About Saint Vincent de Paul and DePaul University’s Vincentian, Catholic and Urban Identity

Rev. Edward R. Udovic, C.M., Ph.D.
Secretary of the University
Senior Executive for University Mission
Saint Vincent de Paul, (1581-1660), was a French Roman Catholic priest who in 1625 founded the Congregation of the Mission (known as the Vincentians). The Vincentians came to the United States in 1816, and in 1818 founded the first college west of the Mississippi River, St. Mary’s of the Barrens in Perryville, Missouri. In 1898, they founded St. Vincent’s College in Chicago, which in 1907 became DePaul University. Besides DePaul, there are two other Vincentian universities in the United States, St. John’s University in Jamaica, New York and Niagara University, in Niagara Falls, New York. The Midwest Province of the Congregation of the Mission (headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri) continues to sponsor DePaul, thereby ensuring the continuation of its Vincentian and Catholic identity.
Within the Roman Catholic Church, Saint Vincent de Paul is known as the “Apostle of Charity.” Vincent lived in Paris for almost all of his adult life. When he looked around at the city he knew so well he saw people in need everywhere. His faith told him that these people were his brothers and sisters in Christ. He felt a personal responsibility to do something that would make a difference in their lives; to do something that would change a world in which suffering and poverty were so taken for granted.
Vincent de Paul knew that making a difference often meant challenging the status quo. He understood contemporary problems and responded with efforts that were part of long-term systematic solutions. Since solutions require resources, he never failed to find the means that were necessary to turn dreams of solutions into reality. Thus, for almost four hundred years, the Vincentian mission has continued to inspire men and women throughout the world to join together to make a difference in the lives of others.

Using contemporary terms, Vincent de Paul can be described as having been:

• **Values-Driven**: His motivation was always transparent—Providing service that honored the human dignity of the individual person.

• **Connected to the Community**: He knew that community transformation demanded community involvement.

• **Supportive of Diversity**: He was always concerned about including those who found themselves excluded by society, by the economy, by the church, or by any human system.

• **A Risk Taker**: Since he felt that so much was at stake, he was always willing to take calculated risks to promote the greater good.

• **Innovative**: He was guided by the motto: “Love is inventive to infinity.”

• **Pragmatic**: He was interested in results. “It is not enough to do good. It must be done well.”
Since September 1898 succeeding generations of DePaul faculty, staff and students have accepted the vision of Vincent de Paul, and made it their own. The official Latin title of the Congregation of the Mission is *Congregatio Missionis*. A literal English translation of this would be “A community gathered together for the sake of the mission.” From this perspective every student, faculty member, and staff member can be said to be a “Vincentian” for we are gathered together for the sake of fulfilling the educational mission of DePaul.

Central to this Vincentian educational mission are faculty members who stress the primacy of teaching and student learning through smaller classes, close faculty/student interaction, and innovative approaches. The University encourages teaching excellence by supporting faculty research, and encouraging a broad definition of scholarship and service.

Also central to this Vincentian educational mission are staff members who, no matter what their role, put our students first.

DePaul provides opportunities for our students, many of whom are first generation college attenders, students of color, or come from underrepresented populations, to have access to a quality higher education that focuses on learning outcomes, academic success, and personal fulfillment.

DePaul provides professional students with an education that is designed for life-long learners who want to invest in themselves. These students find in DePaul a university that creatively meets their needs, and is equally interested in investing in their educational success.

DePaul’s enrollment growth has been driven by a mission decision with deep
Vincentian roots. As the university has welcomed more of the students who naturally look to it for educational opportunity, new faculty and staff have been hired to teach and support them. DePaul is committed to increasing its capacity to provide an optimal environment for learning experiences and student services. The university anticipates a measured enrollment growth in the future to ensure that a high quality education is always available to students who can be successful here.

DePaul’s true place in American higher education, and its true contribution to society, has everything to do with the kind of diverse students it serves and the educational outcomes of those students given its identity as a Catholic, Vincentian and urban university.

DePaul began its history literally as a “neighborhood” urban university. We were for many years the proverbial “little school under the El” serving the people of the city of Chicago. Today, DePaul continues to define itself as an “urban” university, but one whose size and mission now call for a wide-ranging engagement with the contemporary world.
DePaul: A Vincentian and Catholic University

There are many ways in which a Catholic higher educational institution can faithfully live out its religious identity. At DePaul it is difficult to view the university’s Catholic character independently from its Vincentian character. From a Vincentian perspective, the university has prided itself on being a Catholic institution that genuinely welcomes very diverse faculty, staff and students, inviting each person to find at DePaul a community that is inclusive and “conversational” rather than exclusive and “confessional.”

As a Catholic university, DePaul provides a learning environment that invites all inquirers to engage in the compelling search for wisdom. The free examination of the beliefs and values of the Roman Catholic, and all
other faith traditions and secular values systems is designed to lead to critical judgments about the respective contributions of these systems to the human enterprise past, present and future.

As a Catholic university, DePaul fosters a community that knows that our diverse beliefs and values help our community to recognize and serve the common good inside and outside of the university. The tensions and conflicts that inevitably arise are addressed on the basis of the mutual understanding, acceptance, and respect that are characteristic of this type of community.

As a Catholic university, DePaul pays appropriate attention to the religious dimensions of its institutional life. For example, the full range of Catholic worship, sacramental opportunities, faith education and service projects are provided. University Ministry also serves the religious needs of other faith traditions represented in the community. Consonant with the true nature of ecumenical relations, these services and programs are not compartmentalized, but rather are integrated to provide for the fruitful dialogue among religious traditions in ways that strengthen the DePaul community.
In order for these values to continue to inform the life of the university, the university community participates in an ongoing public dialogue concerning the institution’s Catholic and Vincentian identity. This is the positive process envisioned by Pope John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, on the nature and role of the Catholic university in the modern world.

DePaul believes that its distinctive Catholic, Vincentian and urban identity provides a compelling educational mission. DePaul stands at the center of an ever-expanding sphere of influence that enables students, faculty, staff and alumni to advance personally, intellectually and professionally. Innovative, diverse, pragmatic, values-based and actively connected to the community, this vibrant network of people and educational programs creates quality life-long learning opportunities that benefit all. Saint Vincent would feel very much at home today at the university that bears his name.
Illustrations and Photographs


Inside front cover: above, St. Vincent’s College and St. Vincent’s Church, 1898, DePaul University Archives; below, John T. Richardson Library and the Quadrangle, Lincoln Park Campus, contemporary photo.

Page 1: St. Vincent de Paul, holy card, 19th century, French, Vincentiana Collection, Special Collections; below, We Are DePaul 2, a mural by Mark Elder, C.M. and students, Francis X. McCabe Hall, 900 West Belden Avenue.

Page 2: above, St. Vincent de Paul, holy card, 20th century, German, Vincentiana Collection, Special Collections; below, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, commemorative postage stamps, 20th century, Italian, Vincentiana Collection, Special Collections.

Page 3: Icon of Saint Vincent de Paul by Robert Lentz.

Pages 4 and 5: contemporary photos, DePaul University.

Page 6: above, Christ Enthroned, stained glass window, Saint Vincent de Paul Church, Sheffield and Webster Avenues; below, Rev. John P. Minogue, C.M., President of DePaul University.

Page 7: above and center, contemporary photos, DePaul University; below, the DePaul Gospel Choir.


Back Cover: Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Chapel, Lewis Center, Loop Campus, gift of Walter P. Powers.