



**International Confederation  
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul  
Council General International  
16<sup>th</sup> President General**



Paris, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## **Special message to my dear young Vincentian members of SSVP Conferences worldwide**

### **Opening**

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, the **SSVP International Youth Day** was established by the Council General International. I am most pleased to convey this special message to all of you, our dear young members, **in recognition of the presence of young people at the SSVP Conferences** since its glorious foundation in 1833.

Fortunately, this date is also the feast day of Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, a clear example of holiness for the Catholic Vincentian youth worldwide. Frassati was a role model as a son, a brother, a student, a Catholic, and a social and political activist, all in accordance with the principles of the Holy Church, the Gospel and the Christian family.

***"Rejoice, you who are young, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes" (Ecclesiastes 11: 9)***

### **Challenging times**

As we know, humanity is going through tough times in the aftermath of the international health crisis. However, the pandemic is not just a health issue; it has caused social disruption and economic hardship. Many have lost their jobs and their hopes. We are all suffering, some more than others, including us, members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, but especially the most vulnerable. **We should not forget that, right from the very beginning of our Society, the young founders were confronted with similar epidemics and were able to keep the flame of charity alight, notwithstanding all the difficulties.**

It is clear that the current restrictions have given rise to a new lifestyle. **Young people have had to learn how to live, how to live together and how to survive.** Civil society has embraced remote working and education. Moreover, the pandemic has had an impact on relationships and has

negatively affected mental health. Young people have taken advantage of new technologies to keep in touch with their friends. On the other hand, the poorest people, without access to computers, mobile phones and the Internet, are excluded.

Once I was told that the pandemic would not cause problems. As a matter of fact, problems were already there, and the pandemic has revealed or exacerbated them. There has been an increase in inequality and deprivation both among and within countries. The geopolitics of the vaccine has made it clear that while some are celebrating without wearing masks, most of the world is waiting for the first dose. Famine, vulnerability and uncertainty have increased. **Being young today is a huge challenge.**

Faced with all this, my message to all of you is direct and very clear: **Remain steadfast in your Vincentian mission, strong in faith, pray a lot and do not be afraid.** As Jesus said: Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid" (Matthew 14: 27). Let us trust in Divine Providence, because God is on your side. He, in his infinite goodness, will fill us all with the strength to do good, to save souls, to help those in need, to flee from the snares of evil and to bear witness to his Word. God is with the young, keeping them safe and strengthening them.

***"Young people, I am writing to you, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2: 14)***

## **Creativity and Resilience**

Nevertheless, young Vincentians have been very active and creative, reaching out to those who are suffering in these gloomy times. There have been countless initiatives of social projects and local campaigns across every continent, led entirely by SSVP young members, as well as acts of piety, prayer and devotion, which are Vincentian hallmarks. In many regions, the Conferences have remained active, solely and exclusively thanks to young members, who have never been discouraged. Young people are the key players in these tough times, doing "charity from within charity".

Due to the pandemic, the special collection for Vincentian youth, which we started some years ago, won't be launched this year. Instead, we kindly ask everyone to reflect on the urgent need for Vincentian Councils at all levels to devote specific resources to youth promotion, setting aside an appropriate budget for programmes related to Youth Committees, as well as youth recruitment, formation and training. It would be great if the social projects carried out by young members were given more support and opportunities to thrive.

***"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4: 12)***

## **Commitment to Youth**

Given this context, Vincentian youth is **doubly important**. First of all, we, as SSVP members, rely on the freshness of youth to keep our essence ever young, creative and innovative. Secondly, the people we serve, through our home visits and charitable works, are also in need of the Vincentian support and the courage of the young.

I want you to know that in me you have a **great supporter and advocate**. I joined the SSVP at the age of 15, and I fully understand the concerns and challenges faced by young members. There will be always room for you in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and especially at the International Council General. Committed to youth initiatives, **I am pleased to announce two initiatives** which will drive the actions of our young members forward. These initiatives will be organised by the International Vice Presidency for Youth, Children and Adolescents, led by fellow member Willian Alves and his team:

*a) **October 2021**: 2021 Digital Salamanca, a virtual SSVP international youth meeting, led by national youth coordinators and young members who took part in the international youth meeting held in Salamanca in 2018. This event, which will offer a great Vincentian formation opportunity for the Youth Committees of Superior Councils, seeks to commemorate the incredible moments experienced in 2018.*

*b) **January 2022**: An international Vincentian youth competition is to be launched. The prize for the winners will be all their expenses for attending the two youth events to be held in August 2023 in Lisbon (Portugal): the International Youth Meeting, hosted by the Vincentian Family, and the World Youth Day (with Pope Francis).*

***"Youth are helpful for their audacity, even for their imprudent acts, for the new ideas they bring, for the initiatives which we had not considered."* (Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam, 1847)**

## **Final Message**

Finally, **I would like to ask you all to further spread the news about the work undertaken by SSVP Youth Committees** in every country. To that end, we have included a new section in our digital magazine, **Ozanam Network**, to collect these testimonies of life and charity with the poor. This section is yours, young people! I encourage you to contribute to our digital magazine and share the ongoing good practices worldwide.

By the same token, I would like to add: "Seize the opportunities that arise in your journey within the Church and the SSVP, and make the most of your free time with courage and efficiency, always focusing on the best service to the poor and your own sanctification".

As President General, I want the **SSVP's International Youth Day** be celebrated by all of us, members of all ages in every country, with as much enthusiasm as possible. **In the international themed year of Jules Devaux, may Blessed Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam, enlighten your paths.**



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renato Lima de Oliveira'.

Fellow member **Renato Lima de Oliveira**  
16th President General