

# **Spiritual Advisor Toolkit**

**Quarterly Reflection Series**

**April – May – June**



**Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

**Cincinnati District Council**

**2024**

## Introduction

Enclosed are a series of reflections created to serve as a tool to guide the Spiritual Advisor, and/or President, as Vincentians strive towards deeper bonds of faith and fellowship in our work of serving our neighbors in need. The enclosed reflections for use at your Conference meetings are one of the options available to your members. Each section is limited to one sheet, double-sided for ease of use at a given meeting. **The required Safeguarding Reflection to fulfill the ongoing education requirement is noted below and features a star next to it.**

## Readings

- The Gospel reading will be one which connects to a theme or topic within the overall reflection. On special occasions, the Gospel reading will be from the liturgical feast day being celebrated, or another source.

## Reflections

- There is a single reflection offered for each accompanying reading that may be adjusted for the needs of the group as the facilitator sees fit.

## Reflection Questions

- At least two questions are provided for each overall reflection. The first is more for personal/private reflection if participants desire. The second question, as well as any others, are oriented more towards facilitating group discussion and interaction. Facilitators are free to develop their own questions or activities, as desired.

## Group Prayers

- Conferences are encouraged to utilize the Opening and Closing Prayers from the SVDP U.S. National Council. If your Conference needs additional copies, please contact the Formation and Service Learning Director: Chris Kelley at [ckelley@SVDPCincinnati.org](mailto:ckelley@SVDPCincinnati.org) or [formation@SVDPCincinnati.org](mailto:formation@SVDPCincinnati.org). These are available at no cost to the Conference.
- During Beacons of Light, Conferences are encouraged to pray the official “*Radiate Christ*” prayer, composed by Archbishop Dennis Schnurr, from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, which is included in this packet. A Vincentian version has been adapted by a Spiritual Advisor from a Conference in our District and has been made available as well.

## Reflections For This Quarter

- I. **Reflecting on Forgiveness & Mercy** – Easter Reflection (April)
- II. **Called & Sent** – Reflecting on Pentecost (May)
- ★ III. **Reflecting on Vulnerability & Boundaries** (June)  
Quarterly Safeguarding Reflection
- IV. **Bonus: Reflection on Serving our Neighbors with Dignity**

## **Easter Reflection** **Reflecting on Forgiveness & Mercy** (April 1 – May 19)

### **A Reading from John**

(Jn. 21:15-18)

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”*

*He then said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”*

*He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”*

*[Jesus] said to him, “Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”*

### **Reflection**

Have you ever struggled with forgiveness? Struggled with the idea someone could forgive you for something that you had done or some words that were said in the heat of a moment? At some point in our lives, we come face to face with our mistakes – with the missteps we have made. Yet, we know in the depths of our hearts that the moments where we have fallen short in living out our lives well or properly, where we may have harmed someone or even ourselves, are not moments that should be what defines us – who we are is more than a particular moment. There is something, someone, greater which defines us – what defines us is being made in the image and likeness of God and He has made us in a very intentional way. Our Lord so deeply loves us that He has desired to be with us and heal us in those moments, removing the thorns of those times we fell short when we come to Him in confession seeking that reconciliation which He continually offers to each of us through Jesus.

Throughout the entirety of Scripture, the Lord continually reminds us that He does not desire offerings, particular works to be done to earn His favor – He is looking first at our hearts, at what is beneath the surface and where we are currently in our journey, He desires that piece of us found deep within ourselves. He knows full well the paths we have walked, as well as those we are continuing to walk, in these difficult moments of reflection.

We see this in our Gospel passage above, where Christ sees Peter and the disciples; He probes the heart of Peter to see where his love is truly coming from. It is in this moment where we can see the stark difference between Peter and Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Judas

gave in to the belief that his action defined who he was in the eyes of God, while Peter refused to. Instead, Peter sought to change his life and seek after the Lord even more. It is in this larger setting that Jesus invites each of us to share our hurts and burdens with Him, to bring the difficulties to Him and allow Him to share a deeper insight into who we are, all so we may come to know ourselves and the Lord more deeply.

At the core of Jesus' message is ultimately a call to forgiveness and mercy – the call to experiencing the healing love of God knowing we may not always deserve it and then sharing that hopeful message to the entire world around us. We are called to a witness with our neighbors and at our Conference meetings where we bring the hope of Christ forward, for we have walked that road before and are coming to experience the love the Lord has for each person.

May we continue striving to be a people of love and mercy, a people after the Lord's own heart and willing to share the same with each person we encounter.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** Like Peter, we can sometimes dwell upon our mistakes or seek to make amends, yet the person that we are with often simply wants us to be with them, to be better moving forward showing that we have learned from this moment. In what ways have you found it easier or more difficult to forgive? Are there some mistakes which are easier to forgive than others?
  
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** The Lord is ultimately calling each of us into a relationship with Him, and that means being willing to admit our mistakes from time to time. In what ways have you found the Lord has brought forgiveness and healing/love into your life? How are you more forgiving/loving because of your time as a Vincentian?
  
3. **(Group Activity)** There are many ways to feed a person, to feed the sheep like Peter was called to do. This can be through actual food, through a kind word or an act of mercy, through prayer, or some other opportunity. Take a few moments to write on a notecard or scrap of paper about a time where you felt fed in some way by your fellow Vincentians in the Conference. When you are done, place the papers in a pile in the center of the group and have each person randomly choose a card to read aloud.

**Called & Sent:**  
**Reflection for Pentecost**  
(May 19)

**A Reading from John**

(Jn. 20:19-29)

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

*When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."*

*Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

*Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."*

**Reflection**

Pentecost, the moment when the Holy Spirit comes down upon each of the disciples, each of us, and strengthens the gifts we need to go out and proclaim the Good News to the world we encounter. It is a privileged time where that Easter joy of having spent nearly the past 50 days walking alongside Christ and being inspired by the words which He speaks following the Resurrection is called to go out into the unknown.

As Vincentians, we have a deep devotion to the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. We can see Him behind the random phone call of a member in the community looking to assist our Conference with a need, or the parishioner asking what exactly it is that we do and whether they could possibly help with it. We see it in the cheerful face of our fellow Vincentians who bring warmth into the lives of so many, including our own, whether it is at a Conference meeting or in the Home Visit. Even with all of this joy, there is still that hidden thought like Thomas of simply wanting to be with Jesus, to have the same experiences as someone else, and struggling with how to accept our path as ever so slightly different from those around us.

Thomas is sometimes referred to as the doubter. We get the term that someone is a Doubting Thomas from the encounter within our Gospel passage, and while it is clear that Thomas is struggling with believing, he is struggle isn't so much with the idea that Jesus has

risen. Instead, the struggle for Thomas is in accepting that everyone else has seemingly been given a moment of clear encounter with the Risen Lord, yet he still seeks his own; he wants to be like everyone else who he can sometimes think is becoming holier than he is. How many of us can struggle with those same feelings; the feelings of not being quite advanced enough in our spiritual life or that we are not prepared because we have yet to experience that undeniable moment like the other disciples in that room?

The truth is, each of us is called forward for a particular reason and at a particular time. The Lord encounters us personally in the ways we need, even if they are hidden in the moment, they can still come to be discovered upon reflection later. The Holy Spirit coming down upon us at Pentecost helps to strengthen us for our unique task, our unique journey and relationship which the Lord is calling us to – something that no other person will ever or has ever quite experienced. As a Vincentian, we are uniquely and individually called to join a community as we grow in those gifts, deepening our bonds with each other, the Lord, and our neighbors who will also come to help reveal the presence of Christ. We are called to know the Lord and sent out to meet Him each day in each encounter we have in our ministry.

May this celebration of Pentecost help renew the face of the Earth, may each of us come to a deeper love of Jesus, and may we be faithful stewards of the gifts we have received for the greater glory of our Lord.

### Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** Each of us is called in a unique way, in vocations big and small; sometimes it takes a while to realize the little nudge we felt towards something was actually a deeper calling reaching out to us. What is a moment from your own life where you felt called by the Lord toward something? What was that calling like for you, and did you follow it?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** The Lord invites us to use the gifts the Holy Spirit has revealed at times, and strengthening those we received at our Baptism. What are some of the gifts you feel you have been given in life for your vocation?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Have you ever had a moment where you felt the Holy Spirit brought about something – a new encounter, the means to fulfill a need, encouragement when life was difficult? Describe that moment.



## Safeguarding Reflection: Reflecting on Vulnerability & Boundaries

### Safeguarding Tips

When encountering a neighbor in a vulnerable position in life, there is a desire to comfort them and let them know they are not alone in this moment. We can sometimes do this by relating a story from our own life or trying to provide a silver lining, yet that can sometimes be felt as diminishing their current experience. The level of our own sharing also poses a question of what appropriate boundaries are in moments of vulnerability, especially because allowing yourself to be vulnerable with another person allows for that person to also be vulnerable and a bond to form over shared difficulties. Any time we share something from our life, or from another persons, we must keep an appropriate respect for the unique situation and lived experience of that person; this is their moment, not ours.

### A Reading from John

(Jn. 13:4-5)

*“He rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around his waist... So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet.”*

### Reflection

Have you ever come across a situation where a neighbor has become frustrated by a Vincentians question? Perhaps feeling disrespected or that someone is going beyond a past experience of what an agency typically asks. Our neighbors’ position of material need makes them naturally vulnerable and that can be uncomfortable when someone comes into the moment with a desire to truly know them more as a person, their experiences as well as their hopes or dreams. Yet our calling is to be ministers, not agents, we are coming from a place of true Christian love which often means displaying our own vulnerability, within an appropriate boundary.

When we think of true Christian vulnerability, of pouring ourselves out to help, there is no greater reminder than the life of our Lord Jesus who continually poured Himself out for each person. In our scripture passage today, Jesus makes Himself vulnerable to the other disciples, showing them the humble and gracious way to serve.

Jesus says nothing initially, he simply rises from the table and goes to each person to serve – He visits them in their own “inner personal home”. Upon meeting them, He takes off the outer garments, symbolically removing the layers or barriers keeping Him from the person in front of Him as he prepares to serve them without an agenda. As the moment arrives, He silently takes in the experience of each disciple, washing each foot slowly and carefully, being sure to fully clean and dry the foot. Each step in the process is carefully attended to, showing the deep



care and compassion of one who comes not to bestow a gift upon someone but to simply be with them and bring a graced moment of love which can lead to lasting healing.

Following this moment of encounter, Jesus once again places His garments on as He readies to re-enter the outside world, yet both people have been changed by this encounter – they come to once again sit at the table now as true equals united by that privileged moment of healing love that was given. Then, only after having brought love and healing, Jesus' only words offered to the disciples in this moment are to acknowledge that even the person who might have great positions or resources must be willing to go into the deep with another person and be vulnerable – what matters most is not the amount we bring to the experience but the love.

As Vincentians, coming into a neighbors' home, or even just into their life for even a moment, we meet them without any of those outer garments. They come to us with many wounds that we may never know or see, and it is up to us to respect that vulnerability and honor the person they are underneath. If, in showing us their deeper self, we see the lasting wounds – perhaps of a difficult childhood, substance misuse, neglect, or depression, we are not called to judge, but to act. We can be that space where they open up, yet we need to be mindful of what is a safe boundary for them as well as for us – sometimes inviting them to hold their thoughts for one who is more equipped to bring the healing presence of Christ into their life. Our role as we bring Christ into these moments is less about us being the healer and more about bringing the wider body of Christ to support the healing of the person before us, giving them control over their own story, and helping them to grow into the person the Lord desires them to be.

May the work we do as Vincentians each day continue to reveal the healing power of Christ's love every day.

### Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** Each of us enters a discussion from unique backgrounds and has particular boundaries. What are some boundaries that you have with neighbors, Vincentians, friends, etc.? How firm are you on those boundaries – are they strong or loose boundaries?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** Describe a moment in your life where someone has opened up to you. How did that happen and what did you feel in the moment?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** What are some ways you have helped to reaffirm someone's experience while also keeping a healthy personal boundary?



## Serving our Neighbors with Dignity

A key pillar of our District Council's *Better Together* Strategic Plan is enhancing the lives of those we encounter in our ministry, namely our Neighbors who are seeking guidance and help, but to do so with a greater respect for each person's dignity. This reflection is meant to help bring about deeper discussion on what dignified service may look like, and how we can work to enliven the Home Visit as a core work of our Society.

### A Reading from Mark

(Mk. 4:1-9)

*On another occasion he began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land.*

*And he taught them at length in parables, and in the course of his instruction he said to them, "Hear this! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up.*

*Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots.*

*Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain.*

*And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." He added, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear."*

### Reflection

The parables found within the Gospel accounts are often moments to reflect upon what it is that we are ultimately called to do, how are we called to live out our lives as Christians following the words of Christ which sometimes come to us in seemingly hidden ways. Yet immediately after this passage, Jesus reminds the disciples that they have been given the insights needed to understand their calling and how to serve well.

In our lives as Vincentians, we often are like the Sower in this parable. We know in this moment of exchange in the Home Visit for the first time, perhaps the only time we may encounter this neighbor, we will not be able to solve all the issues they are facing in life. We also realize that our role isn't to be the savior, or to fix everything like a mechanic – we are not Jesus. Instead, we are called to tend to the person in front of us like a careful gardener so that our neighbor will be receptive to the love and Word of God witnessed throughout our time spent in the visit. Our hope becomes one where we seek to plant the seeds in the right soil and pray for their growth, pray that they will be watered well and remember how

much they are uniquely loved by Jesus. In due time, we hope to encounter our neighbor again, perhaps following up on this experience a few weeks or months later, and helping continue a discussion that one day leads to them seeing their own deeper dignity respected, seeing the value which they bring to those around them simply for being themselves, and seeing the many gifts which the Lord has given to them for building the Kingdom in their part of the world.

### Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** Each of us desires to be welcomed and accepted for who we are, not seen for the situation we are in at a given moment in time. Describe a time when you have felt true welcome and inclusion with a group. What qualities made it so? How can you bring that to your Conference or the Home Visit for those around you as well?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** The Home Visit is part of the core works of the Society, but not the only work. When you think about your Conferences experiences with the Home Visit, where do you find the most joy? What do you appreciate most about a Visit?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** As part of the Home Visit, we are called to enter into a space that provides a sense of welcome, a place where our neighbors can be safe to be who they are and share their experiences. What are some ways that you or others in your Conference try to do this? Outside of promising material assistance, what has helped create a joyful experience for our neighbors during a Visit?

Archdiocese of Cincinnati Prayer for Beacons of Light



*RADIATE CHRIST*

*Mary,  
Mother of the Church  
and our Mother,  
present our prayer  
of thanksgiving to your Son.  
Beg from Him the graces we need  
to be faithful disciples who follow Him  
with enthusiasm and joy.  
May our witness to the love of God  
bear fruit in our archdiocese,  
parishes, homes and hearts.  
Teach us to be God's joyful witnesses,  
to radiate Christ in all we do,  
so that all people might know,  
love and follow your Son  
through this life  
and into the next.*

*Amen.*



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**A Vincentian Prayer for Beacons of Light**

(Adapted from the *Radiate Christ* prayer of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati)

**Vincentian Prayer for  
Beacons of Light**

**Mary,**

**Mother of the Church and our Mother,**

**Patroness of our Society,**

**we ask that you present our prayer  
of thanksgiving to your Son.**

**Seek from Him the graces we need  
to be faithful disciples,  
and Vincentians, who follow  
with enthusiasm and joy.**

**May our witness to the love of God  
bear fruit in our archdiocese,  
parishes, homes and hearts,  
and here in our Conference.**

**Teach us to be God's joyful witnesses,  
to radiate Christ in all we do,  
so that all people, especially our neighbors,  
might know, love, and follow your Son  
through this life and into the next.**

**Amen.**

\*Adapted from the prayer *Radiate Christ* of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati