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Introduction

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Introduction

Most of my life I have believed that if we bring good people together, help them get acquainted, and offer a little encouragement, good things will happen. I proposed the idea of a conference of scholars from a variety of fields to Bill Hay and he liked it. The idea was to bring together a diverse group of people willing to work at knowing Vincent and his work – his principles, values and leadership skills – to talk with each other and challenge each other’s thinking. Then we would go away to think, pray and write. The conference then turned into a surprise party – because we would all be surprised at whatever happened. The theory held; we invited good people, made them comfortable and encouraged their work.

What appears in this volume is the result of the surprise party we enjoyed on the shores of Lake Geneva in August, 2003. Most who write about Vincent author biographies, histories or focus on his spirituality. Our conference participants started with traditional sources but moved quickly to Vincent as leader, manager, organizer and advocate for social justice and diversity. We found a Vincent who cared for his organization and its management almost as much as he cared for the poor. He realized that effectiveness in serving the poor is inextricably linked to organizing. We are not the first to discover this about Vincent, but we are pleased to acknowledge it in these pages and, perhaps, help the reader to understand Vincent as the organizational genius he was.

The Hay-Vincentian Leadership Project aims to discover the leadership principles and values of Vincent as they are alive and well in today’s organizations. The authors here come mostly from the academic community and, therefore, apply our knowledge of Vincent, as well as our disciplinary training, primarily to the environment from which we come – the higher education community. The lessons learned and documented here will apply broadly beyond the academic community, however, to anyone interested in organizing or serving the poor.

I believe we have identified a culture of organization and leadership in the manner of Vincent de Paul. I encourage readers to find that truly Vincentian culture, for it is truly our own.

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