



**CHARACTERISTICS  
OF A  
VINCENTIAN  
SERVANT-LEADER**



# Ten Characteristics of a Vincentian Servant-Leader

## 1. LISTENING

The Vincentian Servant Leader cultivates a deep commitment to **listening** intently to others and seeks to identify the will of the group and helps to clarify that will in the context of the Vincentian value structure and the Rule. He or she listens receptively to what is being said and unsaid. Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's own call to service and spirituality. Listening, coupled with periods of reflection and contemplation, are essential to the spiritual growth and well-being of the Vincentian servant-leader.

**“Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God’s image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ.” (Rule, Part 1:1.8)**

## 2. EMPATHY

The Vincentian Servant-Leader strives to understand and **empathize** with others. People are accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits and gifts. The servant leader assumes the good intentions of colleagues and does not reject them as people, even when she/he may be forced to refuse to accept certain behaviors or performance. The most successful servant-leaders are those who become skilled empathetic listeners, grounded in Vincentian spirituality.

**“Vincentians endeavor to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve. Rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.”(Rule, Part 1:1.9)**

## 3. HEALING

One of the great strengths of Vincentian Servant-Leadership is the potential for **healing** one's self and one's relationship to others, inspired by the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. The healing of relationships is a powerful force for transformation and integration. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, Vincentian Servant-Leaders recognize that they have an opportunity *to help make whole* those with whom they come in contact.

**“Vincentians serve in hope. They rejoice in discovering the spirit of prayer in the poor, for in the silence, the poor can perceive God’s Plan for every person. The acceptance of God’s Plan leads each one to nurture the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace in themselves, their families and all those who lives they touch. Vincentians are privileged to foster these signs of the presence of Risen Christ in the poor and among themselves. (Rule, Part 1, 1.11)**

#### **4. AWARENESS**

General **awareness**, and especially self-awareness supported by prayer and reflection, strengthens the Vincentian Servant-Leader. Awareness helps one to understand issues involving ethics, values, and tensions in the SVDP Society Communities. Awareness helps the servant to be able to view most situations from a more spiritually grounded and integrated, holistic position.

**“Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society. (Rule, Part 1:1.6)**

#### **5. PERSUASION**

A Vincentian Servant-Leaders is reliant on **persuasion** rather than on one's positional authority. Persuasion, listening and awareness support the servant leader to sustain decision making processes within a volunteer driven organization consistent with the value of subsidiarity. The Vincentian Servant-Leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The Vincentian Servant-Leader is effective at building consensus within groups.

**“All decisions are made by consensus after the necessary prayer, reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate, matters are put to a vote. (Rule, Part 1:3:10)**

#### **6. CONCEPTUALIZATION**

The ability to look at a problem or an opportunity from a **conceptualizing** perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. Vincentian Servant-Leaders seek to nurture their abilities to inspire Councils and Conferences to *dream great dreams*. For many leaders, this is a characteristic that requires discipline and practice. The traditional leader is consumed by the need to achieve short-term operational goals. The leader who wishes to also be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based

conceptual thinking and to harvest the wisdom and enthusiasm of SVDP Society colleagues.

**“Members of all ages strive to preserve the spirit of youth, which is characterized by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination.” (Rule, Part 1:3.5)**

## **7. FORESIGHT**

One knows **foresight** when one experiences it. It is closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easier to identify. Vincentian foresight is a characteristic cultivated through prayer and study that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from our rich heritage, applied to the present and the future.

**“In exercising freedom of action to face the challenge of poverty in their area, Vincentians feel called to pray together for guidance and strength and for that creative imagination which is the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, “Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions.” (Rule, Part 1: 3.9)**

## **8. STEWARDSHIP**

Vincentian **stewardship**, like Vincentian Servant Leadership, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. It is a commitment to balancing the passion for charity with the need to sustain the ministry of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion in the context of discernment and participative decision making whenever possible.

**“Vincentians should never forget that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money. Nevertheless, the Society uses money and property to help relieve the suffering of those in need. The Society’s funds must be handled with the utmost care, prudence and generosity. Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. (Rule, Part 1: 3.14)**

## **9. COMMITMENT TO THE GROWTH OF PEOPLE**

Vincentian Servant-Leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as volunteers or paid staff. As such, the Servant-Leader is deeply committed to the **spiritual growth** of each and every individual within his or her Conference and Counsel.

**“Vincentians are sincerely concerned with the deeper needs and spiritual well-being of those they help, always observing a profound respect for their conscience and the faith they believe in, listening and understanding with their hearts, beyond both words and appearances. (Rule, Part 1:1.11)**

## **10. BUILDING COMMUNITY**

The Vincentian Servant-Leader understands that the essence of the Vincentian tradition is rooted in the spirituality of Christian Love expressed in **community** through service to the poor. Servant Leadership in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is focused on building and sustaining a community of individuals formed in a common vision and Rule who are dedicated to expressing their Christian spirituality through reverent service to the poor and marginalized. Vincentian Servant-Leaders create the environment for ongoing spiritual formation through education, prayer and reflection, and meaningful service to the poor.

**“The members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide Community of Vincentian friends.” (Rule, Part 1:3.3)**