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John T. Maher, C.M.

This special edition of the Journal of Vincentian Social Action is a welcome addition to this unique, ground-breaking journal. It comes at a special time for the Congregation of the Mission, the community of priests and brothers who founded St. John's University 147 years ago. Commonly called "Vincentians," this religious community animates the mission of St. Vincent de Paul to benefit all members of this outstanding community of scholars, students, and staff.

What is the reason for this special edition? This calendar year of 2017 is a major milestone for the Vincentians in two significant ways. First, it is the 400th anniversary of the inspiration of St. Vincent de Paul to begin a ministry of evangelization and service to the poor and needy. From his inspiration came religious and lay organizations who, four centuries later, still carry on his vision and mission. They number over one million members worldwide. 2017 is also the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the first Vincentians in the United States who endured a perilous journey from Italy through the Alps to France, across the Atlantic, arriving at Baltimore, and eventually settling in St. Louis, Missouri. Their valor enabled the foundation of three Vincentian universities, many seminaries, parishes, specialized ministries, and foreign missions in Asia and Latin America.

The experience of St. Vincent de Paul and his subsequent effect is referred to as a charism, defined as an "extraordinary power given a Christian by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church" (Charism, Merriam-Webster.com, 2017). The Vincentian charism is distinct, and has been the animating force for Vincentian priests and brothers, Daughters of Charity, laity in the Ladies of Charity, International Association of

Charities, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Later religious and lay groups would adapt the Vincentian charism to their way of life in the service of the poor.

In this special issue, the reader will be given a glimpse of the core meaning of the charism, its development in history, and ways it has grown, flourished, and impacts the world, the Church, and St. John's University. Fr. Robert Maloney, a former Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, aptly named his masterful work "Fire Within." In it, he discusses how the vast array of Vincent de Paul's works of evangelization and organizational care for the poor owe their origin to his profound spiritual experience. It was his spirituality that Vincent shared in his writings, forging new ministries and communities to continue what he had begun.

Fr. John Rybolt, a Scripture scholar and historian, writes on the evolution of Vincentian social concern from delivery of emergency services to coordinated action and advocacy. Fr. Rybolt pulls no punches showing how gaining a social justice perspective for Vincentians was a gradual, but forward process to move from doing good works to promoting systemic change. His article's title is a not-so-subtle hint of his findings: Vincentian Social Justice: A Work in Progress.

Sr. Louise Sullivan, a preeminent Vincentian scholar, has enriched our understanding of the Vincentian charism in her research and writing on St. Louise de Marillac, the greatest collaborator of St. Vincent. Working together, Louise and Vincent pioneered new, revolutionary models of ministry for religious women and laity. In "St. Vincent and the Empowerment of Women", Sr. Louise shows

that by their collaborative efforts, Louise and Vincent created the Daughters of Charity, religious women who cared for the poor in creative, innovative ways to deliver service. Vincent and Louise also created the Ladies of Charity, another first: lay women ministering directly to the needs of the poor. Four centuries later, the Daughters of Charity and Ladies of Charity are among the largest groups of women, religious and laity, serving the poor.

This special issue also highlights ways the Vincentian charism has filtered into St. John's academics. Dr. John Conry, Professor in the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences at St. John's University, writes on "Vincentian Hospitality Principles in the Healthcare of the Indigent," how this charism can be cohesive framework to provide healthcare for the poor. This article was originally published in the Vincentian Heritage Journal in 2016, but it is relevant for this issue. In his masterful analysis of the plight of the medically indigent, Dr. Conry applies the core Vincentian principles of health care delivery (from the core values of the Daughters of Charity healthcare ministries) to today's health care crisis. He demonstrates how these principles are adaptable to Project Renewal, a local agency where he and St. John's students deliver health care to the homeless.

Dr. Judith Mangione and Dr. Donald McClure of the School of Education share their expertise and insights as those who are "training the trainers" in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Their article, "Charism That Lives: Translating the Message of St. Vincent de Paul for Today's Teacher" discusses ways the School of Education provides a deeper understanding and application of the Vincentian charism for teachers, by examining a signature program of the School of Education, "In Addition," where students serve economically and educationally deprived children. Their efforts bring the charism to life in a way St. Vincent would be proud.

Mr. Brian Crimmins, an accomplished SJU alumnus, is the Chief Executive Officer of Changing our World, a leading philanthropic fund-raising consulting firm. He generously shares

his own story of how his parents' values and the Vincentian charism at St. John's University moved him from a goal for a career in sports management to leadership in philanthropic fund-raising in the human services sector of non-profit organizations. Brian has much experience assisting non-profits develop strategic plans and fund-raising for their stability and growth. His ideas are in line with how Vincent de Paul assisted groups delivering service to the poor, encouraging them to do so with competence, consistency, and compassion.

This special edition of the Journal of Vincentian Social Action is only possible due to the guidance and support of Dr. Marc Gillespie, Editor in Chief, Anthony Marziliano, Assistant Editor, and with assistance from Fr. Patrick Griffin, C.M., Executive Director of the Vincentian Center for Church and Society. Much gratitude is due these fine gentlemen for their long hours of planning, reviewing, and editing to produce so fine a finished product.

In closing, this special edition is meant to highlight two crucial factors any study of St. Vincent de Paul should manifest: first, that Vincent's vision and mission came from a profound spiritual experience that guided his life and work; and the Vincentian charism is a living, organic reality in today's world. Hopefully, readers will find this to be the case. St. Vincent offered his followers a succinct, lasting message on the meaning, purpose, and effect of what became his charism: "Love is creative unto infinity." May that be your discovery from these pages, as well!

References

Charism. (2017). In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved October 6, 2017, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charism>