

Home Visitation

(from the Diocesan Council of Phoenix)

The foundation, the very essence of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, is the visiting of the poor in their homes; we must see them amid all the disorder and distress. Such a sight is both a lesson to us, and a motive of devotedness to them.

Home visitation has been the primary method of our works of charity since the Society was founded in 1833. Unlike trendy activities, this is not something that has faded away or is out of date. It has been proven that this is the best way to learn about those we are serving and also the best way to be a servant to those in need.

Why is home visitation so important? Wouldn't it be easier and more efficient to ask them to come to us? There are several good reasons to do home visits:

1. Our Vincentian spirituality focuses on our search for Christ in those we encounter. Jesus told us himself (in Matthew 25) that when He was thirsty, we gave Him drink; when He was hungry, we gave Him food; when He was naked, we clothed Him; whatever we do for the least of His brethren, we do for Him. We are in search of Christ; humbly we go to Him.
2. *"You are a servant of the poor...They are your masters"* (St. Vincent de Paul). The concept of being a servant draws us to do for them rather than ask them to do for us. In the Peace Prayer of St. Francis we find *"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console."*
3. Our act of going to them is a form of sacrifice. We have to give of our own personal time, we have to make an effort to leave our comfortable surroundings and the activities that we are involved in to go to the suffering Christ. This is not just a personal sacrifice; it is an act of love.
4. Going to the homes of those that request assistance is the best way to learn about them and their circumstances. At a minimum, it verifies a real address, confirms a real family resides there, and shows that the need for food or clothing is real.
5. The work of the Society is a work of charity, not a business. It is the quality of our encounter that has a spiritual impact on us rather than the number of encounters. The home visit provides for this quality while enhancing the self-respect of those we visit.
6. Travel is not always convenient for those with few resources. Often, the only means of transportation is walking. It is especially at times like this that we can build their self-esteem by going to them.
7. Fulton J. Sheen once wrote, "The truth is the truth whether everyone believes it or no one believes it." We can come up with any number of excuses for not doing this. But the reality is: It is our responsibility as servants to the poor to give them the highest quality, the most efficacious service possible. It is Christ Himself whom we are serving.

The Face of Christ

One's home is not just a house. A home connotes much more; for it is refuge and castle, as well as a place of residence. A home tells the story of its occupants. It reveals much that is intimate about those who live there. Because home is that kind of sanctuary, it belongs in a unique way to those who live there. Under normal conditions, an outsider has no right to enter except by invitation. From this perspective, Vincentians who call on the poor are honored by those who receive them. The welcomed Vincentian is being accorded the status of friend, of guest who is permitted to share in the inner life of another human being or family.

