

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2004**

**AN ADDRESS BY THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT
BRO. ANTHONY WONG DOO**

Your Grace, Most Rev. Edward Gilbert, Archbishop of Port of Spain, Ms. Leela Ramdeen, Episcopal Delegate for Social Justice, Brothers and Sisters of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Good morning and a warm welcome to you all.

Firstly, let me take this opportunity to thank the National Council and by extension you Brothers and Sisters for considering me trustworthy by appointing me for a second term of office. Through the grace of God and the abundance of your love and support bestowed upon me over the past three years, I can say with some measure of certainty that the Society has enjoyed a successful term.

Nevertheless, there are two concerns that as your President it is incumbent upon me to draw your attention for immediate implementation.

- (a) Faithfulness to our vocation
- (a) Succession Planning.

In 2001, His Grace the Most Rev. Edward Gilbert addressing our Society for the first time asked the question: "How Catholic is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul?" The full import and profundity of this question is important for our engagement with the Poor, for it could be the devil's trap if as Vincentians we see our work as solely service oriented and out of pity for the marginalized.

Unless our motivation stems fundamentally from a genuine love of God and love of neighbour which fulfills the Law, we will not truly see Christ in the Poor. Our work of love has to be rooted in the examples of our patron St. Vincent de Paul and our founders headed by Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Our success will be measured not necessarily by how spectacular or ostentatious we appear or perform but solely by how faithful we truly are to our vocation; that is we serve the poor in love and solidarity, simplicity and charity, with gentleness, respect and devotion, always remembering that it is Christ Jesus we serve through the Poor.

Our formation meeting for all presidents of conferences and councils held in July 2004 was designed to foster this understanding and to engender a culture of true Catholic ethos in our performance.

Succession Planning

If the Society is to cope with the challenges and complexities of the modern day society and the demands of our sixteen institutions, every level of our structure – Conferences, Councils, Committees, the Secretariat and the Executive must create an atmosphere where leadership positions must evolve in conformity with the rules and the spirit of the Society. Leaders must show magnanimity to identify and train others for their positions whilst members with the capacity to contribute must be prepared to serve when they are invited. In either case there ought not to be tension or conflict. The welfare of the Poor and the Society must be pre-eminent. As our physical assets increase, our human resource capacity must increase as well to ensure the viability of our institutions and the Society.

The process must evolve as a natural progression that will give the society greater depth to draw on. The injection of new blood will bring new vitality and dynamism, whilst the elders will provide the encouragement, wisdom and stability to the organization.

Leadership must never emerge from a climate of necessity or panic but must be groomed; thus ensuring continuity and longevity in the Society.

Brothers and Sisters, I have sought to revisit our function as a Society, since we could inadvertently drift from our moorings and I have advocated for a culture of inclusiveness, for as His Grace said at the mass in the Cathedral to launch Synod 2003.

“By ourselves we can do good things,
But together we will be able to do
Great things.”

Thank you.