

The Healthy Servant

(excerpted from *It's All About Love* by Mike Syslo)

I remember watching a movie a few years back titled “In the Name of the Poor.” In this movie which depicted the life of Mother Teresa, there was one particular scene in which she was so zealous in serving the poor that she ignored her own needs and became seriously ill. She kept on insisting to the nurse that she must return to her work. The nurse finally told her that, if she continued to neglect her own health, she would not be able to serve anyone. The servant must be healthy in order to be able to serve. This holds true for Vincentians as well.

As Vincentians, we are faced with a similar challenge. We have to keep ourselves physically healthy in order to be able to serve those in need. This takes special attention to our diet and exercise. Okay, now I am starting to sound like a doctor. But it is true -- not only diet and exercise, but also a willingness to share the load with other Vincentians. St. Vincent tells us: *Be careful not to overdo it ... The spirit of God leads us on gently to do the good which we can reasonably accomplish so that we can do it consistently and for a longer period of time. Act thus...and you will be acting according to the spirit of God.*

Many of us are also guilty of the “I need to do it all” syndrome. We fall prey to the belief that it takes too much time to find someone to help me or to teach someone else to do it. So, we martyr ourselves and do it all. Wake up, Vincentians! Mother Teresa learned her lesson and Vincent gives similar advice.

We have an additional obligation related to our health – our spiritual health. Our entire ministry (this work that we are called to do) is spiritually based. Unless the works we do are done for God, they have no meaning. We must do whatever it takes to keep nurturing and growing our faith. Our first essential objective in this ministry is to grow in holiness. Frequent prayer, frequent reception of the Body and Blood of our Lord, attendance at our SVdP meetings and participation in our spiritual discussions, attendance at Days of Recollection, attendance at retreats, scripture studies, participation in various liturgies, all help us to grow in our faith. These activities and others help make us spiritually healthy.

And then, there is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We have been called to ministry through the Society. We must work to keep our Society healthy, so that people can continually help those in need through it. We must learn about it, participate in its structure, in its committees, in its programs, in its services. We must help the Society grow, locally, in the District, in the Diocese as well as nationally and internationally. It is through a healthy organization that the poor can continue to be served for many years to come.

Fr. James Krings once wrote in “Living Faith”: *A slight variation of a mission vignette of SSM Health Care, the system in which I am a chaplain, may be helpful: On a particularly difficult day, a nurse prayed: “O God, where are you? Why don’t you send help?” “I did,” God replied, “I sent you.”* God is sending us to help those in need. We need to keep ourselves healthy – in all respects – so that we can serve Him well through those we serve.