Office of Religious Diversity  
Annual Assessment Report  
Academic Year: 2012-2013  

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Abstract  
This project engaged key student leaders from DePaul Christian Ministries (DCM) and related Student Religious Organizations (SROs)* in intentional Vincentian teaching and activities. The purpose of the project was to identify ways in which these students might better understand and relate to the Vincentian legacy, values and teachings and integrate these “Vincentian ways” into their own lives, beliefs, spiritual formation and involvement in community and service.  

Methodology consisted of a focus group at the beginning of the project, journaling in the midst of the initial learning retreat, small group reflection throughout the winter and spring quarters and a one-minute survey distributed at the end of the project. Through these methods it was found that there was significant growth in understanding and embracing Vincentianism among DCM student leaders. An unexpected result of this project is that DCM students from many Christian traditions found common ground and unifying principles in the legacy of Vincentian founders. Twenty five student leaders participated in many DCM activities related to the project and fifteen students fully participated and were provided with final surveys. The results of this project underscore the importance of continuing and expanding Vincentian learning, service and activities among all students.  

Introduction and Context  
Approximately 5,000 students at DePaul annually self-identify as non-Catholic Christians. Nearly five hundred of these are active in DePaul Christian Ministries and related Student Religious Organizations. There is an articulated and demonstrated disconnect between these students and their SROs and the “Vincentian way.” In fact, DCM students are, for the most part, neither familiar with historic Vincentian leaders nor Vincentian values. And, the majority do not see themselves as Vincentian but consider the Vincentian world to be reserved only for the Roman Catholic community. Thus, anything seen as “Vincentian” such as University Ministry or Vincentian community and service work is not typically embraced by DCM students.  

*(see Appendix I of the Office of Religious Diversity 2012-13 annual report for detailed SRO information)
Over the past two years DCM and other Office of Religious Diversity (ORD) staff has worked diligently to help non-Catholic students find a “home” and a connection within University Ministry (UMIN), ORD and Student Affairs. Slowly, DCM’s theologically diverse Christian students and the religious groups to which they belong are becoming more engaged in these larger communities at DePaul. Despite this progress, however, DCM students remain reticent to embrace Vincentian work and values; it was this continued reluctance that prompted the ORD assessment project.

Throughout the 2012-13 academic year DCM staff worked closely with their student leaders, providing Vincentian education, activities, service and reflection opportunities with the purpose of answering one question:

After a year of intentional Vincentian programming, how have students involved in DePaul Christian Ministries grown in their understanding of Vincentianism and in connecting Vincentian values to their own lives, beliefs, spiritual formation and involvement in community and service?

Intentional Vincentian programming with DCM’s student leaders not only provided a means for answering the assessment question, but it also supported two ORD learning outcomes:

1. Students who participate in Office of Religious Diversity programs will consider their own and others’ spiritual/religious and cultural practices and traditions.

As students became more engaged in Vincentian spirituality, service and values, they also came to learn more about Catholic traditions and faith. DCM students naturally considered and encountered cultural practices and traditions of the Catholic church as they participated in this project.

2. Students who participate in Office of Religious Diversity programs and services will commit to Vincentian spirituality and values that embrace the inherent dignity of all human beings.

This entire project was dedicated to helping students commit to Vincentian spirituality and values. In addition, the project helped DCM students who may have viewed “other” Christian traditions with some skepticism to recognize the unifying places within all Christian traditions and to respect the “other.”

Both of the ORD learning outcomes are in keeping with the mission of DePaul University and also reflected in the Division for Student Affairs mission statement and specifically relate to the Division of Student Affairs Learning Outcome:

Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will demonstrate an understanding of their own and others’ faith and spirituality; in their actions, behavior and decisions, they will demonstrate values central to the Vincentian mission of DePaul.

The assessment question proposed by DCM advanced the core values and mission of ORD, UMIN, Student Affairs and DePaul University.

DePaul’s Vision 2018 became the foundation upon which the assessment question was developed. The objective of expanding and deepening “the engagement of all students with DePaul’s...Vincentian mission” inspired the assessment question and helped shape learning and engagement that were essential in answering the question. The DCM assessment project provided numerous co-curricular learning opportunities around Vincentianism and it was geared toward a very specific group of students, both in keeping with the same Vision 2018 objective.
The co-curricular emphasis of Vision 2018 is also a significant component of the Division for Student Affairs Strategic Plan 2010-2013. This co-curricular priority is congruent with the Strategic Plan for holistic learning, which the DCM assessment question advanced through a myriad of academic, spiritual, emotive, service and social learning opportunities.

The theory behind the assessment question was two-fold:
1. DCM students who did engage in Vincentian study and activity would discover that the "Vincentian way" was not only intended for Roman Catholic students but for all, and
2. Embracing Vincentian tenets would encourage and empower students to react to the needs of others, particularly the disenfranchised of society.

The first part of the theory is posited by DePaul University’s President, Fr. Dennis Holtschneider, in his academic convocation celebrating the 80th anniversary of Adamson University. Fr. Holtschneider spoke with passion and proclaimed that “all who walk through our doors, our collaborators and students, can be brought into the great project that Vincent saw and to which Vincent invited everyone...Everyone should be brought into the great work. That’s the heart of it.”

Dr. Scott Kelley, with the DePaul Mission and Values Office, sheds light on the second theoretical thought by linking DePaul University’s Vincentian identity and core value to “sustainable efforts” that will empower those who pass through DePaul University to “read the signs of our times and respond to them.”

The answer to DCM’s assessment question proved both parts of the theory to be correct.

Methodology
The assessment question was specifically geared toward non-Catholic Christians at DePaul. This Christocentric group consists of students from many traditions: Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, Pentecostal, Southern Baptist, United Church of Christ, Non-denominational and “seekers.” The question was not posed to students of a Roman Catholic faith background.

It was initially anticipated that the assessment project would target thirty DCM student leaders but only twenty five signed up for the January 2013 retreat, which spearheaded the assessment project. Each participant in the DCM project self-identified as a leader in DCM and/or connected Student Religious Organizations. This was the only identifying factor necessary for this project.

All leaders participated in a focus group at the beginning of the kick-off leadership retreat, shared thoughts through journaling and group reflections and assisted in planning and implementing at least one premier large group event of a Vincentian nature. Seven leaders continued to learn and reflect upon the “Vincentian way” through bi-weekly meetings held throughout the winter and spring quarters. Two students chose to reflect upon Vincentianism by producing digital stories.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the project and that the results of the project would be shared with the larger University Ministry community, Student Affairs and the Office of Mission and Values. Participation was optional and all who chose to participate in the retreat and subsequent activities gave verbal consent prior to the retreat to participate in the project and its many activities. At the end of the project a one-minute survey was sent to fifteen of the most active students in the project and as their survey responses were submitted, each was asked if their comments might be quoted in the end report if necessary. The nine students who completed the final survey gave permission to use their comments as necessary. Finally, two students developed “Vincentian” digital stories and both gave permission to not only share those stories as a part of the DCM assessment project, but to also allow use of the stories as part of DePaul’s Mission and Values YouTube Digital Stories library.

Retreat Focus Group Questions
These questions were presented to the students at the very beginning of the project retreat.
1. What do you know about St. Vincent DePaul?
2. Who were other historic leaders of the Vincentian movement and what did they contribute?
3. What does it mean to be Vincentian?

Retreat Reflection/Journaling Prompts:
These prompts were provided to students at the project retreat. The prompts and instructions followed a series of presentations on the Vincentian family and values. Instructions were simple: Find a comfortable and quiet place and answer the following questions in the provided journal notebook. After thirty minutes of journaling, we will come back together and you will be invited to share, as you’d like, your thoughts in a small group and then with the entire group.
What is the most significant thing you learned about the Vincentian family/founders?
With which Vincentian leader do you most connect? Why?
With which Vincentian value do you most resonate? Why?
How might you live out Vincentian values in your own life?

Student Identified Criteria for Premier Vincentian Events
Students were invited and encouraged to assist in the planning and implementation of several DCM events, all of which had a significant connection to the “Vincentian way.” Three main events became important arenas in which students were able to uplift Vincentianism, working together in a cooperative atmosphere that uplifted human dignity and mutual respect: Martin Luther King Worship Celebration, PUSH [end of the year ecumenical worship celebration], World Relief Project.
All twenty five students who began the project participated in leadership roles in one or more of these events. Instructions varied depending on the area that each student chose to in but generally, instructions included a request that students prepare and implement the event, weaving in Vincentian understandings and working collaboratively in the spirit of St. Vincent DePaul.

Criteria for Digital Stories
Participants were given the option of producing a digital story that would express how they have experience Vincentianism in their lives. The training and facilities for this creative evaluative tool came through the PAX study program, which sponsored a one credit course led by Brian
Cicerello with the Office for Mission and Values. Students from the Vincentian Community and Service Office and others within ORD (Interfaith Scholars) also participated in the class. The instructions included an invitation to participate in the class during which time they would be given the resources to develop and two to five minute digital story about a personal point in their life when they experienced or participated in a Vincentian moment.

**Criteria for Continued Vincentian Learning at DCM Student Leadership Team Meetings**

Each meeting began with reflection on writings of St. Vincent DePaul or Louise de Marillac OR each meeting began with reflection on a specific Vincentian value. Instructions simply asked students to reflect, sometimes quietly and other times as a group, over the Vincentian moment present to them.

**One-Minute Survey Questions**

This survey was sent to the fifteen students who remained most engaged and active in the majority of DCM activities related to the project. Instructions: Please take one or two minutes (tops) to answer each of the following questions. Please be honest and candid in your reflections. Answer quickly, providing your “gut” reaction. Please do not be concerned about providing answers that are expected—be honest.

As you reflect upon your engagement with DCM programs, retreats, worship, ministry and other events or activities throughout the past two quarters, what was the most useful/meaningful thing you’ve learned about “being Vincentian?”

Name your greatest “Vincentian” accomplishment of this year.

What question remains uppermost in your mind about what it means to be a “Vincentian?”

What might you do beyond this year to live out “Vincentian” values?

**Findings/Results and Discussion**

Thirty DCM student leaders were initially targeted for this project but only 25 actually participated. Throughout the winter and spring quarters of the academic year, 60% of the initial sample group remained extremely active in DCM. The remaining 10 students (40%) were involved in select project activities. Fifteen student leaders were asked to participate in a final one-minute survey and nine students (32% of initial sampling) responded.

As mentioned above, the only identifying factor necessary for this project was key leadership in DCM or its associated Student Religious Organizations. DCM staff made every effort to assure that each Christian faith tradition within DCM was represented by at least one participant. Through these efforts a wide variety of traditions, cultures and ethnic groups were represented through participants. There were ten male and fifteen female participants.

This assessment provided insights and information indicating students from non-Catholic faith groups come to DePaul

• without an understanding of the “Vincentian way,”
• lacking interest in or desire to engage in the “Vincentian way” because “it is Catholic,” but
• willing and able to learn about and embrace Vincentianism.

The project also indicated that students who engage in intentional Vincentian study, reflection and work will come to
integrate “Vincentian ways” into their own lives, beliefs, spiritual formation and involvement.  
recognize how Vincentianism can bring students from all walks of life together for a common good.

The following quotes from DCM student leaders who participated in the assessment give emphasis to assessment indications:

“I thought DePaul was just the guy the school was named after. I didn’t know St. Vincent DePaul did so many amazing things and that he inspired a whole movement. I like being part of that. It helps me feel connected.”

“I didn’t even know DePaul was a Catholic school. When I figured that out it made me a little nervous. Then I heard about Vincentianism. I didn’t even know what that was. That really made me nervous. But, I’m ok with it now. I think it’s pretty great to know that I’m at a school that stands for something.”

“[I’ve learned that] being Vincentian is helping the poor. Helping those who are impoverished is very important, but those are not the only types of poor people. We need to help the spiritually poor, the emotionally poor, the physically poor, the educationally poor, etc.”

“[I’ve learned that] being Vincentian is not feeling the obligation to help the poor, but having the feeling of immense need that something must be done.”

“The most useful and meaningful thing I’ve learned about being a Vincentian means that you serve others before yourself. When in action as a Vincentian, you are allowing God himself to work through you to better the lives of other people no matter who they are and what they believe.”

“I have learned that St. Vincent DePaul’s mission totally lines up with the Gospel. I think that God truly asks us to live a life that is self-sacrificing and a life that values the poor and the marginalized. Being involved with DCM has given me an opportunity to live these values through service opportunities, outreach events, and simple prayer.”

“I have a friend who thought that she was not good enough to work with black students in urban communities because she is a white girl and the historical relationship between whites and blacks make it harder to hide one’s identity in the presence of an oppressed group. After conversing with her I helped her to realize that regardless of the color of her skin, she has something in her that she can offer to students of other races. That’s Vincentian. From that point forward, she was confident that she can help no matter what.”

“My greatest Vincentian accomplishment this year was taking part in Vincentian Service Day. This was my first year participating in this event and it was very powerful to experience in this university-wide day of service. Being a part of this very special day was amazing.”

“I will always be Vincentian because I will be myself and keep helping others because I understand that my life is my ministry.”
“The major question I have about being Vincentian is: how can I be a daily Vincentian? I would like to figure out how I can apply Vincentian values more in my day to day routine.”

In addition to these comments, the digital stories produced by two other DCM leaders uplift Vincentianism ([http://www.youtube.com/user/depaulmission](http://www.youtube.com/user/depaulmission)) and provide examples of students’ connections to Vincentian values.

There were actually two significant surprises that came out of this assessment project.

• The most interesting surprise came from listening to students during the focus group and in the small group reflections. Here students openly shared their skepticism and distrust of Catholicism. Several of the more theologically conservative non-Catholic students voiced their reluctance to engage in UMIN activities and work because they always thought it was “just for Catholics.” Others felt “left out” and “on the fringes” of religious life at DePaul because it always seemed to revolve around “the Catholic stuff and St. Vincent DePaul.” The importance of building a visible DCM presence, a universal Vincentian acceptance and sense of UMIN ownership among DCM leaders and participants is critical to supporting the faith and spiritual life of the non-Catholic Christians at DePaul.

• The competition that DCM staff intuitively suspected among SROs as they recruited students and engaged students in SRO activities was unexpectedly confirmed through this study. By the end of the spring quarter, DCM students’ willingness to admit their own “competitive feelings” among SROs was articulated during small group reflections. There was a sense that the competition was unfounded and unnecessary as students came to focus on unifying factors rather than things that drove them apart. Students who were once skeptical of one another because of theological and spiritual differences found common ground in serving the poor, reflecting upon unity and diversity and uplifting the dignity of all people and all religions. The President of the DCM Student Leadership Team best describes the unifying gift of Vincentian engagement:

> “Before we worked together and actually came to reflect and learn together, I was afraid to even talk to [others]. I didn’t want to look like I was trying to become part of their group and I didn’t want them to think I was recruiting. It’s all a lot better now. And I’m so glad I got to know [them]. They are amazing!” This is perfect example of young adults on campus embracing diversity, appreciating the individual and working together with a common goal. This is also inspiration for continuing to educate and encourage DCM students as they open their hearts and minds to the Vincentian world and become more integrated into the heart of University Ministry.

Since key DCM leaders were targeted in this study, the sample group was limited in size. Another limitation came through attrition. As students came toward the end of the academic year, fewer were engaged in the project and the result is fewer responses to the final survey. Both of these raise limitations in the scope and breadth of the assessment but the results from even a smaller sampling provided useful insights and implications regarding Vincentian education.

**Implications**

The Office of Religious Diversity, in its 2012-13 goals, called for the development of “a Common Student Vincentian” curriculum. This assessment project stresses the importance of developing and consistently utilizing this curriculum. Two new and important components of the curriculum would candidly address
(1) student resistance toward Vincentianism because of its Catholic roots and
(2) the unifying components of the vision and mission of St. Vincent DePaul.

This assessment project provides helpful insights into the presuppositions, reluctances and lack
of understanding on the part of non-Catholic Christian students regarding the “Vincentian way.”
With such insight, the Division of Student Affairs, UMIN and the larger university community
has an opportunity to explore and address how programs and activities might break down
barriers to Vincentian learning, understanding and action. Perhaps the barriers could be
addressed by weaving a Vincentian curriculum similar to the one being developed for use by
ORD (and UMIN) into the Division. Just as Socially Responsible Leadership is entwined in all
areas of Student Affairs, so too might Vincentian education be plaited into the Division and other
areas within the University. As students learn more about the namesake of the institution and
understand the imperatives of the” Vincentian way” they will discover commonalities among
themselves and develop leadership skills and values that will empower them to become giving,
serving citizens. As Dr. Kelley so aptly put it, embracing Vincentian values and actions leads to
“sustainable efforts” that will benefit individuals, the university and the world.

IRB approval for this project was not obtained.

The results for this project will be shared within ORD and UMIN, with the Office of Mission and
Values and Student Affairs. A pastoral reflection on the significance of embracing the
“Vincentian way” will be shared with UMIN students and staff as well as the Office of Mission
and Values. Specific project results will be shared with participants at a fall DCM Leadership
Retreat and again at a winter quarter Student Leadership Retreat. Students will be encouraged to
use their knowledge and the results of the project to teach, inspire and encourage new students to
DCM. The digital stories are available on-line: http://www.youtube.com/user/depaulmission.

Many of the DCM activities embedded in this project will become annual events that will
continue to uplift and develop the Vincentian values within DCM and ORD. DCM staff will
annually use the ORD Vincentian curriculum and appropriate assessment tools to continue
evaluating the efficacy of Vincentian study and engagement among its students. Those areas
within ORD that already weave Vincentian reflection, service, education and formation into
programming will enhance that work by following the ORD strategy. Other areas within ORD
that have not yet moved into explicit Vincentian education and formation will also follow the
strategic plan, utilizing the curriculum in a way that is relevant to specific faith traditions.