

# Reflecting on our identity

We are a lay Catholic organisation. There is some confusion around what the term 'lay Catholic organisation' means? It is true that there are challenges that come with being Catholic. We belong to a church that has a very long history. Some parts of this history can be difficult to reconcile.

The Catholic Church is also one of the largest humanitarian organisations in the world. Right throughout history, men and women have worked tirelessly through the church to build hospitals, educate people and deliver assistance to those who are in need. Following the message and teaching of Jesus Christ who calls us to feed people in need, heal the sick and stand up for the marginalised. This is as true today as it was a thousand years ago. This is what Catholics call 'faith in action' and it's the genesis of our St Vincent de Paul Society.

Our St Vincent de Paul Society was born as part of the Catholic Church. Frederic Ozanam came up with the idea of our organisation after being challenged to 'show the good works' of the Church. The idea of forming local groups and going out to meet people in need to show love through acts of kindness and generosity spread rapidly throughout the world in a couple of decades.

Our identity as a 'lay' organisation, means that we have our own leadership that is separate to the traditional leadership of the Church. We work alongside the many other groups that form part of the Catholic Social Services. What we have in common with these many other organisations is a shared faith that has a deep commitment to serve people who are marginalised. It is a faith that leads us to see Christ present in the lives of people struggling through poverty, injustice and diseases of despair, in the same way that we see Christ present in the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

We are not all Catholic, and that is a good thing. We need all talents, skills and diversity in our organisation so we can best understand and tackle poverty effectively as Bl Frederic Ozanam dreamed of two hundred years ago.

## Question for Reflection and Discussion

What does the identity of the St Vincent de Paul Society mean to you?

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What parts of the Church do you find challenging?

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What parts of the Catholic faith do you find inspiring?

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How do you see yourself and your work as part of the one of the largest humanitarian organisations in the world?

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