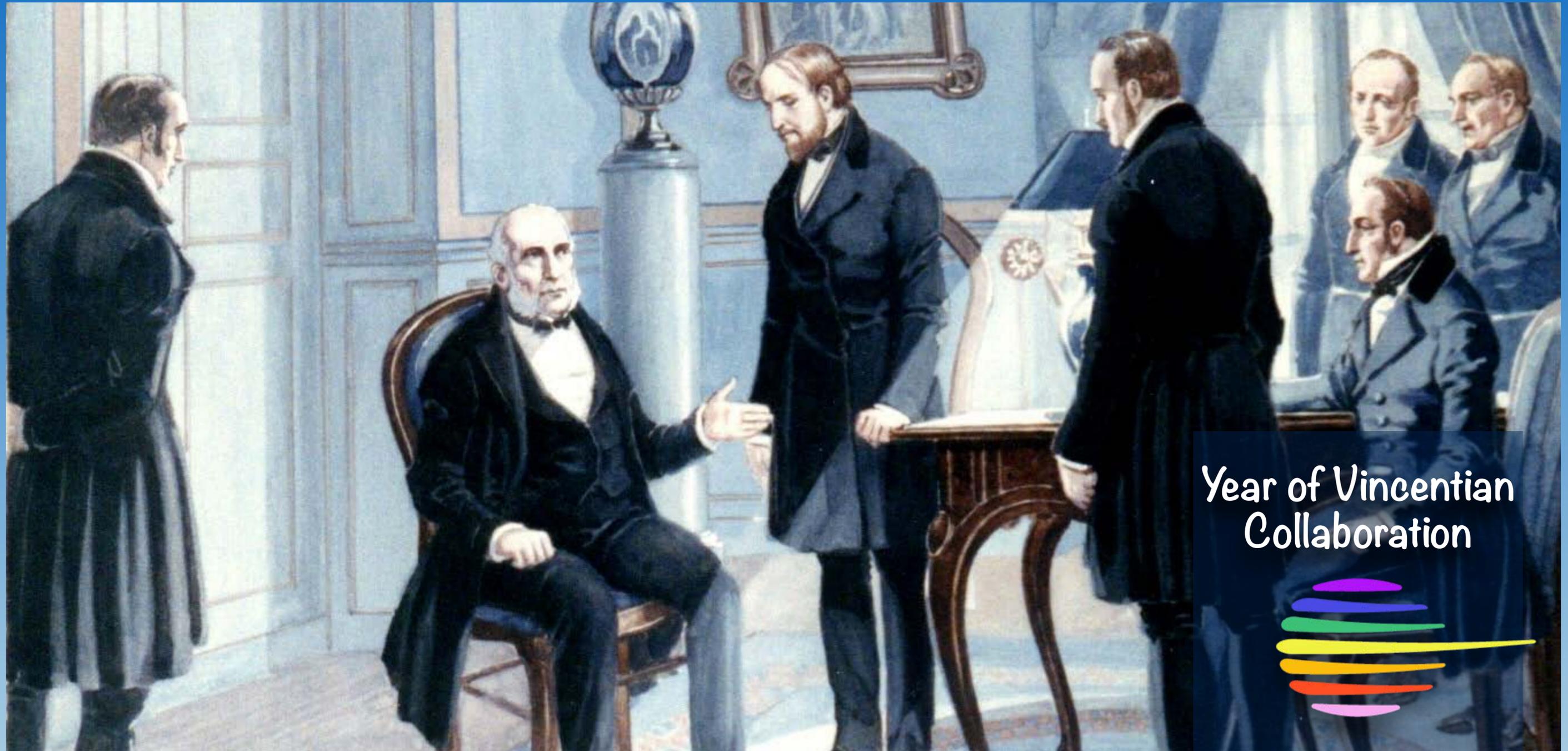


Frédéric Ozanam and Collaboration



Feast of Blessed Frédéric, September 9, 2015

The dream of a group of friends

- The history of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is really quite simple. It is about the dream of a **group of friends** in 1833.



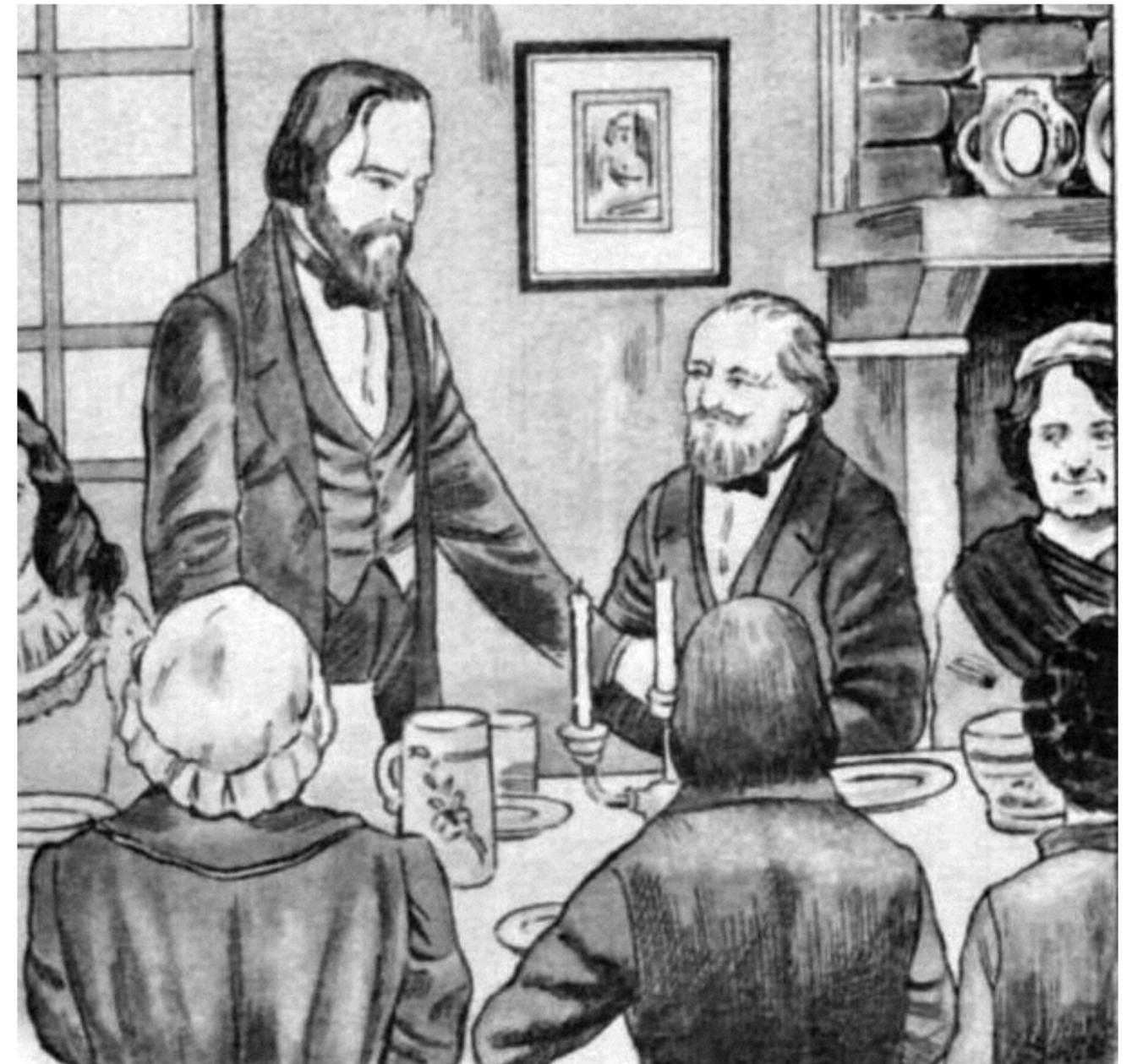
The situation

- By the early 1800s in France, the effects of the Industrial Revolution were hard to ignore: the mechanization of industry, the proliferation of steam-driven machinery, the development and concentration of factories, the displacement of the populace, and the exploitation of the working class.
- The consequences of this were immediately felt: a steep drop in wages caused by competition among workers seeking jobs and thus an excessive increase in unemployment, synonymous with hunger.



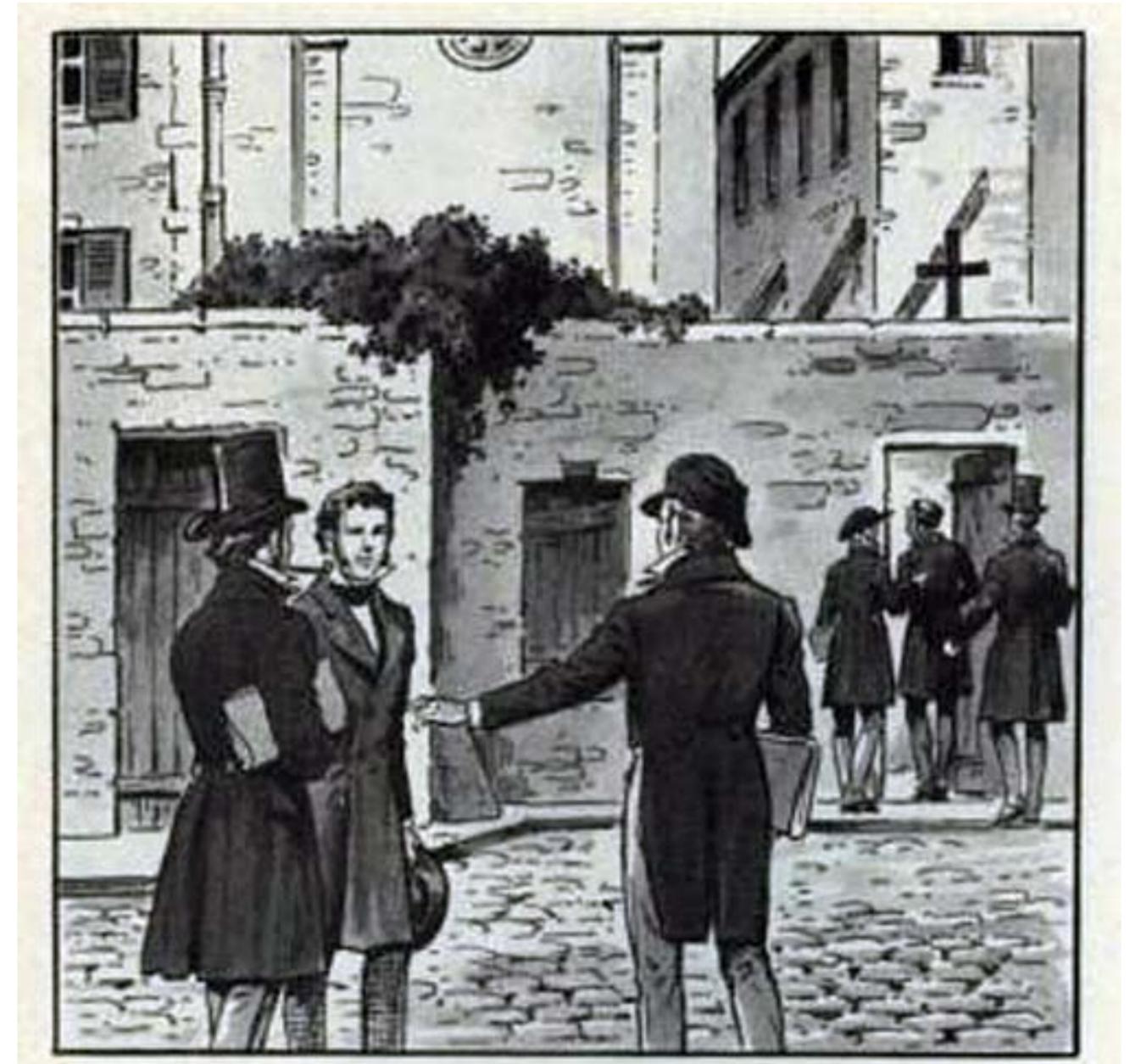
Moved with concern for the working class

- By 1830, there was a first wave of Catholics who were concerned for the fate of the working class.
- Some intellectuals of the time were beginning to react. In *L'Avenir*, the daily newspaper of Lacordaire and Montalembert, they published various articles that caught the attention of several young Catholics, including Frederic Ozanam.



Commitment

- Paris was in turmoil and so **Frederic and five of his friends** sought to devote themselves to helping the people living in terrible poverty.
- The six men were quite young; the eldest was 24 and the youngest was 19.



Seeking someone to complement the group

- To complete their group, these young men wisely decided to place themselves under the guidance of someone older than they: a 40-year-old man, **Emmanuel Bailly**, who offered them life experience, **contacts, and the capacity for networking** that they needed.



Gathering in solidarity



- In 1831, outraged by the *Journal de débats* for having called “the working class barbarians and enemies,” Ozanam denounced “the contempt for human dignity, the exploitation, the comparison of the worker to a machine, the slavery, the waste in the face of human misery, the usury, the brutality of the economists and the industrialists.” **A small group of Catholic students, companions of his from the Sorbonne, had gathered around him,** among them Jules Devaux, François Lallier, Auguste Le Taillandier and Paul Lamache, all future members of the first Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Teaming up with like-minded people

- Le Taillandier was the first of the future founders to be on the right track as he tried to inspire his friends with these words: “A meeting of charity where **a group of Catholics gather together** would have the double merit of preserving in them the spirit of faith and making their companions who are indifferent see the persistent and beneficial vitality of Christianity.”



Reaching out; fine-tuning

- The group went to see the local pastor in their neighborhood, Fr. Olivier, for guidance. He suggested that if they wanted to help the poor they could direct the catechesis of needy young children. A nice suggestion, but not quite what they were looking for.



Welcoming advice from one with more experience

- The oldest of the group, Mr. Bailly, had the great idea of sending them to visit a woman religious who would end up **profoundly influencing the whole group**, and without whom the Society of St. Vincent de Paul would not have been the same: **Sister Rosalie Rendu**.



Getting to work

- Sister welcomed them with great warmth and instantly understood what they were seeking. She got to work immediately by giving them tickets for free bread which she distributed to help the poor. She showed them how to use the tickets and how to alleviate misery in very concrete ways.



Charity in Action

- These young men, along with Sr. Rosalie, began to act. They went personally to visit the poor in their own homes and distributed aid to them.



Choosing a patron, a role model

- The project was placed under the protection of **Saint Vincent de Paul** because Sr. Rosalie had presented him as a model of boundless humility, charity and simplicity.



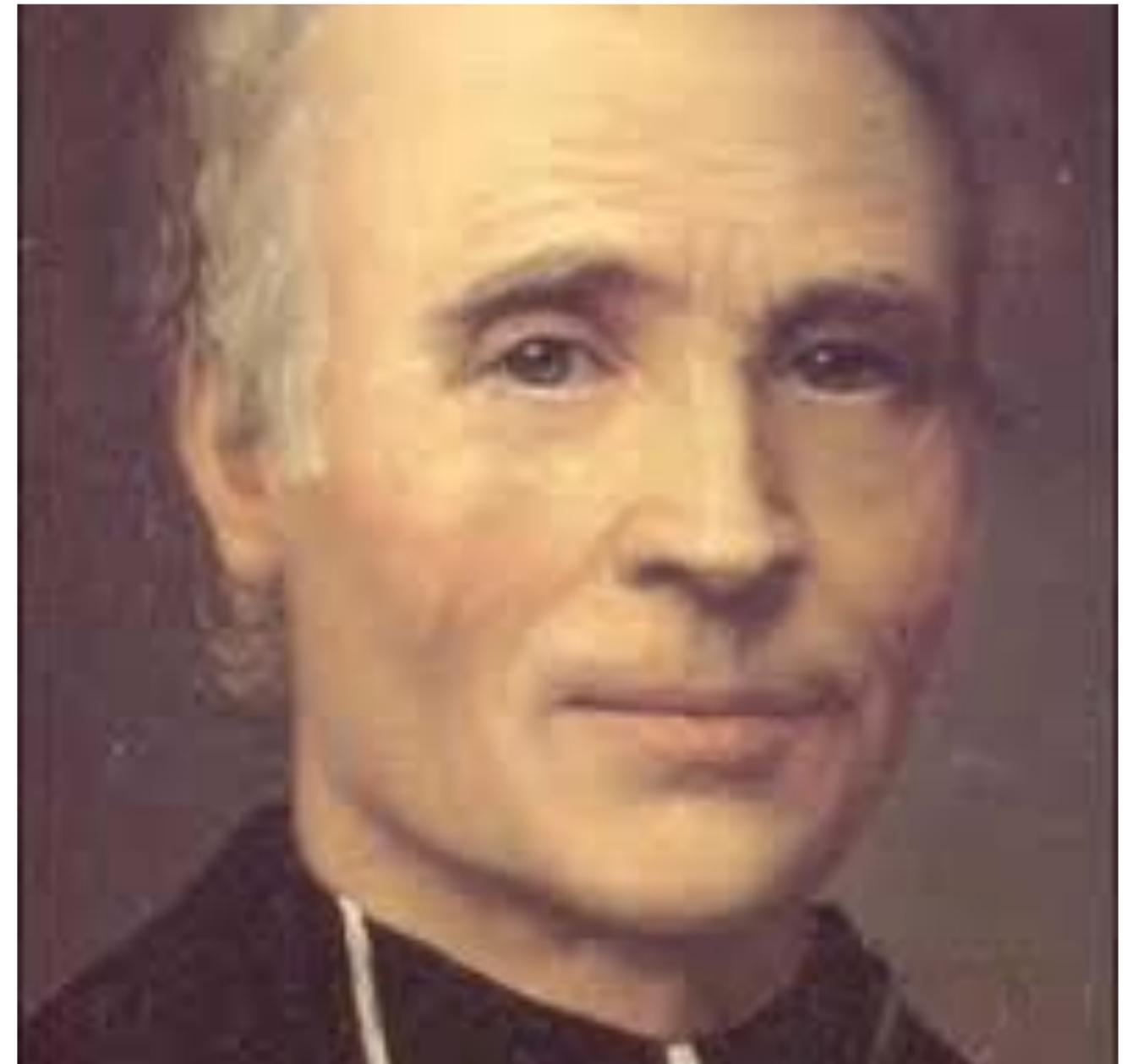
First Conference

- On 23 April 1833, the first members met in the offices of the *Tribune Catholique*, Bailly's newspaper: thus the **first Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul** was founded.



A great movement

- In August of 1833, **Léon Le Prévost**, a learned man who was around 30 years old, had joined the Conference. He wrote: “In this moment there is a great movement of charity and of faith, but all this in a sphere veiled in humility [...] from these new catacombs shall come forth a light for the world.”
- (Le Prévost would shortly leave the Conferences in order to found the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul.)



Collaboration with government

- It is important to note that the activity of the first members was not limited only to assistance: in December 1833 the administrators of the neighborhood of “La Bienfaisance” asked the members of the Conferences to accept the role of “Commissioners of Charity.” This was the beginning of **collaborative activity between the Society and Public Administration** that continues with great success in our own day.



Growing; branching out

- In 1834 the young Vincentians met with **young workers** to begin helping them with their studies.
- A short time later, **the Court entrusted them** with the mission of reaching out to **young people in trouble**.
- In 1836 **the Court asked the Vincentians to help prisoners** who had been recently released.
- In the same year the Society began its **assistance to the military**.
- To defend **the most vulnerable members of society** against rising prices, the Conferences created food pantries and dining rooms.
- The first home built for a poor family was in 1842 in Lille.
- The institution of “**L’Avocat des pauvres**” (**advocacy**) began in 1844.
- In 1850 at the Baudin factory, in Jura, the **first Conference for businesses** was founded.
- Around 1850, banks for unemployment and credit were founded, as were recreational **clubs for workers**.

We Are Family

- Today, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul collaborates with the Vincentian Family around the world. Their Rule expresses this relationship: “**Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help, form a single family.**” (Chapter 4.3)



God's Will

- Thus God smiled on the friendship of six young men, and provided the group with the grace necessary to dream that particular dream, and the strength to make it become reality.
- And from the beginning God surrounded them with collaborators so that working together, they would have the opportunity to grow in holiness by assisting their neighbors living in poverty.
- May their collaboration in service be an inspiring example to us as a Vincentian Family today.

FONDATEURS

DE LA SOCIÉTÉ SAINT-VINCENT - DE - PAUL



B



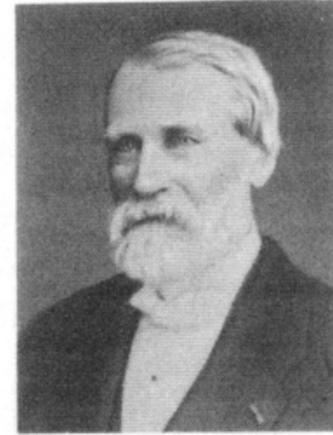
C



A



G



D



E

A - Frédéric OZANAM
(1813-1853)

B - Jules DEVAUX (1811-1880)

C - Paul LAMACHE (1810- ?)

D - Auguste LE TAILLANDIER (1811-1886)

E - François LALLIER (1814-1886)

F - Félix CLAVÉ sans document (1811- ?)

G - E. J. BAILLY (1793-1861)

Founders of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
(does not include photo of Félix Clavé).
International Office of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Paris

Source: *Vincentiana*, July-August 2006