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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol42/iss6/7

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Vincentian Apostolate at Adamson University (Manila)

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Procurator General

**Historical Background.** Adamson Ozanam Educational Institutions, Inc., was founded by George Lucas Adamson and Alexandar Athos Adamson in 1932 as a school of Industrial Chemistry. After World War II, in 1948, the University rented the buildings owned by the Vincentian Fathers at San Marcelino Street, Manila and stayed there until 1964 when the priests took over the administration of the University. At that time there were only 4,000 students; after 34 years of Vincentian administration the school population reached 22,000 students.

**Vincentian Apostolate.** Although Adamson University was founded as a secular school, when the Vincentian Fathers took over, they introduced several important religious programs to place it in line with the general ideals of Catholic Education. A theology department was opened, campus ministry was strengthened, Masses were held daily, religious icons and celebrations were introduced on the University campus. These diverse apostolic activities were based not only on the various guidelines from the Holy See which looks at education as a most important apostolate but also from the experiences of Vincentian Universities around the world (e.g. St. John's in New York and De Paul University in Chicago) and the apostolate of the Seminary-colleges before World War II.

**Teaching of Religion.** After the Vincentians took over the University, twelve units of theology courses were required for graduation. This means that a student had to stay in class for around 150 hours before he is given his graduation diploma from Adamson University. During a particular semester as many as 8,000 students are taking one of the four subjects in theology: Introductory Course in Theology, The Bible, Dogma and the Sacraments, Morals and Ethics. Some of the Vincentian administrators willingly spend hours in the classroom but the vast majority of the professors are laymen and women, some of them Ladies of Charity and members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, who have degrees in Catholic Theology.

The importance of the religious teaching can be glimpsed from the fact that the majority of the poor students who study at the University at the tuition fee of $200 a semester, have practically no catechetical instruction in their primary and secondary schools which are run by the government. The introductory course in religion (Theology I) is so basic that even the Buddhists, the Muslims and the Protestants can attend the course without qualms of conscience. As the Philippines is a third world country, the parishes and dioceses around the country can barely afford to sponsor the catechetical instructions in the public schools.

The Vincentian Fathers had a very firm guidance and direction of the Theology Department which was for many years under the chairmanship of a priest, this writer having been the first chairman of said department. The priest-chairman sees to it that
the textbooks being used are good, the professors well-qualified, and the teaching-learning experiences beneficial to the students. For the past few years, as many as 25 professors teach in the department of theology, all of them trained in the best theology schools in the Philippines and abroad. Special ongoing formation was given to the theology faculty members in the form of seminars, lectures and special courses in the various theological centers in the country. Some of the theology professors have written textbooks for the use of their students.

Many priests, including this writer, have taught basic theology at Adamson University. As in all courses, the problem was to keep the students interested, communicate enough of the basic Catholic doctrine and to insist that theology is an important part of their lives. The interest of students was enhanced by multi-media presentations, contests and prizes, poster making and painting. One special occasion was the feast of St. Vincent, when all theology students were asked to paint or draw a picture of St. Vincent, write an essay or declaim a poem in honor of St. Vincent de Paul. The classrooms were sources of information and knowledge for the interested priest-professor to get a feel of what the young were thinking about God and their relationship to Him, the various cults in the area, their problems about religion, their parents and their future. There were so many occasions to take care of the young who were not only poor materially but also spiritually and mentally handicapped.

All year round, the Theology department undertakes special programs for the students: retreats by groups, special Masses on various occasions, confessions on first Friday, apostolate with the prisoners and the sick, teaching of catechesis in addition to the daily Masses held on campus. Practically all the freshmen and the graduating classes had to undergo a one or two-day retreat in preparation for entering the school year and for graduation year. Generally, the priest-chairman, the campus minister and the five or six priests assigned to the University give the retreat. But due to the large number of retreatants, around 4,000 students a year, other priests from the neighboring areas are asked to help out. For many students, these retreats are the first retreats of their life and they are inspired to take their spiritual life seriously. This is the time when some are encouraged to become priests or nuns. There are dozens of Sisters who were students of Adamson University; many students became Vincentian seminarians and two have been ordained priests.

**Campus Ministry.** Campus Ministry is one of the Vincentian arms of the University because of its direct contact with the students who belong to poor families. In addition to their activities they undertake programs which keep them in contact with the less fortunate members of society: "The Campus Ministry also participated in programs for special occasions. Its staff shared in the closing of the International Marian Year Congress on *Humanae Vitae*; the National Laity Week; the CBCP episcopal Commission on the Youth; the Forum on CBCP Pastoral Letter and Challenge to Fundamentalism; the National Bible Year Congress; the Youth Encounter and the Operation Kamay to help earthquake victims. The Campus Ministry's extension services included the PGH Sunday choir, the Annual Day with the Poor at Golden Acres, PPL Depressed area, settlement, etc" (cf. DelaGoza & Churchill, *Adamson University: A History*, p. 218).
The Campus Ministry Office was also in charge of the Vincentian organizations, e.g. the Children of Mary and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Around 60 Children of Mary and 200 members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are active every school year. Several dozen Ladies of Charity are also on campus but most of them are members of the faculty and so are not under the Campus Ministry. The students who are members of the Children of Mary and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul take turns helping in the animation and preparation of the daily Masses at the University. The altar decorations they prepare every week are beautiful, inspiring and imaginative coming as they do from young talents who would later on become architects and engineers because the majority of Adamson students are in the Engineering and technological courses.

This group of students undergoes special training with the campus minister and the directress of campus ministry. They take part in special activities related to their spiritual life and apostolic activities. They spend a certain number of hours visiting dozens of hospitals, asylums, psychiatric centers, etc.

**Integrated Community Extension Service (ICES).** The Integrated Community Extension Services (ICES) is another Vincentian service arm of the University specifically instituted to reach out to the underprivileged members of society. A yearly report noted the following activities of ICES: "Although it is relatively new, it has attracted the attention of many groups, especially the accreditation councils, for its untiring efforts in reaching out to the underprivileged members of society. Its occupational skills program graduated 316 students, its food processing seminars had 49 participants, the dressmaking class had 56" (cf. DelaGoza & Churchill, op. cit., p. 217).

The Vincentian Fathers, through the Adamson University ICES office, saw another instrument of their apostolic ministry. With hundreds of people who benefitted by the occupational skills, food processing and dressmaking programs, they opened other projects. There were training for computer skills, automotive, and electrical skills. Many of the trainers were volunteers from among faculty members and students of the University. One of the most popular and effective training programs was computer literacy for youth. At one time practically all the 150 or so secretaries of the Archdiocese of Manila underwent several days of a training program which helped revolutionize the record keeping and accessing programs in the whole archdiocese of Manila. Before the training sessions, the participants are invited to pray, read the bible or listen to some short inspirational talks by the director or a priest.

**Conclusion.** There is little doubt that Adamson University is a rich field for the apostolic ministry of the Vincentians who have administered the school for the past 34 years. The number of students (22,000 every year), a majority of them from the middle and lower income groups, the facilities of the University and its Vincentian orientation as a Catholic University augur well for the future of the University. The various institutional departments, notably the Theology Department which takes care of around 4,000 students, the Campus Ministry with the support of the Children of
Mary (COM) and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP), the Integrated Community Extension Services (ICES) all help in setting up a Christian atmosphere.

Students who pass through the portals of Adamson University are one in proclaiming their Vincentian brand of training in the various fields and corporations which hire these graduates can distinguish their service orientation. Students who finish their course are assured of a real change in their social and personal lives. They are able to climb from poverty to decent living, from spiritual ignorance to Christian living. As the former president of the University emphasized in his inaugural address: "If the students study law, they can become Vincentian lawyers, with the predilection towards the poor and the deprived. Future managers should remember that they need to help solve the social problems of the country.... Future educators, writers, and artists should be made aware that they are in a position to shape and influence public opinion towards the common good" (cf., DelaGoza & Churchill, op. cit., p. 395).