

## Two by Two

Have you ever wondered why Vincentians go out in pairs as opposed to going out on calls or visits alone? On the surface the answer to this question may appear simple. As Vincentians, we know that we never go out alone for a variety of safety reasons. Each of us can logically deduce that there is more safety in numbers, thus going in pairs is a reasonable safety precaution to take.

In addition to safety concerns, we are required by our Diocesan Safe Environment requirements to minister to others in groups of two or more. Being with someone else reduces the chances that we will say or do anything that might be considered inappropriate. Working in pairs prevents the establishment of grooming behaviors and prohibits ministers from entering into exclusive relationships with those whom we serve.

While safety and protection concerns are strong supportive reasons for requiring Vincentians to only minister in pairs, neither appears to have influenced Frederick Ozanam and the original members who founded our Society. From the very beginnings of our organization, Vincentians have visited the poor in teams of two, but why?

The first members of our Society had a strong sense that it was necessary to go out to spread the Gospel just as Jesus had sent out his apostles two by two. During Ozanam's day, many charitable groups including the Daughters of Charity went out into the streets and worked among the poor alone. This begs the question why did the Society place so much value on going out two by two?

If we look at the concept of two by two in the Bible, we find this practice rich in meaning and practice. This scriptural mandate served as the model for the first conference of charity and helps the Society define who we are and what we do. The number two conveys and articulates community. When we work or minister alone, we are tempted to see that work as something we own. When we enter into the community of two or more, we experience a deep sense that our work represents something bigger than ourselves.

As Vincentian teams we are representatives of the Society and a symbol of God's deep abiding love for all. The work is not about us it is about bringing the Gospel to life for the forgotten, the suffering and the deprived. The money is not our money. The glory is not our glory and the work is the work of all our conference not of our hands alone.

We continually strive to avoid the temptation of making the work about us. At times, it might be easier to just take a few dollars out of our own pockets and give it to a family in need rather than working through the conference, but such actions fly in the face of our Vincentian mission and our call. How many of us have been tempted at least once to pay for something ourselves that our conference has voted against? To act on that temptation would be to work against all that the Society stands for and the process we have agreed upon. It would make the work about us and lead those we serve to feel grateful to us not the One we serve.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells us “where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20). As Vincentians, we know and believe what Jesus has said to be true. When we as members of the Society enter into the community of two or more, we are able to bring the actual and abiding presence of our Lord to those whom we visit. As teams, we can feel God’s presence in a real and unique way, a way that exists only when we are praying and serving within the Body of Christ.

The Bible also tells us that the number two is the means by which truth is assessed. In 2 Corinthians 13:1, we hear that “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” From experience, we know that having two members listen and evaluate the story of those whom we serve gives us a clearer and deeper understanding of their needs and leads us to make better and more enlightened decisions. Sacred scripture supports this concept and tells us that whatever two or more servants of the Lord agree upon shall be considered truth. Community is a vital part of living and working in truth and in love.

The Rule directs us as Vincentians to always minister in twos. Nowhere in the Rule of the Society, does it say that there are exceptions to the two by two requirement. We do home visits in pairs. We deliver food in pairs. We meet our families to pay their rent in pairs. We visit institutions in pairs. ***We never go alone.*** We always go together and by doing so we bring God’s love to those whom we serve in a way that is truly unique to our Vincentian mission. Being a Vincentian means that we fully consent to living and working through the Body of Christ; a body that is always and forever based in a community of two or more joined together in love, vision and service.