

# Final Document for the Symposium

## On Wise Stewardship of the Assets of the Vincentian Family

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From August 9-11, seventy-two members of the Vincentian Family from every continent met in Paris to reflect on Vincentian management of the patrimony of the poor as "Wise Stewards". Our work was based on the conviction that the resources that the Lord has entrusted to us "*are the patrimony of Jesus Christ, the sweat of poor people*"<sup>1</sup>. The themes and cases studied during the Symposium can be found on the web page for the Vincentian Family Symposium:

<http://mission.depaul.edu/VincentianIdentity/vfs/Pages/default.aspx>

As a result of all our reflections on the administration of goods and wishing to serve our Lords and Masters better, we conclude that the following concepts and principles should be taken into account.

### Stewardship

Wise stewardship of the patrimony involves caring for all the goods of creation that God has entrusted to us, including material goods and our personal gifts. The good use of creation is our responsibility since all human endeavors take place within a limited and finite context. This leads us to live ecology in a Christian manner.

1. The Vincentian steward must accomplish his task in co-responsibility, establishing mechanisms for control that bring total transparency to his administration, so that his management is always based on the principles of truth and justice. These mechanisms include:
  - The creation of an institutional context in which interpersonal relationships and internal control are experienced in a spirit of mutual trust for optimal and effective service of those most in need;
  - The division of tasks and supervision processes that promote responsibility;

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<sup>1</sup> COSTE XI, 190.

- Budgetary planning and control of expenses; inventories and other means of managing resources;
  - External audits that strengthen institutional credibility;
  - Establishment of concrete, extensive, and discrete mechanisms that allow for ongoing evaluation of the work achieved and assure good use of financial, human and patrimonial capital.
2. The servant leader should have certain qualities: ability to listen, empathy, reconciliation, awareness, conceptualization, foresight, good management, commitment to the growth of persons and the ability to work as part of a team.
  3. Good stewardship of Vincentian institutions requires optimal management of human resources, our most valuable asset. It will be particularly attentive to ongoing formation through opportunities for personal training and regular evaluations carried out in a spirit of simplicity and charity.
  4. Ongoing reflection on the work accomplished, when necessary time is taken to learn from success and from failures, will help to improve effectiveness.

### **Transparency**

Transparency, or simplicity, is an essential virtue of the Vincentian Family. For the good of the mission, it is indispensable that we present ourselves as we are.

1. This transparency requires internal dynamics for participation that help all of the members to feel responsible for significant decisions. In the same way, it is essential that our Vincentian charism be adequately shared with all our collaborators and with the institutions with which we establish agreements and contracts, while always respecting their convictions and interests.
2. Project planning is essential for good management, but the ability to accomplish planned projects is much more valuable. In order to do so in total transparency, we will use an important tool, which is the development, approval and adherence to budgets. This allows for ongoing management that is better adapted to needs and available resources. Ongoing adjustment of the budget and regular evaluations of projects are key elements for success.
3. Vincentian groups and institutions strengthen the credibility of their work through transparent administration that allows everyone, including persons who are poor and benefactors, to see the wise use of goods in the service of evangelization and building of the Reign of God.

4. Aware of the importance of communication in today's world, the Vincentian Family should seek effective strategies to make its work known in society and in the church, with the double objective of engaging more collaborators and raising funds to strengthen its capacity to serve the most disadvantaged.

### **The fight against of corruption**

Vincentian stewards know that they carry out their tasks in the midst of a society and some sectors that often are subject to corruption or the structures of sin, out of which resources are deviated for personal interest, resources which should be at the service of the least fortunate. Corruption is a significant obstacle to sustainable development, with a disproportionate impact on poor communities. It erodes the social fabric.

This is why the Vincentian steward must be aware of the "corrupting power of money"<sup>2</sup> and the responsibility to go against the tide, with attitudes based on the Gospel and the Vincentian charism, seeking to eliminate corruption or minimize its impact on the life of the least fortunate.

1. Vincentian institutions should work within the legal framework of the country, striving to fulfill all their civil responsibilities (labor contracts, just wages, payment of taxes, submission of reports, etc.) and procuring all necessary permissions.
2. The Vincentian administrator should be attentive that all those who collaborate in our works are guided by the principles of truth and justice, dialoguing with these collaborators and establishing from the beginning the ethical principles that govern our activities and defining the limits that cannot be breached.
3. Internally and within the Church, Vincentian institutions should practice zero tolerance, establishing concrete monitoring strategies that prevent any type of corruption from penetrating its structures and individuals since this is completely incompatible with the goal of just social conditions. In this way, negative repercussions that corruption entails are avoided, because those who are poor would remain neglected and the institution would lose its reputation, causing scandal in society.
4. Whenever ethical dilemmas, external to Vincentian institutions, must be considered, the context and the local culture must be kept in mind because sometimes a certain degree of corruption in the world is not within our control. A certain flexibility and mutual

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. COSTE X, 245-256.

compromise may be needed as long as the Vincentian mission and its integrity are not compromised. In these cases, it is very important to engage in a discernment process as a team and with appropriate formation and information, which permits responsible action in corrupt environments and recognition of the course of action that best responds to the ultimate objective of serving those who are poor.

5. Vincentian behavior should often be a prophetic denunciation, using the existing institutional structures and the powerful resource of social communication. It is important to remember that the impact of this denunciation is even more powerful when we act together with those who share our values.

### **Sustainability**

Our tradition is inspired by a balance between an efficient effort to assure the continuation of our works and great trust in Divine Providence, which supplies goods for God's most beloved children and guides our actions at every step.

1. Vincentian work is called to be part of the Christian tradition of putting goods in common, which allows for their use according to the recommendations of the Social Doctrine of the Church, being especially attentive to the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, co-responsibility, and justice.
2. As in the time of Vincent and Louise, the present and future of Vincentian works require that an active network of charity be established and maintained; this network, starting with those who are the closest to us, will involve the many people and institutions who are interested in the mission of the Vincentian Family. This activity will also remain open to collaboration with governmental institutions to help them achieve their social mission.
3. A Vincentian creatively seeks new and diverse financing sources in order to fight against poverty and uses the goods he or she already has in an appropriate and wise way. The following funding sources should be encouraged, among others: developing social networks, seeking grants from government or private entities, creating foundations, investing ethically, creating patrimony funds, and administering funds from income-generating activities or micro-businesses.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is essential for the present and future of Vincentian efforts, and should consider the different opportunities to work together both within the Vincentian Family and also with other persons and

institutions that share our mission or want to help us build a better world where justice and charity reign.

1. The Vincentian Family is called to collaborate with other religious families and civil and church groups and institutions that want to share in its mission. In the same way, it is important to remain open to opportunities to work with those who seek the good of the most deprived, beyond our own institutions.
2. Interpersonal and institutional relationships are essential for any collaboration's success. The Vincentian steward should strive to invite others and enflame people's hearts so that they become committed to the mission, respecting different perspectives and focusing on the common task of serving the poorest of the poor.
3. The challenges of collaboration must be recognized, such as lack of trust, the risk of superfluous and unfruitful relationships or seeking the starring role. Simplicity and humility create favorable conditions for collaboration, personal transformation and mutual trust, essential for work together.
4. The exchange of experiences and sharing formational, human, material and economic resources within the Vincentian Family should be the first step toward living collaboration according to the example of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac.
5. As cherished sons and daughters of God, persons living in situations of poverty should be active subjects in their life and Vincentian action, collaborating in different ways in their own integral human development and in the works from which they benefit, since no one is so poor that he has nothing to give.
6. In order to accomplish more effective work in a globalized world, the Vincentian Family needs to surround itself with competent professionals and encourage skill development internally in the various fields of its numerous works.

## Conclusion

The principles mentioned here are the fruit of the knowledge of experts who have accompanied us during these days and the sharing of our experiences. Faithful to our charism, let us always remember what Saint Vincent told us:

*"We shall render a very exact account in this matter before God. Our goods belong to God and to the poor. We are only their providers, not their lords" (COSTE XI, p. 30).*