

Sanctity and Unity in Diversity

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One of the most beautiful aspects in the life of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the unity and synergy that reigns among its members, when it comes to the promotion of the most needy. There are no divergences between us, the members. There are only certainties: our work must focus on evangelization, seeking a more worthy life for the most needy people, in the name of Christ, for the glory of God.

This unit constitutes a differential aspect in the daily life of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, which even distinguishes us from other movements and pastorals. At the same time we enjoy that unity, each of its members is, of course, different. Each brother and sister has his or her own culture, talents, life experiences, origins, education, various influences received, etc. But, faced with the challenge of solving the problem of the poor, we are completely aligned, united, in tune, convergent.

It is evident that, in the management of the Councils and of the Conferences, conflicts and debates of ideas can arise that, up to a certain point, can be intense and heated. After all, we are human and sinners. But the discussion stays there: as soon as consensus is reached, we move on to speak the same language, all defending the same point of view, pronouncing the

same speech. This “unity in diversity” has always moved me, and it was one of the reasons that brought me to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

At the same time that we achieve “unity in diversity,” another unfoldment automatically takes place: the search for holiness. If we are united, even though we think differently, we have many more possibilities to achieve holiness, which is the reason for our work with people who suffer. As the International Rule teaches us (item 2.2), “Vincentians are called to walk together towards holiness,” even “aware of their own weakness and vulnerability.” This path to holiness is not only carried out in visits to the poor, in participation in the daily life of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul or in the life of prayer in the Church, but also when each member detaches himself from his or her own opinion, seeking the convergence of opinions in decisions considered controversial. This way of acting, conciliatory and friendly, impels us towards personal sanctification, in a climate of service to those who suffer the most. It is necessary to be flexible and tolerant.

Dear Vincentians of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other members of the Vincentian Family: we are truly different, unique, but united in Christ and united in the suffering of the poor. That is why, on the way to holiness, we can even diverge, but we find consensus with the help of the Holy Spirit that softens our hearts and gives us the understanding to know that our role, as members of the Church and volunteers, is much more important than the small differences of opinion that, many times, are designed by the devil that wants to promote divisions.

Acting with sweetness, simplicity, humility, disinterest and zeal, the Vincentians perfect their spiritual life and help to build a less unequal and more supportive world, serving in hope.

Renato Lima de Oliveira

16th General President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul