

# Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul (RSV)

Foundation: 3 March 1845



**Shield**

**Motto:** *In every way, Christ must be proclaimed.*

## **History: the Founder**

Among the first members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and in the climate of fervent charity around Sr. Rosalie Rendu, was another founder of an institute of religious life, Jean-Léon Le Prevost (1803-1874).

He was among the first who joined the seven founders of the Society, and it was he who, on 4 February 1834, suggested a title that would be adopted and maintained up to the present, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, instead of the former Society of the Conferences of Charity.

At age 31 he was the eldest of the group. He brought to the youthful enthusiasm of the others the wisdom and concreteness of a more mature age. For many years he was the president of the Conference of St. Sulpice, the second conference in the city of Paris.

In this responsibility, Jean-Léon Le Prevost and his other confreres worked to help the needy in their homes. However, the frequency of certain situations called for the creation of new institutions.

Le Prevost became interested in young prisoners. He also opened a library, which thus allowed some adults to change their opinions about their problems. He founded a group called Holy Family, to bring together needy families, give them a human and Christian formation as well as some opportunities for recreation. We would call them a "family club." This initiative of his spread all over Paris and elsewhere within a few years.

With the passage of the years Le Prevost meditated: *"There is so much to do for the poor... the harvest is great... it is not enough just to give a little time after work each day. What is needed is a full-time commitment."* The idea grew, then, to start a new religious family, which he called appropriately the Brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The new institution would conduct an essentially missionary apostolate for the evangelization of the masses and, through the exercise of charity in all its forms, it would be moved to reveal the love of God for all. On 11 September 1844, Le Prevost met Clément Myionnet, a member of the Society in Angers. Clément had the same views and the same desires as Jean-Léon: to consecrate their lives to the service of the poor in a new religious congregation.

The new family began with the blessing of Bishop Angebault of Angers, imparted after the Mass he celebrated at the foot of the altar with the relics of St. Vincent de Paul at the chapel of the Vincentian Motherhouse, rue de Sèvres, in Paris. That very same morning, a young man, Maurice Maignen, joined them. The first members were all laymen who had belonged to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

After a few years, Le Prevost understood the need for spiritual assistance in his plans. He realized the need of having priests ready to dedicate themselves fully to this activity. The first priest to enter the group had been a member of the Society, the recently ordained Henri Planchat, a martyr of the Commune of Paris. Le Prevost was ordained a priest on 22 December 1860.

The new religious confronted the emergencies typical of a society in full industrial development, which touched the working class, particularly youth. They began centers for apprentices and students, for classes in professional development, for lodging for young workers, for popular initiatives such as soup kitchens, etc. Maurice Maignen was involved in the foundation of Workers' Clubs which, beyond developing a work of assistance and support, became centers for debating issues of social justice. He took part in the Catholic Social Movement that laid the foundations for the development of several reflections later elaborated in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII.

Jean-Léon Le Prevost was recognized for the heroicity of his virtues, 21 December 1998 and, according to Church tradition, is honored with the title Venerable.

Le Prevost drew up in 1847 his own hymn to charity in these beautiful words:

*It is charity which arouses and awakens souls around us; it encourages and unites them. Indeed it is charity that carries us along and involves us in its activity. Charity never errs nor remains on the sidelines: once it is alight, it must be spread abroad, shine and warm distant places. It nourishes all. Dear friends, we are thus unafraid; we do not reflect on our unworthiness, which often blocks us and renders us timid. Like a flame, charity consumes and purifies. We are purified in charity and filled with life. By means of charity we will be transfigured. Oh, how this thought encourages and consoles me. It is charity that impels and even pesters us. We are moved by this ardent and powerful charity, by this force, will and love: the infinite love, the love of God.*

The original title, Brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul, then became the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul. The Community has maintained a very close connection with the Vincentian spirituality that the first members had imbibed from the beginnings, in their first experiences of the service of the poor when they were members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris and Angers. Today, too, the Congregation feels itself a part of the Vincentian Family and participates in the initiatives that the Vincentian Community proposes.

## **The Apostolates**

For 11 years, Le Prevost had committed himself to visiting the needy in their homes, to educating young prisoners and orphan/apprentices. In these and other works, three intuitions had directed him. His experience had shown him the importance of missions in the cities, especially in the capital of France. He had also discovered that the practice of charity is the best way to reconcile the mass of workers to God and to the Church. "*Divine Providence,*" he wrote, "*desires, in our time, to save the world through charity.*" Finally, this type of work required the union of priest and religious brother for the evangelization of the people. From this he understood that the works of his institute would be "essentially missionary" and that the exercise of charity, in all its forms, would be of primary importance for revealing the love of God towards all. Finally, among the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul, priests and brothers form a single spiritual and apostolic family.

## Spirituality

Formed in the school of Sts. Vincent and Francis de Sales, both influenced by the French School of Spirituality of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the founder gave his religious a double rule: to conform themselves to Jesus Christ and to show him to the world through their works.

## Works

The Congregation of the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul grew in France and, in 1884, established itself in Canada. Following that, and responding to the call of the popes, new works were founded in Brazil and in Africa (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Congo-Kinshasa).

They still have the clubs (the “Patros”) and other works for youth, like hostels for workers and students and clubs for young people. Their field of action reaches out to street children, the handicapped, the aged, the homeless and the unemployed.

In France and in Canada, they have taken on parishes in areas of high population. In Brazil especially, and in Congo, in parishes in densely populated areas, they work at evangelization and the formation of basic communities. These parishes are, naturally, connected with numerous and varied works: basic literacy, secondhand clothes shops, courses in catechesis, family associations and retreats.

## Apostolic Commitments

### 1. *Evangelization of the Family*

*“Following our tradition, we will consecrate our efforts to the restoration and the building up of the family.”*

(Const. n° 164)

Today’s families in our kind of neighborhoods experience several sorts of difficulties: being separated, marginalized, single-parent, victims of unemployment, abandoned children, violence, abortion, homosexual couples, second marriages, problems of drugs and alcohol, etc.

In this very concrete context:

- Our pastoral activity should contribute to the development of the human person, while giving special attention to the poorest families.
- Families constituted according to the plan of God should be invited to develop their missionary sense and accompany families in distress.

- Christian parents should be encouraged to assume their role as educators of the faith of their children, especially young couples.
- All the Religious should take an interest in the family ministry of their neighborhoods and in the great questions that touch upon respect for life.

If possible, each one should be involved more directly:

*“At a time in history like the present, special attention must also be given to the pastoral care of the family, particularly when this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis” (NMI n° 47).*

## **2. Evangelization of youth (Children, Adolescents, young People)**

*“We are always forced to attend to the youth in our kind of neighborhoods.”*

(Const. n° 63)

Today, youth are undergoing all sorts of pressures, such as broken families, lack of basic education, the negative aspect of mass media, unemployment, lack of work, with no possibility to study, being exposed to the traps laid by drugs and pornography, being taken up in the spiral of violence, being victims of prostitution and sexual exploitation, and with no roots in the Christian life.

We insist on an apostolic action adapted to this reality:

- By an attitude of welcome, essential for a more direct contact with these young persons, as well as a profound respect for them and their sufferings;
- By an open dialogue recognizing their dignity;
- By a clear proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ as a response to their search for accompaniment of those who demonstrate a genuine interest in the Christian life, by offering them a means of Christian initiation through a proper sacramental life;
- By recalling to Christian youth the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is today in decline, as a means of spiritual growth:

*“... to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine charity and true pastoral justice” (JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter “Misericordia Dei,” 7 April 2002);*

- By stimulating among young people a missionary dimension and the witness of faith in their surroundings: *“Christian formation by our Works implies a joint action of Priest and Brother”* (Prop. 201 to the Chap. 1996).

### 3. **Evangelization of those who are Poor**

*“Being the representatives of, and ordinarily the agents of, the poor, we should have their humility, patience, detachment and recourse to God.”*

(Const. n° 66)

As participants in the Vincentian charism and attentive to the calls of the Church today, which indicates to us new forms of poverty: “... threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination” (NMI n° 50).

- We are invited to a more inventive charity to face these new challenges: “The proclamation of the Gospel takes place also by the charity of works, by gestures of solidarity which ensure an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words” (NMI n° 50).
- To remain faithful to the teaching of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, from which our Congregation has arisen, we value personal contact as the first evangelization, the attention given to the wounded lives around us.
- So as not to remain involved just in simple assistance given to the poor, we should become involved with other carefully chosen organizations to struggle against misery and promote human rights: the right to life, health, housing, education, work, moving thereby from mere tinkering to social justice, in keeping with the teaching of the Church.
- Each one should be so inspired by the social teaching of the Church as to be particularly alert to the world of those workers who are very affected by new social and economic conditions.

### 4. **Collaboration in the Apostolate**

*“Among us, the Brothers, ministers of charity, and the Priests, ordained ministers, should live in the most cordial cooperation, and vie with one another in offering mutual support,*

*with the one group preparing and supporting the works and the others giving spiritual strength and completion.”*

(Const. n° 7b)

a) Between Priests and Brothers:

- That the union of these two elements be activated in a common apostolate; this constitutes the foundation for a vocation ministry that will bear fruit for our institute and will be the best means to reveal to young people the meaning and the necessity of the vocation of a Brother.
- That our apostolic plan should always be built, led, undertaken and evaluated mutually.
- That the specific action in the religious life of the consecrated lay brother be the first among the “committed laity,” and that his role in the missionary plan be better defined, while allowing him to acquire an adequate formation.

b) With the Laity:

- To develop volunteer laity, particularly devoted to the pastoral and charitable service of our works.
- To form them in the spirituality of our charism, in communion and family spirit, apostolic zeal and education to an adult faith in Jesus Christ.
- To seek to make them “multipliers” of our evangelical and missionary activities.
- To be attentive, with them, to awaken young people to our way of life and to the possibility of a vocation consecrated to the service of the poor and the youth.

c) With other pastoral ministers:

1. diocesan clergy;
2. other religious communities;
3. the Vincentian Family.

**Today**

The Congregation of the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul is currently present in:

- 6 countries (France, Canada, Brazil, Congo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast);

- 236 religious (91 Brothers and 145 Priests): 71 in France, 61 in Canada, 28 in Brazil, 35 in Congo (Democratic Republic of), 26 in Africa (Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast), 15 in the northwest of Brazil.

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*Portal RSV* is the official site of the General Council in the service of the Religious and their coworkers. The **Infos** (News) on the central part of the home page of the Web site is published each Friday.  
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