

THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY AND ITS FOUNDERS

It might surprise you to hear that the St Vincent de Paul Society was not founded by St Vincent de Paul, but by a 20-year-old French University student named Frederic Ozanam. He founded the Society in 1833.

Frederic was from a wealthy Catholic family – his father was a doctor and his mother was an heiress. He was the fifth born of 14 children, but he was one of only four to survive early childhood, with 10 of his siblings passing away from disease at a young age.

Frederic was a driven young man and decided to study law at a university in Paris. Each day, Frederic had to walk through the disadvantaged suburbs on his way to university. He saw a lot of people who were homeless, people who were very sick, and people who were starving, and often shared his concern with others. One day Frederic was teased by some of the other students who said ‘we always hear you talking about the poor and how unfair it is – why don’t you do something about it’.

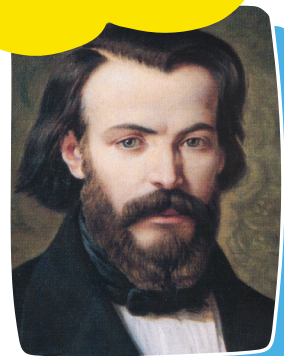
In response to the need they saw around them, Frederic and six friends formed a group called a ‘Conference’ and committed themselves to helping people in need. The Conference adopted the name the St Vincent de Paul Society because they were inspired by Saint Vincent, who had devoted himself to helping the poor people of France 200 years earlier.

Frederic and his friends asked Sister Rosalie, a Daughter of Charity, for guidance on how they could help those in need in the disadvantaged areas of Paris. She told them of a poor man she knew who was living through a freezing Paris winter without firewood. Frederic and his friend brought what was left of their own firewood to

the man’s doorstep and unsure of what to do next, they left without meeting the man. They had been prepared physically for what they would do with armfuls of firewood but were unprepared emotionally and spiritually for how the experience would influence them. Frederic felt as though he had failed the man in some way, reflected on what had gone wrong and resolved to be better prepared and respond differently next time.

Sister Rosalie offered guidance on how visits to help people in need aren’t just about what we bring (however practical or necessary it might be), it’s about sharing, listening and just ‘being’ with those we assist. Frederic and his friends recognised the importance of providing company and friendship as well as material assistance to people in need and built a strong belief that is shared by members and volunteers of the St Vincent de Paul Society across the world today.

"YOURS MUST BE A WORK OF LOVE,
OF KINDNESS, YOU MUST GIVE YOUR TIME,
YOUR TALENTS, YOURSELVES"
FREDERIC OZANAM



ACTIVITIES

Q: What year did Frederic start the St Vincent de Paul Society?
A: 1833

Q. How old was Frederic when he started the St Vincent de Paul Society?
A. 20 years old

Q. Why did Frederic and his friends form a group to help others?
A. Because they saw people in need of food, safety and friendship and decided to do something about it.

Q. What did Frederic and his friends drop on the door step of the first man they helped?
A. Firewood

Q. What did Frederic study at university?
A. Law

Q. What did Frederic learn from Sister Rosalie after he visited the man's home?
A. When helping people in need, it is important to listen to them and spend time with them, as well as offering help with the things they need

- Use the Vinnies website to find out more about the lives and importance of St Vincent de Paul, Sr Rosalie Rendu and St Louise de Marillac.
- Create a mind map of qualities Frederic Ozanam demonstrated when starting the St Vincent de Paul Society.
- In what ways are Frederic Ozanam and St Vincent de Paul role models for us today?
- Creatively present research showing how Sr Rosalie Rendu was important to the formation and development of the Society.
- Research someone in a position of leadership who inspires you and find out 5 things about that person.