

"Meetings are a waste of time"



National President
Adrian Abel

There is little worse than meetings that go on too long leaving us feeling exhausted and drained, with no clear sense of purpose. The SVP is not immune to such meetings, yet our meetings should be a positive experience, as they are an integral part of our Vincentian vocation.

What is it then, to be a Vincentian?

Firstly, as Vincentians, we believe that Christ has called us to serve Him by serving those in need, in line with the Gospel's message to love our neighbour as ourselves. However, many individuals serve those in need, so there is nothing uniquely Vincentian about such good works.

Secondly, Vincentians recognise that in serving and loving our neighbour we must develop spiritual growth in ourselves. The old Rule used to say that membership was about our own spiritual sanctification. I feel that in our now "more enlightened age" this phrase may seem a little cold and calculating. It is by showing love for those in need that we grow closer to Our Lord.

Thirdly, to be truly Vincentian we are to work together, utilising the skills and experiences of our fellow Vincentians, while offering our own God-given talents to the Society, by encouraging and helping others in the wider family. I like the term fellowship, a word better known to evangelicals than Catholics.

So what role can meetings play to achieve these three hallmarks of our Vincentian ethos?

Answering the call every Christian receives to seek and find those who are forgotten. The meeting should play a crucial role in recognising those in need in our community, then in serving them in accordance with their needs. Conferences should keep a record of those they visit (but taking care not to include any personal information that may put us in conflict with the Data Protection Act). Members of the Conference can then take on the responsibilities of those members who may not be able to continue visiting due to personal circumstances. If we do not meet regularly this is unlikely to happen. Many parish visiting groups fail because volunteers cease visiting when their own circumstances change.

The Society should be well known in the parish and act as a contact point for those seeking help for themselves or on behalf of others in need.

Where two or more gather together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. The meeting should always start with prayer and a spiritual reflection and end with prayer. This is both a request to the Holy Spirit to guide us in our deliberations and a recognition that our work never springs from ourselves. It is in this atmosphere of prayerful reflection that we develop a closer relationship with God as individuals and as a Conference.

I remember my own faith being strengthened by insights given to me by a member (who later became a priest) during discussions following a spiritual reading almost 50 years ago.

Rushing through our prayers is a wasted opportunity, it is surely better to shorten them and say them slowly and with meaning, even if time is really against us.

Lord Jesus, help us by meeting together to deepen our Vincentian friendship. Most of us have times when we need encouragement especially when things go wrong. By discussing our ideas with other members we can often refine those ideas making them even better. While meetings should be business-like, they need not be miserable. We can enjoy the company of like-minded people. Many Conferences have an occasional meal together (not out of Conference funds of course!). Celebrate anniversaries and let others see us happy in each other's company.

Long meetings put off many members and are rarely necessary. Sticking to the agenda and coming to decisions, then sticking with them are skills that good presidents need to acquire, and other members need support. Try and make meetings joyful affairs. Most Conferences owe their existence to someone calling a meeting, so something good can result from them! So let's all try and make our meetings even better - and yes it applies just as much to me and I accept the challenge.

Adrian Abel, National President