

SAINT VINCENT *Online*

Historians and collectors used to search for buried treasure in library stacks and dusty attics. Now they look on the Internet, too.

The Rev. Edward R. Udovic, C.M., a leading Vincentian scholar as well as senior executive for university mission, secretary of the university, vice president for teaching and learning resources, and an associate professor of history at DePaul, spearheaded the university's successful effort to become the premier international site for Vincentian studies. He could not have done the work without the Internet, he says.

"The sheer number of items available 24/7, through online marketplace resources such as the Advanced Book Exchange, eBay and Amazon.com, is a great advantage," Udovic says. "Searching is easy and so is purchasing—as you might expect from an online source."

Under Udovic's direction, DePaul's Office of Mission and Values, the Vincentian Studies Institute of the United States (which has been part of DePaul since 2007) and the John T. Richardson Library's Archives and Special Collections Department have gathered a large array of library, archival, special collections, material culture, and art resources into an integrated collection. The collection includes thousands of items that are accessible to all those who have an interest in the heritage of the university's patron, Saint Vincent de Paul. The use of these resources is increasing exponentially.

"Broadly speaking, Vincentian Studies encompass the study of the life and times of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac," Udovic explains. "Also, they include the history—almost four hundred years—of the tradition of mission, service and leadership found in groups and institutions that identify themselves as Vincentian."

One interesting area, which constitutes the core of the large Vincentian research library, was created around what is called "Saint Vincent's reading list." Combing through the saint's writings, scholars identified works that would have been on Vincent de Paul's own reading list. Udovic purchases these volumes in editions from the saint's lifetime—if not the exact edition Saint Vincent notes in his writings—as they become available through online booksellers.

A recent find for the "reading list" is a 1635 French edition of the letters of Saint Francis Xavier, the great Jesuit missionary. "When Saint Vincent sent the first Vincentians as missionaries outside of France, he recommended that they read these letters so that they could use Francis Xavier as the model for their own efforts," says Udovic.



The Rev. Edward R. Udovic, C.M., with a portrait of Jean-Baptiste Etienne, C.M., (1801-1874), the 14th superior general of the Congregation of the Mission. The portrait was a gift to Udovic from the French Vincentians in recognition of his doctoral dissertation on Etienne.

One of the most exciting finds happened last year through Internet auction sites. "We had the opportunity to locate and purchase two letters and a manuscript fragment written by Saint Vincent. One of these letters was previously unknown, and another's location had been lost for 80 years. The manuscript fragment turned out to be from one of the saint's most important spiritual conferences about advancing the role of women in the church," Udovic says.

by Carol Sadtler

Some of the collections are enormous, thanks to the scope of eBay's international online marketplace. There's an assortment of over 4,000 Vincentian material culture items—everyday items such as postcards, holy cards, medals, photographs, magazines, yearbooks, maps and special occasion mementos—from different eras and from all over the world. "Material culture items offer a unique opportunity of interpreting history, since in every age and culture people choose to surround themselves with material items that express their identity, values and beliefs," says Udovic.

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There also are unique and obscure items that may never have found their way to the university were it not for the Internet. Just one example is a commemorative bronze bust (shown at right) of Saint Vincent given in 1864 to major donors who had contributed to the creation of a shrine to commemorate the saint's birthplace near Dax in the southwest of France.

The Internet also allows the university to share its Vincentian riches. Postcards documenting a wide variety of Vincentian institutions around the world, particularly in the years between the turn of the 20th century and the early 1950s, are accessible on an online Vincentian postcard site (depaul.edu/magazine). During the 2007-2008 academic year, this site alone experienced more than 350,000 hits.

DePaul plans to maximize the use of these collections by taking advantage of the distance-learning possibilities afforded by the Internet and the proposed new International Center for Vincentian Studies in Paris. (See story on page 10 of this issue.) Udovic says that over the next several years these collections will be digitized and made completely accessible online.



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The university soon will launch a digitized repository of Vincentian texts on its institutional digital repository, Via Sapientiae (via.library.depaul.edu). This site will eventually make hundreds of thousands of pages of Vincentian manuscripts, documents, and books in the university's collection accessible for study by anyone, anytime, anywhere in the world.

In addition to the digitized Vincentian postcard site, another Web site in the planning stages will make it possible for the university to create a virtual Vincentian museum with online exhibitions featuring its collections. These will then be linked to online Vincentian courses and other Web-based continuing education opportunities.

The Internet marketplaces also have made a difference on DePaul campuses. A large number of original and rare Vincentian artworks—paintings, historic prints and antique statues of Saint Vincent de Paul—have been located and purchased by the Office of Mission and Values. These artworks are now on display throughout the university and serve as a visual enhancement of our institutional identity and values.

"Without the Internet revolution, creating these collections would have been time-consuming and difficult, if not impossible," says Udovic.

"Yet in the end, by themselves, these Internet sites are just collecting tools and the collections just interesting objects. However, the professional use of these tools and the resulting accessibility, study, interpretation and scholarship that result from having such a wide and integrated collection provide the university and its Vincentian Studies Institute an unparalleled opportunity to advance Vincentian Studies, which, in the end, advances the Vincentian mission at DePaul University and elsewhere at the dawn of the 21st century."

For a guide to Vincentian art at the Lincoln Park or Loop Campus, visit depaul.edu/magazine.