

‘There was no room at the inn’ – Luke 2:7

Street Homelessness

Looking after our homeless brothers and sisters living on the streets has been at the forefront of Vincentian charity since the inception of our Charism. St Vincent himself housed foundlings – children without parents who would have been homeless without his support.

There are an estimated 100 million people living on our streets in dire poverty. In response to this, the Vincentian Family is focusing its Annual Theme this year on street homelessness. We invite Vincentians across the world to foster a culture of encounter, a culture of love and embrace, to our neighbours living on the streets.

Biblical Wisdom

‘Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.’ – *Proverbs 21:13*

‘And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”’ – *Matthew 8:20*

‘Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?’ – *Isaiah 58:7*

‘Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.’ – *Psalms 82:3*

‘For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”’ – *Galatians 5:14*

‘My command is this: love one another as I have loved you.’ – *John 15:12*

The Wisdom of St Vincent

‘Let’s devote ourselves with renewed love to serve persons who are poor, and even to seek out those who are the poorest and most abandoned; let’s acknowledge before God that they’re our Lords and Masters...’ (*CCD:XI:349*).

‘Go to the poor: you will find God.’

‘By [compassion], we can’t see someone suffering without suffering along with him or see someone cry without crying as well. This is an act of love, causing people to enter one another’s hearts and to feel what they feel, far from those persons who have no feeling for the anguish of the afflicted, or the suffering of poor persons.” (*CCD:XII:221*)

‘Charity is the cement which binds communities to God and persons to one another.’ – (*CCD:II:413*)



Vincentian Family Annual Theme 2018

Fostering a culture of encounter on our streets



“Doing good isn’t everything; it must be done well” (CCD:XI:43)

‘We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of Providence, and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ.’ – (CCD:III:384)

Papal Wisdom



‘Let us love, not with words but with deeds.’

– Pope Francis

Left, Pope Francis celebrated his 80th birthday by dining with homeless neighbours

‘Jesus came into our world without a home, and he chose poverty... the Church seeks to embrace us all and says that **it is a right to have a roof over your head**. Popular movements work toward the three Spanish Ts: trabajo [work], techo [roof] and tierra [land]. The Church teaches that every person has the right to these three Ts.’ – Pope Francis, speaking to *Straatnieuws* paper

‘Poverty has a face – it has the face of a child; it has the face of a family; it has the face of people, young and old.’ – Pope Francis, to the *UN Food Programme*

‘Poverty is a plague against which humanity must fight without cease.’ – Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in a speech on 2005 World Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Reflection

Consider this passage from Luke 16:19-25, of Lazarus begging:

‘There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

‘The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.”

‘But Abraham replied, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.”

What does this passage tell us about fostering a culture of encounter with our street homeless brothers and sisters? What does a Christian response look like?

Vincentian Action

Explore inspiring examples of Vincentians helping street homeless people across the world on our website (vfhomelessalliance.org). If you have a case story you would like to share with us, get in touch at: homeless@famvin.org

A Culture of Encounter

Inspired by St Vincent, we ask how we as a Vincentian Family can better support our homeless neighbours.

Pope Francis has asked Catholics to promote a '**culture of encounter**'. John L. Allen Jr (*National Catholic Reporter*) explains what he means by this:

*'Francis seems to intend the idea of reaching out, fostering dialogue and friendship even outside the usual circles, and making a special point of **encountering people who are neglected** and ignored by the wider world.'*

*"Encounter" is thus, in some ways, a proxy for "mercy" – placing the **emphasis on compassion** rather than, in the first instance, judgment.'*

Questions for personal reflection and group sharing:

- Identify the quotation from the selection above that speaks most to your heart? Why? What is God telling you through this?
- What do you know about the reality of street homelessness in your city/country?
- What are the most urgent needs? What groups/institutions are already working in your area?
- Could you share a story of your encounter with a homeless person?

How can we take this culture of encounter to our streets?

1. **Pray for the homeless** – see our prayer card
2. **Share a meal with your homeless neighbors** – see our guidance sheet on organizing a sharing meal
3. **Become a member of the Famvin Homeless Alliance** – sign up on our website: vfhomelessalliance.org
4. **Join the '13 Houses Campaign'** – see more on our website: vfhomelessalliance.org

SHARING MEAL WITH THE HOMELESS



The Famvin Homeless Alliance invites Vincentians to welcome their local homeless neighbours to share a meal. This expression of community and solidarity builds bridges with the poorest among us. As St Vincent said:

‘Charity is the cement which binds communities to God and persons to one another’

Following Pope Francis



Pope Francis celebrated his 80th birthday by inviting homeless neighbours for dinner. He said we must ‘love, not with words, but with deeds’.

We invite Vincentians to answer the Pope’s call by replicating his example: inviting homeless neighbours for a meal.

How to organise your own meal:

1. Choose a venue – make sure everyone you invite can get there, and that the venue has all the cooking equipment you need
2. Put together a team – who will make the food? Who will invite the guests?
3. Invite your guests – invite as many people from your community and local homeless neighbours as you can manage.

How the Famvin Homeless Alliance will help:

1. Materials: use our quotes from the Bible, St Vincent and Pope Francis to encourage reflection at your meal.
2. Prayer: use our prayer card at your meal, joining others across the world praying for an end to homelessness.
3. Publicise: tell us about your meal on social media through our Facebook and Twitter pages, or drop us an email: homeless@famvin.org.

Prayer for those who are Homeless



'We are priests of the poor. God has chosen them for us.'

St Vincent de Paul

O God of justice and mercy, of creation and redemption, strengthen us, your servants, as we strive to bring your love and compassion to those who are homeless.

We pray that we might see you, our all-loving God, in every homeless person whom we encounter and that, with them, we might find systemic ways of remedying their plight.

May we do everything in our power to assist all men, women and children to reach their potential, so that they experience fullness of life.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

