

History

St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) was founder of the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, Confraternities of Charity, and Ladies of Charity. A man of deep faith, keen intellect, and enormous creativity, he has become known as the "The Apostle of Charity" and "Father of the Poor." His contributions to the training of priests and organizing parish missions and other services for the poor shaped our Church's role in the modern world.

St. Louise de Marillac (1591 - 1660), a contemporary of St. Vincent, was inspired and directed by Vincent's spiritual leadership. She was Vincent's collaborator in founding the Daughters of Charity and organizing hospitals for the sick poor, asylums for the orphaned, workshops for the unemployed, championing literacy for the uneducated, and establishing standards for local charities. Louise was a wife, mother, teacher, nurse, social worker and religious foundress

The Start

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul began in Paris, France, in 1833 when a young law student at the Sorbonne, Frédéric Ozanam, was challenged during a debate to demonstrate what he and his fellow Catholic students were personally doing to help the poor in Paris. Ozanam's reaction was immediate. Within weeks, Ozanam, at 20 years of age, and six of his peers formed the first "Conference of Charity." Under the conference, this group of seven men financed their works of charity out of their own pockets and from contributions of friends. They visited the poor in their homes, providing them with needed aid and assistance. At the prompting of Monsieur Emmanuel Bailly and Sister Rosalie Rendu, superior of a convent of the Daughters of Charity, Ozanam soon placed the conference under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul who had spent his life in 16th century France serving the poor. Within a few years, the original group of seven grew to 600, spreading to 15 other cities and towns in France, numbering more than 2,000 members.

Move to the USA

Twelve years later, in 1845, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul crossed the ocean to St. Louis, Missouri, where the first American conference was formed. To this day, St. Louis remains the Society's national headquarters.

St. Vincent de Paul Today

The Society numbers about 800,000 members in some 140 countries worldwide, whose members operate through "conferences".[3] A conference may be based out of a church, community center, school, hospital, etc., and is composed of Catholic volunteers who dedicate their time and resources to help those in need in their community. Non-Catholics may join with the understanding that the society is a Catholic organization.