it is especially due to Sister Rosalie, under whose gentle guidance these generous and enthusiastic young men became "Vincentians." As they entered the hovels of the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffetard district, they strove to discover the image of the suffering Christ in the ravaged faces surrounding them. They learned from Sister Rosalie that

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23. *Bulletin de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul*, vol. 1 (1849), 250-252.

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24. Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 160-161.

25. *Letter of Sister Rosalie to the Pastor of Confort*, August 16, 1854, AFCP, 8J2 – Ro – Le 278-La. 30.

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charity is neither philanthropy nor socialism. It is much more and can only be nourished by faith, by the firm conviction that they were serving Jesus Christ in those who were poor. A letter of Ozanam reveals just how well this truth had been embraced. He wrote:

*“It seems that we must see in order to love; and we see God only with the eyes of faith; and our Faith is so weak. But we see poor persons with our bodily eyes. They are there and we can place our finger and our hand into their wounds... and we can say with the apostle, ‘Tu es Dominus et Deus meus [My Lord and my God].’”*<sup>26</sup>

However, the Society was not officially placed under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul until February 4, 1834. The proposal came at the weekly meeting, but not from Bailly or Ozanam and certainly not from Sister Rosalie. Rather, according to the minutes, it would be Jean-Léon Le Prevost “making himself the interpreter of the wishes of several members, [who would] ask that the Society place itself under the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul, celebrate his feast, and in addition, recite a prayer [to him] at the beginning and end of each meeting.”<sup>27</sup>

The minutes then go on to say that “no proposal could be more warmly received by the Society; all the remarks to which it gave rise can be summarized by congratulations and praise for the member who authored it.”<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that this proposal and one then put forth by Ozanam that the Society place itself under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary were the “first adopted unanimously”<sup>29</sup> by the members.

Le Prevost’s proposal was a sort of baptism for the Society. The patronage of Saint Vincent was official, and the Conference of Charity would henceforth be the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. More and more the confreres would turn to Vincent for inspiration. In 1838, Ozanam would

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26. “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to Louis Janmot,” November 13, 1836, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam* 3 vols. (Paris, 1978), 1:242.

27. *Extraits des procès-verbaux de la Première Conférence (1833-1835)*, ASSVP, Registre 101.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

confirm this: “Now, in place of the *Imitation of Christ*, we read *The Life of Saint Vincent de Paul* so as to be more imbued with his example and traditions.”<sup>30</sup>

The members of the ever-expanding Society were learning well from the life and works of Vincent de Paul, but also from the living of examples of his spirit and traditions, Emmanuel Bailly and particularly Sister Rosalie, at whose side and under whose guidance they became “Vincentians.” Their combined effort is fittingly described by Georges-Albert Boissinot, S.V., biographer of Jean-Léon Le Prevost, who would go on to be ordained a priest and found the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul and who was one of Sister Rosalie’s closest collaborators:

*“Emmanuel Bailly, Frédéric Ozanam, Sister Rosalie Rendu, Jacob Libermann [Founder of the Spiritans] Jean-Léon Le Prevost, ... [and one could certainly add Armand de Melun], what a team of apostles and holy persons walked the area around the Panthéon and rue Mouffetard, called the street of the revolutions!”*<sup>31</sup>

Second, the *First Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul*. The growth of the Society from the initial Conference of Charity into an organization of many conferences, which had spread beyond Paris to the provinces, led to the realization that some form of regulation was essential if the original spirit was to be maintained. Thus, in 1835, Emmanuel Bailly, François Lallier, and Frédéric Ozanam were charged with the task.

As with the first Rule of the Daughters of Charity, the first Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was a product of lived experience. For two years, the first confreres had given themselves to God to serve Jesus Christ in the person of those who were poor under the guidance of Sister Rosalie. This humble Daughter of Charity exemplified for them the essential attributes of Vincentian service. But the time had come to codify the experience for the ever-growing number of members, especially those who might never have the opportunity of knowing or working alongside Sister Rosalie. Their desire was to give form and structure to the nascent Society and to clarify the identity of the members as Vincentians.

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30. “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam to François Lallier,” May 17, 1838, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam* 3 vols. (Paris, 1978), 1:308-309.

31. Boissinot, *Un autre Vincent de Paul*, 247.

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Two years of experience working with Sister Rosalie and the Sisters of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois had shown the members that, even with zeal and generosity, they could not respond to every need. Thus, while remaining open to the Spirit leading them to discover the ever-changing face of misery, they set forth their goals:

*“Jesus Christ wanted first to practice what he must then teach... Our desire, in keeping with our limited strength, is to imitate this divine model. Therefore, the end of the Conference is:*

1. to sustain its members in the practice of a Christian life by example and mutual advice;
2. to visit those who are poor in their homes, to bring assistance in kind... and to offer them religious consolation...;
3. to apply ourselves, according to our talents and the time that we have at our disposition, to the elementary and Christian instruction of poor children, whether free or in prison...;
4. to distribute moral and Christian books;
5. to apply ourselves to all kinds of other charitable works, for which our resources are adequate [and] which are not contrary to the primary aim of the society....”<sup>32</sup>

In the 1835 Rule, the members are urged to practice “all virtues,” but six are considered as most necessary for the accomplishment of their charitable works. These are self-sacrifice; Christian prudence; an efficacious love for one’s neighbor; zeal for the salvation of souls; gentleness of heart and humility in words; and especially a fraternal spirit.<sup>33</sup>

All these virtues, the young confreres had learned at Sister Rosalie’s school. Yet, none of the three authors of the Rule of 1835 had ever read the first Rule of the Daughters of Charity. It did not circulate outside the community. They did, however, witness Sister Rosalie and the other Daughters of Charity with whom they worked apply it to their lives and their service of those in need. Echoes of this living Rule are apparent in the 1835 text: Jesus Christ loved and served in the person of those who are poor; Jesus Christ, Model of all charity; humility, simplicity, gentleness,

32. *Règlement de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris: Imprimerie de E-J Bailly et Compagnie, 1835), 8-9.

33. *Ibid.*, 10.

compassion, respect and devotion in their dealings with those in need; love of neighbor united to zeal for the salvation of souls; service that is at one and the same time “corporal and spiritual”; and finally, charity and union among themselves as they support one another for the service of those who are poor.<sup>34</sup>

In less than two years, the young members of the Society had become imbued with the essential attributes of Vincentian service. They were now ready to share it in a formal Rule with other members, many of whom would never walk the streets of the Mouffetard district, climb the rickety steps to its miserable hovels or experience Sister Rosalie’s gentle guidance first hand as they reached out to bring assistance and comfort to its desperately poor inhabitants. As with the first Rule of the Daughters of Charity, the Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul would undergo revisions over the years. But, in both cases, the essence remains and calls forth rededication to the primitive spirit. Sister Rosalie’s beatification, on November 9, 2003, has led the members of the Vincentian Family to rediscover their roots. In an article written for the *Echoes of the Company*, the internal international communication organ of the Daughters of Charity, José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha, 14th International President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, proposed a subject for reflection for the Daughters of Charity that has application for the entire Vincentian Family. He wrote:

*“I suggest you meditate on this question: are the times we are living in so very different from those of Sister Rosalie Rendu? I would honestly say yes and no. Suffering takes on different forms, and the causes of it are different. But people remain the same, and they still need the loving care of their brothers and sisters...*

*Will we be able to find, in our own times, other ‘mothers’ who will be willing to believe in lay groups and collaborate in their formation for the service of the poor and later be able to let these groups spread their wings, respecting and emphasizing their need to be independent? Some of you will say, as did Sister Rosalie one day, ‘This can be done.’ Serving the Church of the poor is well worth the effort.”*<sup>35</sup>

34. *Ibid.*, 10-18.

35. José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha, “The Saint Vincent de Paul Society Today,” *Echoes of the Company* 4 (July-August 2004): 330.

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Just as the providential convergence of the destinies of Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, and the founding members of the Ladies of Charity transformed the face of charity in seventeenth-century France and beyond, so the providential encounter of Sister Rosalie, Frédéric Ozanam, Emmanuel Bailly, Jean-Léon Le Prevost, Armand de Melun, and the founding members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul indelibly marked the service of those in need in the nineteenth century, and continues to do so today on five continents. The Vincentian Family, which took its first steps in 1617 in Châtillon, a tiny village in southeastern France, has journeyed to the farthest corners of the earth, fulfilling Ozanam's dream of "encircling the earth with a network of charity." Sister Rosalie was, and continues to be, of considerable importance in this realization.

Sister Louise SULLIVAN  
*Daughter of Charity*

March 2014

Dear Sisters,

When I was in high school, I read about the North American martyrs. One of the elements which interested me in these stories was that these missionaries took an oath never to return home once they set out for the missions. Clearly, their focus was not to be on the persons and the places which they left behind, but on the persons and the places which lay ahead. That is a powerful statement on the nature of a missionary. It should say something about us.

I want to thank publicly Father Greg for calling me to this service. It is one of the significant roles in his mandate as Superior General and I am honored to have shared in this grace. I also want to thank Sister Evelyne and through her all of you, the Daughters of Charity. You have revealed much to me regarding the proclamation of the Gospel on behalf of the beloved persons who are poor. Lastly, I want to thank Father Bernard for his willingness to assume this role of Director with such generosity. He represents for me all the confreres who serve with you.

When I came to Paris, the first thing which I told the Sisters on the rue du Bac was that I loved the Daughters of Charity. I have repeated that truth often to different groups of Sisters during my years as your Director General. Now, as I leave, I can say it again and with greater reason.

My Sisters, I hear the compelling call of the mission, even in the mysterious way in which it sometimes arrives. An encouragement of St. Vincent, with St. Louise nodding her approval, rings true for us: "Let us adore the wondrous will of God in this action." Blessed be God! Whatever my next assignment, I shall continue to minister to and with the Daughters of Charity in some form or other. We need to remain close to each other.

At this moment of change, let us continue to pray for one another and for the mission, always holding up those who are poor whom we serve.

Your brother in SS. Vincent and Louise,

Patrick J. Griffin, CM

