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Spring 2008

## What Would Vincent do Today to Overcome Poverty?

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### Recommended Citation

Tavanti, Marco Ph.D. and Mousin, Reverend Craig B. (2008) "What Would Vincent do Today to Overcome Poverty?," *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol28/iss2/2>

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— Preface —

## What Would Vincent do Today to Overcome Poverty?

BY

MARCO TAVANTI, PH.D., AND REVEREND CRAIG B. MOUSIN

*Editors and Symposium Codirectors*

How would Vincent de Paul address the issues of poverty in the twenty-first century? Are Vincentian institutions of higher education implementing their missions to educate women and men for service? How do they use their assets to foster teaching, research, and service in keeping with Vincent's leadership in marshaling resources to reduce poverty? These questions inspired the Vincentian Poverty Reduction Symposium of 24 April 2007, and the articles included in this volume of the *Vincentian Heritage*. In collaboration with Sister Margaret Kelly, D.C., of St. John's University and Dr. Marilyn Fleckenstein of Niagara University, faculty and staff members from these two Vincentian institutions and DePaul University shared their best practices and aspirations for the amelioration of poverty's burdens. Reverend Norberto Carcellar, C.M., a Vincentian committed to poverty alleviation and systemic change, who works with the homeless people and scavengers of Payatas, metro Manila, in the Philippines, presented the symposium's keynote talk. Later in 2007, the Opus Prize Foundation recognized Father Norberto and his work with the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines as exemplary in the struggle for poverty elimination, systemic change, and social entrepreneurship. With Father Norberto also representing Vincentian Philippine universities and colleges, the symposium aimed to stimulate conversation on the roles and responsibilities of Vincentian academic institutions in the struggle against poverty. By way of videoconferencing, panelists and members of the audience exchanged ideas on the means by which Vincentian universities can educate students for service in the Vincentian tradition. This publication includes and expands on those ideas.

We know of Vincent de Paul's and Louise de Marillac's goals and means from the voluminous correspondence they shared during their years of collaboration to aid the poor of France in the 1600s. Through their work, many innovative programs spread not only through France, but through other parts of Europe and in Madagascar as well. Frederick Ozanam told his fellow founders of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society that we would do well to invoke and imitate Vincent. He added, "We are reading at present at our

meetings the life of St. Vincent de Paul, in order better to penetrate ourselves with his maxims and traditions. A patron saint should not be a signboard to a society, like a St. Denis or St. Nicholas over the door of a tavern.... We owe him consequently the twofold homage of imitation and invocation.”<sup>1</sup>



“The beggar-Christ and Vincent de Paul.” By Meltem Aktas.  
Commissioned by Rosati House, DePaul University.  
Courtesy of Rosati House, DePaul University, Chicago, IL

Thus, in addition to the one-day symposium, we solicited academic articles and experiential reflections from faculty and staff at the five major Vincentian academic institutions worldwide: DePaul University, St. John’s University, Niagara University, Adamson University, Santa Isabelle University and All Hallows College. You will find their responses in this volume. The Vincentian legacy encouraged collaboration between our faculties, staffs, administrators, students, and alumni to replicate ideas and share strategies while fulfilling the mission of our Vincentian academic institutions. We are convinced that working to reduce poverty is integral to our Vincentian

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen O’Meara, *Frédéric Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne. His Life and Works* (New York: Christian Press Association Publishing Co., 1879), 113-14, quoting a letter from Ozanam.

values, Vincentian education, and Vincentian leadership. After all, Vincent de Paul cannot be defined simply as a good leader, educator, or saint without considering his total dedication to faith in God and service to the poor.

These articles illuminate many inspiring practices at Vincentian academic institutions on three continents. They picture leaders, programs, and institutions that view their educational missions in solidarity with economically and socially disadvantaged people and communities. These reflections and examples go well beyond encouraging service to the poor. They speak of systemic changes to fight poverty through resource allocation, strategic implementations of programs, and the promotion of university/community partnerships to reduce the local and global consequences of poverty.

We could not take this modest step without the support and encouragement of many. We thank each of these Vincentian institutions for encouraging their faculty and staff to see their vocation in light of service to the poor. We are also grateful to the Vincentian Endowment Fund (VEF) and its board for the grant that enabled us to host this symposium and to publish these papers in the *Vincentian Heritage*. Special thanks go to Avery Buffa for his administration of the grant that ensured Father Norberto's travel to Chicago and his presentation, as well as the program itself. We also appreciate the assistance Alice Farrell similarly provided.

The Vincentian Endowment Fund provides a concrete example of how Vincentian universities support their mission statements. Founded in 1992, it sponsors an annual grant cycle through which any faculty member, staff member, or student at DePaul can seek funding for a community service project that will further the university's mission.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, thirteen of the DePaul authors in this issue of *Vincentian Heritage* received VEF grants to support either the work they describe in their articles or other projects related to that work. In these pages, one will also see how Niagara University, through its Niagara University Community Action Program (NUCAP), provides its students with assistance in service-based learning. Support for Vincentian Service Fellows also inspires student leadership at St. John's University. Santa Isabella deems itself a "university of the poor," and therefore its programs must make higher education accessible to those who would otherwise be denied it. These examples, and others described in these articles, demonstrate how Vincentian institutions advance their mission to serve the poor.

We also share our great appreciation for the information services staff at DePaul, including Nicola Foggi, Cornell Lambert, and Martin Williams, student workers Brad Petrik and Tim Boonprasarn, as well as Herm Platt at

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Vincentian Endowment Fund, see: <http://mission.depaul.edu/vef/index.asp>.

Niagara University and Luis Ramos at St. John's University, who handled the videoconferencing at our symposium. Their expertise enabled our participants to communicate not just through the written word but in real-time conversation.

We are grateful for the copyediting of Renaldo Migaldi, whose keen eye and sensitivity helped provide this issue of *Vincentian Heritage* with a consistent style. Likewise, we would have been lost without the organizational skill of Andrea Pope, who helped coordinate the collection of these articles. We are especially thankful to Nathaniel Michaud, director of publications for the Vincentian Studies Institute, for his direction and wise counsel in finalizing all of these articles for publication. The Vincentian Studies Institute also deserves our deep appreciation for dedicating an entire issue of *Vincentian Heritage* to the cause of poverty reduction.

Finally, we stand in humble awe of all who have gathered during the last four centuries to provide witness to the efficacy of doing and teaching — the commands of Saint Vincent de Paul for all Vincentians who, through their work, add to his legacy of ennobling the God-given dignity of all we meet.

Our final hope with this publication is to stimulate interest, initiatives, and collaborations among our Vincentian institutions for tackling the multifaceted realities of poverty in our neighborhoods, our countries, and our world. As the programs described in these pages grow, may they also encourage others to develop innovative ideas about how Vincentian higher education can inculcate service learning, teach students about the dignity and resources of the poor, and increase awareness of systemic change, social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, and social justice.

VINCENTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION,  
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION