

REFLECTION

National Council Meeting

Sr Therese Haywood DC
20-21 July 2019



A Vincentian Reflection on Change

Change is part of life but something which can be difficult to negotiate. We all acknowledge that we are living in times of unprecedented change and for us as National Council this is a time of transition into a new period of leadership. What can we learn from St Vincent, St Louise and Blessed Frederic about how to negotiate change well?

In an article about St Vincent as a leader of change Margaret Posig describes the vision that inspired Vincent and Louise

*Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac "shared a vision, that of Jesus Christ to be loved and served in the person of those who are poor." This shared vision enabled the two saints to collaborate in achieving their goals of service to the poor, and they "modeled their decisions on Jesus in order to carry out God's will in their lives."*¹

St Vincent and St Louise were guided in all that they did by the will of God; they were people of prayer who took time to discern the next step. St Vincent said

*To find suitable means for implementing this plan, look to God: if this is done, will God be glorified by it? Will it be beneficial to the Community, and will the neighbor be helped by it? ...Above all else, look to God's interest.*²

He also reminds us that we need to have openness to the new and be patient if things are made difficult in a period of transition

*I hope both you and he [priests] will adore the guidance of God in this unexpected change and that it will find prompt and loving acceptance in your hearts. I ask this of Him with all my love, and also to preserve and bless you so that you may accomplish His plans for you.*³

¹ Margaret Posig, Saint Vincent de Paul as a Leader of Change: The Key Roles of A higher Purpose and Empowerment, Vincentian heritage, 26(1): 33

² CCD 13b, 271-272.

³ CCD vol 5 p 451

We should take as a maxim never to be surprised at current difficulties, no more than at a passing breeze, because with a little patience we shall see them disappear. Time changes everything. ⁴

St Louise reminds us that changes are always necessary and that we must adapt and change if we are to continue to serve the poor well.

Changes can and must occur. If they are not accepted, we shall never enjoy the peace of soul that is essential... ⁵

You are well aware that changes are always difficult, and that it takes time to learn new ways of serving the poor skilfully and well. ⁶

Frederic Ozanam in a letter to his friend Leonce Curnier reflected upon the need to divide the original conference into sections.

As it is possible that with the beginning of the school year our number will increase and rise to a hundred, we will have to divide up and form several sections which will have a common assembly periodically. When these new arrangements are taken, I will let you know. For despite what I have said about the dissimilarity that seems to me to exist between our two societies, there must be no diminution of union and harmony. On the contrary, like divergent spokes touching the same center, so our varied efforts tending toward diverse ends come together in one and the same charitable mind and proceed from the same principle. There must then be agreement among us in order to double our strength. There must be frequent communications which provide us a laudable example for good and render us a common joy in the success of each one. ⁷

We can take from the wisdom of our Vincentian models several principles:

- the need for change,
- the importance of patience with ourselves and the process of change,
- the need for good communication
- the recognition of the diversity of opinions and ways of doing things
- the importance of coming together in pursuit of our common goal.

In this time in our church and our world, leaders are called upon to help our members make the changes that are necessary. We can do this by articulating clearly the mission of the Society, drawing on the faith of our members, and looking at reality but also communicating hope.

What strikes you in this article? What challenges can you see ahead for us and which principles would be helpful in negotiating them?

Sr Therese Haywood DC
Spiritual Adviser, National Council

⁴ CCD Vol 3 p382

⁵ Spiritual Writings. Pg 813 A. 66

⁶ Spiritual Writings. Pg. 385 L. 337

⁷ Frederic Ozanam, a Life in Letter, 56.