

## History of the Organization



Blessed Frederic Ozanam –  
Founder

**Blessed Frederic Ozanam (1813 - 1853)** was founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Frederic was a husband and father, professor and servant of the poor. He founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as a young student with others of the Sorbonne in Paris. Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, is considered a mentor of Frederic and of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as she taught the first members the art of helping the poor and the sick. Frederic's writings on social justice anticipated the first social encyclical of our modern times, *Rerum Novarum*.

### How the Society Started

Frédéric Ozanam left his home in Lyon, France, in the autumn of 1831, for Paris. He registered in the School of Law at the Sorbonne, University of Paris. Frédéric collaborated with Mr. Emmanuel Bailly, editor of the *Tribune Catholique*, in reviving a student organization which had been suspended during the revolutionary activity of July 1830. They called their new association "The Conference of History." The group met on Saturdays to discuss various topics, everything but politics.

At one of their meetings, a student challenged Frédéric and the practicing Catholics. He admitted that the Catholic Church had done much good work in the past, but "what do you do now?"

Frédéric called for a meeting of five of his friends; they agreed to meet at Mr. Bailly's office. The date was April 23, 1833, Frédéric's twentieth birthday. Inspired by their words, Frédéric decided to found the "Conference of Charity" to assist the poor. Emmanuel Bailly, the married layman, was chosen by the six students as their first President. In a short time, they changed their name to The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in honor of their patron.

### The Society in the United States

While historians are not certain about some details, there is no doubt that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was established in St. Louis, Missouri at the Basilica of St. Louis, King of France, popularly called "The Old Cathedral," in 1845. Father John Timon, CM, an American Vincentian priest from Pennsylvania, and later Bishop of Buffalo, New York, was the one who brought copies of the Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul back from Dublin, Ireland, to St. Louis. Timon talked to various people about the Society and its wonderful work with the poor.

Bishop Peter Richard Kenrick, successor of the first Bishop of St. Louis, Joseph Rosati, CM, asked Father Ambrose Heim to establish the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and be its Spiritual Advisor. Father Heim was known by all for his extraordinary zeal and ministry with the poor. He became known as "The Priest of the Poor."

The first meeting of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States was held on November 20, 1845, only twelve years after its foundation in Paris. Nineteen of the most prominent Catholic layment of St. Louis attended. Dr. Moses Linton was elected President, Bryan Mullanphy, Vice President, Dennis Galvin, Second Vice President, James Maguire Jr., Secretary, Patrick Ryder, Treasurer, and Fr. Ambrose Heim, Spiritual Advisor. The Conference was aggregated (formally recognized) by the Society's International Council in Paris on February 2, 1846.