

Vincentians - Always Two

(excerpted from *For Your Love Alone* by Michael Syslo)

For ages we have been saying the same thing over and over and over again. In every encounter with those in need, Vincentians go with a partner. This is not a new idea. This has been the recommendation from the Society, its founders, and its leaders, over the 175+ years of its existence. And there are many good reasons to do so.

- Safety is an obvious one. One person acting alone can be in jeopardy of their safety in any environment: home visit, in an office, in the pantry, in a car, at a gas station or restaurant, etc. The presence of two people reduces the risk.
- Two people interviewing – asking questions, listening to answers, observing surroundings, interpreting body language, etc. – provide a better understanding of the need presented.
- Two people discussing all of the issues and sharing in the decision-making process come up with more and better possibilities.
- In any environment, as long as there is only a one-on-one presence, the possibility of accusation of wrong doing (action or words) can occur. The possibility of accusation of wrong doing by the Vincentians is reduced when two Vincentians are present.
- The presence of two Vincentians will reduce the possibility of a member being "rude, crude and downright ugly" to those we serve. If not eliminate, the other member can help soften or counter the offense.

In all of the years that I have been involved with Conferences, helping them recruit, helping train members, consulting with them on various issues, the far majority of all of the problems that have come to my attention have been related to Vincentians working on their own. Please understand one basic fact. In almost all cases, a complaint went to the parish and/or the pastor before it came to me. Think about just that fact for a moment. Almost every time when people call to complain about being treated rudely, they have already spoken to someone at the parish; and then have been given our number to call. Granted, there are two sides to every story; but the parish staff and pastor normally hear the bad side.

The far majority of all of the complaints that we hear are related to Conferences who are serving out of a pantry or an office. Unfortunately, most Conferences that serve from the pantry or office rather than do home visits will generally bypass the two-Vincentian rule. Yes, we do hear complaints about home visitors also but not nearly as many as we get for the others.

We have had to shut down Conferences due to the pastor's specific request because he was unhappy with the SVdP operation and the complaints he and his staff received. Some of those have been rebuilt as home visit only Conferences. On others, the pastor did not want us back.

There are no reasons that can be presented to justify doing things alone. We have heard hundreds. They include things like: "I could not get hold of anyone to go with me;" "We have too few members;" "We have a person (sometimes) in the office next door so it is safe;" "If we did it in two's, we would not be able to help as many people;" etc. The one that really gets me is "I have done social work for years; I don't need any help." There are no reasons that can offset the many reasons listed above for going in pairs.

The Vincentian mode of operation is to work in pairs. When Jesus sent His disciples out, He sent them out in two's. I think He might know something about human nature. As Vincentians, we are asked to imitate Jesus in all aspects of our lives. Take some serious advice from Jesus and do your Vincentian ministry with a partner.