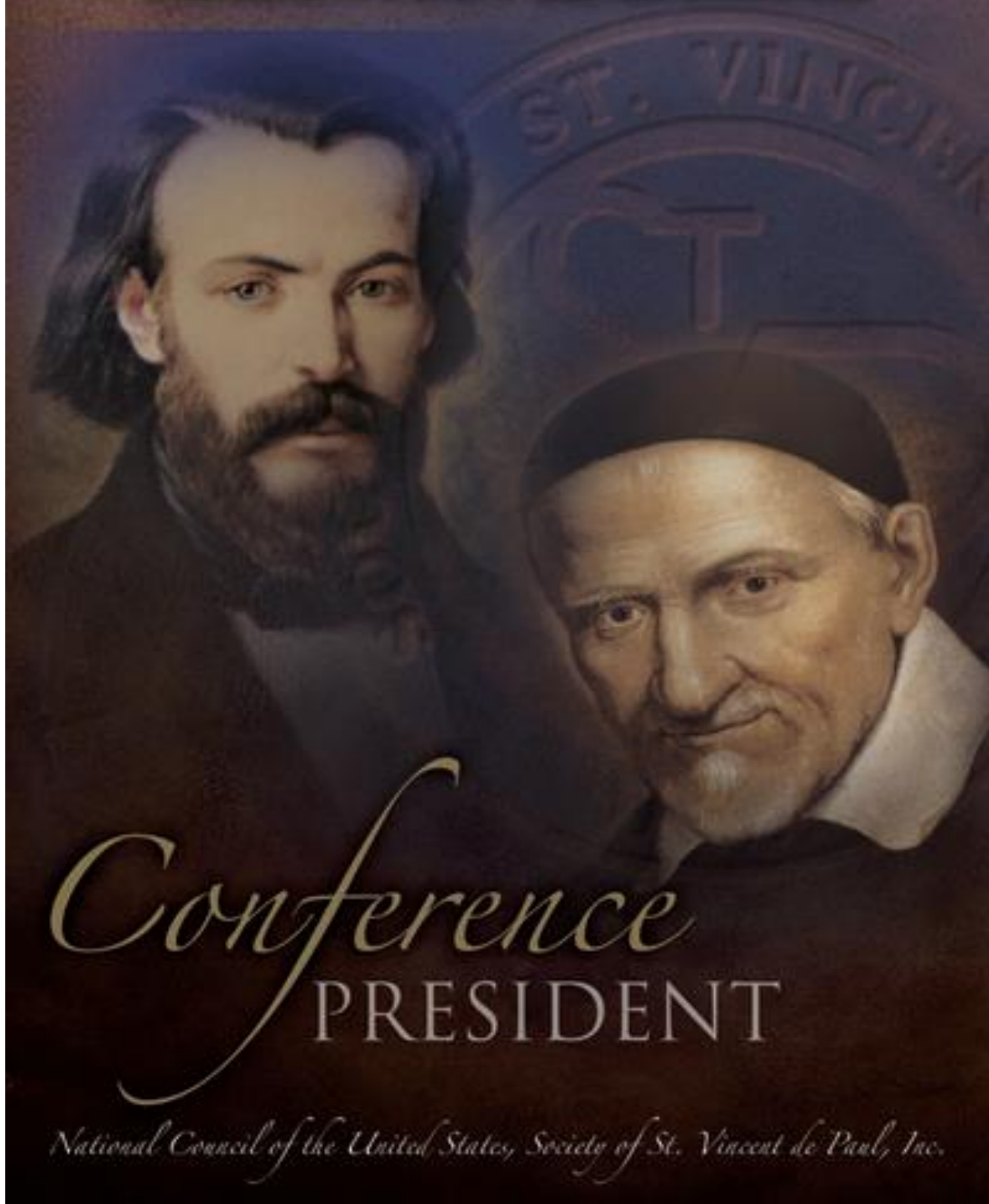


VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP



Conference
PRESIDENT

National Council of the United States, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.



The Vincentian Vocation

Rule 1.2

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.

IN GRATITUDE TO:

Governance Committee:

Tom Fahl, Chair
Roger Playwin
John Berry
Mike Syslo
Pam Hudson Johnson
Ralph Middlecamp
Dave Barringer
Sheila Gilbert
Joe Riley
Ron Meyer
Roz Gutierrez

Leadership Task Force Members:

Ray Sickinger, Chair
Kathy Iberle
Marty Cormack
Amanda Stricklin
Bill Soucie



SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
GUIDELINES
FOR
CONFERENCE PRESIDENT
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I: INTRODUCTION

Servant Leadership Positions

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 12)

For a specific period of time the Society chooses qualified members for the various Council and Conference leadership positions who will carry out their tasks with the same dedication with which they work within their own Conference.

It is important that officers, at all levels participate regularly in meetings and charitable activities of the Society and visit the poor as often as possible.

The term of office for President is three years, once renewable. Once a President has served for two consecutive three-year terms, that person will not be eligible for re-election as President until a three-year term has elapsed under a different President.

The Rule states: “Leadership positions in the Society, at any level, are always to be accepted as service to Christ, the members, and the poor. Servant leadership is done in imitation of Jesus who said: ‘For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mk 10:45)” (Rule Part 3, Statute 11). Therefore, successful SVDP leadership is indeed based upon a deep Vincentian spirituality.

These pages touch upon many aspects of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul organization at the "basic unit" or Conference level. The principal focus is to assist a new president in knowing the Society and his/her responsibilities as a Conference leader. A related purpose is to encourage members to accept the burdens of office when called to such duties by Conference members. Periodic changes in presidential direction are healthy and desirable. The SVDP Conference presidency is not a matter of personal aggrandizement but the sign of deepening commitment to the Society.

It is important to remember that “All decisions made by a Conference or Council must be made consistent with the Rule and Statutes of the Society, Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and governance policies of the Society.” (Rule: Part 3, Statute 16.)

It is also important to emphasize that ALL officers at all levels of the Society must “visit the poor as often as possible.” The ministry of the Society is to serve those who are in need. It is a natural expectation that Conference and Council leadership

THE SEVEN DUTIES

of an
Effective and Responsible Conference President
by **Ray Sickinger**

• **1st Duty: COMMITMENT**

A Conference President must make a solemn **commitment** to:

- grow in understanding and live out the Vincentian charism.
- attend the regularly scheduled meetings of the District Council.
- be adequately prepared to vote on the issues and policies that will be discussed.
- share ideas and concerns.
- serve no longer than two consecutive three-year terms before stepping down from that role so that new leadership might take over.
- support the mission of the Society.
- foster the spirituality of the Society.

• **2nd Duty: COMPREHENSION**

A Conference President must **comprehend** :

- the Rule of the Society and its applications.
- the essential structure, operations, and functions of each unit of the Society.
- the life and spiritual legacy of our Patron, St. Vincent de Paul, and the role of St. Louise de Marillac.
- the life and spiritual legacy of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and the role of Blessed Rosalie Rendu.

• **3rd Duty: COMMUNICATION**

A Conference President must **communicate effectively** in order to:

- share information about issues, decisions, and policies with their Conference members in a timely fashion.
- express in appropriate ways and through appropriate channels any concerns, issues, and ideas important to their Conferences.
- remain informed about national, regional, district, and local issues.

• **4th Duty: CULTIVATION**

A Conference President must **cultivate members** through formation by:

- developing members both new and old (through Ozanam Orientations, Days of Recollection, Retreats, Serving in Hope Modules, etc.)
- finding, training, and encouraging Spiritual Advisors.
- Increasing and encouraging both active and associate membership in the Conference.
- encouraging the establishment of a Voice of the Poor Committee.
- cooperating in the implementation of the National Strategic Plan.
- Providing training and other formation that helps all members understand and address the root causes of poverty. It is important for members of the Society to understand why those living in poverty act and react the way they do. Educational programs, such as those designed by Ruby Payne and Donna Beegle, are being used within the Society to help our Vincentians to better understand those they work with. This training helps eliminate many false stereotypes.
- developing processes that encourage Systemic Change (learn more on this below).

• **5th Duty: COLLABORATION**

A Conference President must **collaborate** with:

- other Conferences in the local area, the state, the region, in the United States or abroad (especially through formal Twinning arrangements).
- other members of the Vincentian Family.
- Other individuals and non-profit organizations, both secular and religious.
- the pastor and keep him informed about the work of the Society.

• **6th Duty: CHAIRPERSON**

As the **Chairperson**, the Conference President must:

- conduct regular, orderly meetings of the Conference.
- delegate duties in a reasonable manner.
- make appropriate appointments of officers and committee members to the Conference.
- facilitate and participate in discussions. Our Rule clearly indicates that “all decisions are made by concensus after the necessary prayer, reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit if fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate,

matters are put to a vote (Rule Part I, 3.10)” If a vote does occur, normally the Conference President would cast one vote only in the case of a tie.

• **7th Duty: CONTRIBUTIONS/COMPLIANCE**

A Conference President oversees **contributions** to and compliance with the National Council, Local Councils, and the Region in order to:

- ensure that solidarity contributions are paid in a timely manner (when applicable).
- assure that the Conference submits annual reports on time, providing a complete accounting of all actions and income.
- Provide for a safe environment. Based on the concern of each diocese that children and vulnerable adults be safeguarded, the Society’s National Council has passed a Resolution calling for all Councils and Conferences in the United States to follow the rules established within their dioceses for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. These programs are called by various names throughout the country but are easily identifiable. The key component is that Vincentians follow the rules of the diocese in these matters, unless otherwise directed by the US National Council.
- be alert to the following issues of compliance/accountability:
 1. Does the treasurer provide a written financial report to the members present at each meeting?
 2. Does the Conference have a bank account separate from the parish? Are there appropriate signatories on the bank account(s)? The National Office has a treasurer’s manual that may prove to be helpful.
 3. Does the Conference have its own 501(c)3 or is it covered under the Council 501(c)3?
 4. Are complete, accurate, confidential records for every person helped kept, updated regularly, placed in a safe, central location, and made available to the active members of the Conference?
 5. Has a complete list of local resources and contact people to aid in cases been prepared and maintained by the Conference?
 6. Has the Conference explored the need for insurance coverage?
 7. Does the Conference conduct appropriate and timely audits or financial reviews?
 8. Is there a need to file a form 990 with the IRS?
 9. Are there appropriate Bylaws? (The National Council Office has approved Bylaws that can easily be modified)

II. SVDP ORGANIZATION

Councils

(Rule: Part 1, 3.6)

Conferences are grouped under various levels of Councils. Councils exist to serve all the Conferences they coordinate. They help the Conferences to develop their spiritual life, to intensify their service and to diversify their activities so that they may always be responsive to the needs of those who suffer.

Conference

The Conference is the basic unit, "the grass roots" of Vincentian organization. It constitutes the heart of Vincentian life and charitable service. It is within the Conference setting that the members work as a unit and it is through that unity that service to those in need naturally grows. What is delineated in the Rule of the Society is a Vincentian way of life – a spirituality that develops both fellowship and service. Most of the Conferences in the United States are parish - centered, although other organizational units are allowed and can be recommended, e.g., School Conferences, Youth Conferences, University Conferences, Conferences of special interest groups, i.e. prisons, and Conferences that are organized around a Special Work such as a food bank or a thrift store.

District Council

District Councils keep individual Conferences in communication with each other and united in spirit. They embrace Conferences from the same city or county or other appropriate geographical division. District Councils represent a minimum of three and ideally a maximum of twelve Conferences in a diocese or Archdiocese.

Diocesan Council/Archdiocesan Council

A Diocesan Council, or an Archdiocesan Council, unites the District Councils, providing liaison and communication links between them, the National Council, and the Bishop.

SVDP ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

International Council

Paris, France

**The International Council General represents the world-wide Society
Over 150 Countries—5 Continents— Over 44,600 Conferences
and 800,000+ Members**

National Council of the United States St. Louis, MO

**The US is divided into 8 Regions to facilitate the work of the National Council. In
these regions there are 65,892 Active Members and 32,650 Associate Members for a
total membership of nearly 100,000**

(Arch)Diocesan Councils

Over 54 (Arch)Diocesan Councils unite and support the District Councils

District Councils

406 District Councils unite and support the Conferences

Conferences

4,441 Conferences, the basic unit of organization

December 2016

The Regional Structure



Eastern

Delaware
Maryland
New Jersey
Pennsylvania
Virginia
Washington DC
West Virginia

Southeastern

Alabama
Florida
Georgia
Louisiana
Mississippi
North Carolina
Puerto Rico
South Carolina
Tennessee

Northeastern

Connecticut
Maine
Massachusetts
New Hampshire
New York
Rhode Island
Vermont

Mideastern

Indiana
Kentucky
Michigan¹
Ohio

North Central

Illinois²
MI (Marquette)
Minnesota

North Dakota
South Dakota
Wisconsin

South Central

Arkansas
New Mexico
Oklahoma
Texas

Midwestern

Colorado
IL (Belleville and
Springfield)
Iowa
Kansas
Missouri
Nebraska
Wyoming

Western

Alaska
Arizona
California
Hawaii
Idaho
Montana
Nevada
Oregon
Utah
Washington

¹excluding
Marquette Diocese
²excluding
Belleville and
Springfield
Dioceses

III. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE SOCIETY

Servant Leadership

(Rule: Part I, 2.1)

“Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness.”

As a leader, the spirituality of the Society, as captured in our Mission and Identity Statements, Values, and Essential Elements, is now placed into your hands. It is also important for you to know and reflect on the lives of our Founders: St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Blessed Rosalie Rendu, so that you will know and understand the heart and soul of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It is then that you can inspire your members to become true Vincentians.

Our Mission Statement:

A network of friends, inspired by Gospel values, growing in holiness and building a more just world through personal relationships with and service to people in need.

Our Identity Statement:

Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service, to those who are needy and suffering, in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

As a reflection of the whole family of God, members, who are known as Vincentians, are drawn from every ethnic and cultural background, age group and economic level. Vincentians are united in an international society of charity by their spirit of poverty, humility and sharing, which is nourished by prayer and reflection, mutually supportive gatherings and adherence to a basic Rule.

Organized locally, Vincentians witness God’s love by embracing all works of charity and justice. The Society collaborates with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes, making no distinction in those served because, in them, **Vincentians see the face of Christ.**

There are a few points in Our Identity Statement that should be emphasized:

- “leads men and women to join together:” The Society is an organization that started out in 1833 as an all-men organization, but eventually evolved into an organization of both men and women. There are men and women in all levels of leadership within the Society.
- “grow spiritually:” Of the three objectives of the Society (growth in holiness, community, and service), growth in holiness is the primary objective. Vincentians see this emphasis in all aspects of our Vincentian ministry.
- “tradition of its founder:” Blessed Frederic Ozanam along with six companions founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It is within the writings of Blessed Frederic and St. Vincent that Vincentians find the basis of our spirituality and focus of our work.
- “Vincentians, are drawn from every ethnic and cultural background, age group and economic level:” The invitation that we make to our fellow parishioners is to grow closer to God by helping our neighbors in need through the time of suffering that they are experiencing. It is an invitation from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to answer the call they are receiving from Our Lord. He has chosen us to be in this ministry.

Our Essential Elements:

HOLINESS OF LIFE

To bear witness to Christ and to His Church by showing that the faith of Christians inspires them to work for the good of humanity

FRIENDSHIP

To bring together men and women of good will and to assist them by mutual example and true friendship in drawing nearer to the Divine Model by fulfilling His essential precept, namely, the love of God in the person of others.

SERVICE TO THE POOR

To establish a personal contact between its members and those who suffer and to bring to the latter the most efficacious and charitable aid possible.

Our Cultural Beliefs:

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Grow in holiness through prayer, service, friendship and formation.

ONE SOCIETY

Contribute to the success of our Vincentian work when we support One Society.

SERVANT LEADERS

Develop ourselves and others to become Servant Leaders.

TODAY'S SOCIETY

Strengthen the Society by embracing new and diverse ideas and people.

EMBRACE ACCOUNTABILITY

Build a strong Society by holding each other accountable to our Mission, to the Essential Elements of the Society and to good Governance.

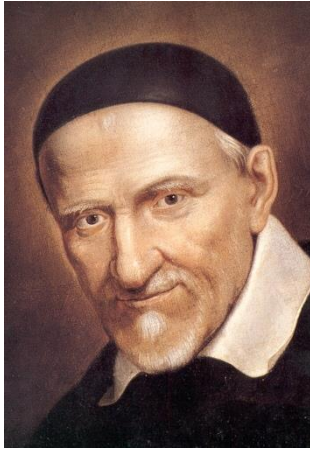
INCLUSIVE PLANNING

Foster ownership by involving all members in planning and decision making.

ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE

Advocate along with the poor, for just policies and practices at the local, state, and national levels.

OUR FOUNDERS: MODELS TO IMITATE



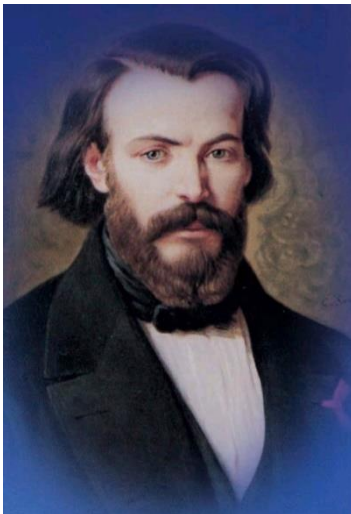
**St. Vincent de Paul
(1581-1660)**

**Founder: Ladies of Charity 1617
Founder: Congregation of the Mission 1625
Co-Founder: Daughters of Charity 1633
Feast Day: September 27**



**St. Louise de Marillac
(1591-1660)**

**Co-Founder:
Daughters of Charity 1633
Feast Day: May 9**



**Frederic Ozanam
(1813-1853)**

**Principal Founder of the Society
of St. Vincent de Paul 1833
Beatified: August 22, 1997
Feast Day: September 9**



**Sr. Rosalie Rendu
(1786-1856)**

**Daughter of Charity
of St. Vincent de Paul
Beatified: November 9, 2003
Feast Day: February 7**

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Vincent de Paul, "the Father of the Poor," had a life so varied and rich in the experience of charity that he has been the model for all kinds of good works within the Church. There were three foundations that would express his life work for the Poor. One was the Confraternity of Charity (Ladies of Charity) begun in 1617, which enlisted lay women in serving those in poverty in the parishes. The second was the Congregation of the Mission (priests and brothers), founded in 1625 with a mission to preach the gospel to those living in rural poverty and to form men for the priesthood. The third was in 1633, when Vincent co-founded with Louise de Marillac the Daughters of Charity, a community of women consecrated by vow to serve those in poverty.

ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC

Louise de Marillac was a wife and widow, mother, teacher and co-founder of the Daughters of Charity. She took a small group of women and molded them into a community of total dedication of being "Given to God for the Service of the Poor." Louise trained the Sisters to read, to write, and to love and serve the poor in health care, social ministry, and education. Above all, she rooted the Daughters of Charity in the Vincentian spirituality of finding Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus, teaching them to be contemplatives in action.

Louise also organized, directed, and animated the Confraternities of Charity (Ladies of Charity). Louise was able to do this because she loved and hoped in God.

The presence of **Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac** filled the landscape of France. They addressed the needs of all kinds of people: refugees from the wars of religion, foundlings, beggars, galley slaves, and they sought to address the injustices that occasioned these conditions. Above all, they were champions of collaboration in apostolic service. They invited and made welcome everyone: cleric and lay, men and women, young and old, rich and poor into the mission of service. Their numbers are a witness that their all-embracing invitation is still being answered.

BLESSED FREDERIC OZANAM

Frederic Ozanam was born in 1813, and so lived at a time when France was reeling from the aftershocks of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. These and other events had all but destroyed the fabric of the country. Materialism and secularism were rampant viruses. People were distancing themselves more and more from God and the Church. Individualism was becoming ingrained and the corporal and spiritual needs of the Poor were being neglected or ignored.

In the Providence of God, there emerged a man of faith, intelligence, and zeal, Frederic Ozanam. As a university student at the Sorbonne, Frederic helped to found the Conference of History. It was a kind of debating club formed to discuss historical and literary topics. The members would meet in the newspaper office of Emmanuel Bailly who became the facilitator of the meetings. It was at one of these meetings that Frederic and other Catholics were challenged to "Show us your works!" This pierced the heart of Frederic Ozanam, and so he told a friend that they needed another Conference, not for controversy or debate, but for the practice of charity. In April 1833, the Conference of Charity was born. It began with six students and Mr. Emmanuel Bailly as president and spiritual advisor.

BLESSED ROSALIE RENDU

Sister Rosalie Rendu, a well-known Daughter of Charity taught and mentored the first members of the Society to find the face of Christ in those they served, in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. She taught them to respect the dignity and personal worth of each of the people they visited. She guided them to go two by two to visit people in their homes in imitation of Jesus who sent the disciples two by two.

Sister Rosalie, together with Emmanuel Bailly, encouraged the founding members to name the Conference of Charity, the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul, making him their patron. Frederic realized the need for a patron to inspire, motivate, and direct the membership. He said:

“To choose a patron does not mean simply adopting a figurehead which will help us cut a good figure in the religious world. He is a model whom we must imitate, as he has imitated the Divine Model, Jesus Christ.

It means carrying on the work he started, acquiring his warmth of heart, catching up the threads of thought which were in his brain. He provides a model for us to copy on earth and a protector who will watch over us from heaven.”

THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

The mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is like the mission of Jesus (Lk 4): to bring the good news to the poor, and to nurture life and hope where there is not much life and little hope. In the Vincentian spirit, it is not enough to bring the poor something to eat, but also to bring them God's love. Our Founders understood that Jesus calls us to love those who are poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, strangers, imprisoned and sick. They understood that Jesus identifies Himself with such as these (Mt 25: 35-40):

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me....Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

The foundation and establishment of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul by Frederic Ozanam in Paris got hundreds of lay people involved in active service to those in need. The Society offered the laity an opportunity to fulfill the dual mandate of Jesus: love God and love your neighbor.



Our Vincentian mission is indeed rooted in the virtues of charity and justice. Vincent said: “There is no charity that is not accompanied by justice.” And Frederic tells us: “Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is justice’s role to prevent the attacks.”

At Frederic Ozanam’s beatification ceremonies, August 22, 1997, Pope Saint John Paul II told the world that:

“Frederic observed the real situation of the poor and sought to be more and more effective in helping them in their human development. He understood that charity must lead to efforts to remedy justice. Charity and justice go together. Frederic had the clear-sighted courage to seek a front-line social and political commitment in a troubled time in the life of his country... So it is that we can see Frederic Ozanam as a pioneer of the social doctrine of the Church which Pope Leo XIII would develop some years later in the encyclical ‘Rerum Novarum.’” (On the Condition of the Working Classes). (Pope John Paul II, 1997)

Indeed, Frederic “envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world.” (Rule 2.4)

WORDS OF OUR FOUNDERS

“After the love of God, your principal concern must be to serve the poor with great gentleness and cordiality, sympathizing with them in their ailments and listening to their little complaints, for they look on you as people sent by God to help them. You are therefore intended to represent the goodness of God in the eyes of the poor.” **St. Vincent de Paul, 1657**

“As for your conduct toward the poor, may you never take the attitude of merely getting the task done. You must show them affection; serving them from the heart; inquiring of them what they might need; speaking to them gently and compassionately; procuring necessary help for them without being too bothersome or too eager.” **St. Louise de Marillac, 1647**

“Because you see Christ in his poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility as His servant. Always remember, that if we had been through the hardships they have had to meet —if our childhood had been one of constant want—perhaps, we too, would have given way to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter. But be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you bring them.” **Blessed Rosalie Rendu, 1833**

“Knowledge of the poor and needy is not gained by pouring over books or in discussions with politicians, but by visiting the slums where they live, sitting by the bedside of the dying, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes.” **Blessed Frederic Ozanam, 1845**

CHALLENGES

Through your leadership as a Conference President, you are an important part of the history of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Through your unselfish dedication to serve those in need you are continuing the "miracle" of spreading the Society throughout the United States. You will accomplish a great deal, but the challenges that remain are even greater. St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louis de Marillac have given us the mission and Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Blessed Rosalie Rendu the vision. It is our responsibility to carry on the works so well begun.

Today we are challenged in the same way. **We cannot wait for the poor to come to us.** We must be proactive. We need to “*seek and find the forgotten, the suffering, or the deprived*” so that we may bring them God’s love. This is our prayer at every Conference meeting.

In the years ahead the Society will remain firm in its purpose and will be called upon to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. We must become advocates where the cause is just. Vincentians through direct service to those who are poor have long been in a position to identify the causes that often result in poverty. Indeed, Vincentians are qualified to advocate for justice in addition to offering charity to those in need.

There are also challenges that we face internally within our Conferences and that Conference leadership must be prepared to deal with. Our Conference members are human and, as such, may not fully understand their roles within the Society. Guidance is needed. There will also be conflicts between members. The relationships that exist between members are both important and fragile. Remember that the second objective of the Society is fellowship (growth in community). It is the role of the President of the Conference to help form the members both in their roles within the Society and their relationships with each other.

Youth and Young Adults:

Pope John Paul II urges all of us to prepare for the Third Millennium with special emphasis on "active" care for those in need. It is as though he is speaking directly to us in the Society and to all the Vincentian Family in "Tertio Millennio Adveniente." His letter carries a special meaning for our youth since they are the future. He calls our young people "the hope of the Church". They are also the hope of the Society. Our Society members must consistently, and in an organized manner, at every level, offer youth a challenge to serve in the 21st century. It is a challenge we cannot ignore if we are to continue to bring new life and vitality to

our Society. The Society is blessed that ever-growing numbers of young people have found, in Society work, an opportunity to grow in God's love.

The Future:

What of the Society's hopes, plans and dreams as we walk into the future? We must make a sincere examination of our past and our previous services. We must be willing to admit to our shortcomings and be prepared to adhere more closely to our mission to grow spiritually by love and service to those in need and to each other. Our future calls for greater "extension" of the Society into more parishes in this country. We must look upon "extension" not only as mere growth of our organization, but also as a responsibility we have to provide others with the opportunity to share our mission of service.

The immediate future holds great opportunity for the Society to develop more effective ways of conducting collaborative works with those who share our common mission, especially with the whole Vincentian Family: Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Charity, and the Ladies of Charity.

We are also called to adhere more closely to our mission to grow spiritually by love and service to the poor and each other. In the above chapters, we emphasized how we are driven by our mission and that this helps us to grow in spirituality. We are evangelized by those whom we serve and so our service helps us to grow spiritually.

Moving into the future, the Society is embracing change. We are embracing change both internally and externally. Within the Society we are approaching our ministry by a change within our culture. We are learning more about those we serve and how we can serve them better. We are accepting accountability and endeavoring to grow the Society throughout the country. Both internally and externally we are promoting and implementing systemic change. We are working toward the improvement and replacement of failed and faltering systems that keep those we serve in the grips of poverty. Change must be embraced or the future will stagnate.

We look forward eagerly to the challenges of the future.

IV. SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Presidents as Servant Leaders

(Rule: Part 1, 3.11)

Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavor to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.

Robert Greenleaf in his book on Servant Leadership gives three foundational questions that you can ask to see if you are a servant leader:

- 1. Do those served grow as persons?**
- 2. Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?**
- 3. What is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?**

Vincent, a servant leader, was always concerned about the growth of those he served. He would strike a fire in their hearts to see Jesus in the face of the Poor. Vincent recruited ordinary people and asked of them extraordinary service. He looked for willingness and open hearts, and he always believed in them. Vincent gathered others to help with his projects. He did not look for stars, but grew them and encouraged them! Vincent knew the goodness in people's hearts and called it forth. This is why the followers of Vincent de Paul are rooted in the desire to grow in spirituality, respect and friendship with others, and in person-to-person service.

Indeed, St. Vincent came to be a servant leader through prayer and scripture. He was inspired by Jesus who said "Earthly kings lord it over their people. Those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. Yet it cannot be that way with you. Let the greater among you be as the junior, the leader as servant." (Luke 22:25-26) To be a servant leader, following in the steps of Vincent, means to be always searching, listening, expecting that a better solution is possible. Indeed, Vincentians must always be seeking new and better ways to serve the poor which are consistent with our Rule and heritage.

As Vincentians and servant leaders we should be asking Greenleaf's questions about those we serve:

1. Do those we serve grow as persons? Do WE who serve grow as persons?
2. Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? Do WE, *while serving*, become healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous?
3. What is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? What is the effect on us as Vincentians?

As Vincentians, we must always be aware of the impact of what we do both on those we serve and ourselves.

Mission and Vision

The very essence of leadership, going out ahead to show the way, demands an openness to inspiration. Too many who presume to lead do not see clearly, and often they argue to preserve the system. It is true, that the leader needs more than inspiration. The leader initiates, provides the ideas and structure, and takes the risk of failure along with the chance of success.

Therefore, leaders must know the mission and the vision. Leaders dream the dream and show the way. Every achievement starts with a goal—a yearning for something that is currently out of reach. Indeed, Frederic's mission and vision for the Society were strong and clear. He derived his inspiration from prayer, reflection, his friends, and the poor. He knew that everything depended on the Providence of God. He initiated a few things, listened to others and then on fire with grace and an overwhelming love for the poor, he organized for practical action. Frederic, a servant leader, honed his listening skills and became a listener-leader. Listening in respect and compassion gives the servant leader empathy and humility. The servant-leader always accepts the person, but always challenges them to grow as persons to become healthier, wiser, and freer.

Greenleaf tells us that leaders need to have “a sense for the unknowable and they need to foresee the unforeseeable.” Vincent did this by letting others come up with the initial idea; he trusted in Providence and then he organized like mad. Leaders act on hunches, but calculated ones. Vincent was practical in all he did. He learned by doing and he was results oriented. He consulted widely and reflected in prayer with great discernment, but his solutions were always practical, never theoretical. Frederic “envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and justice encircling the world.” (Rule: Part 1, 2.4) Indeed Vincent and Frederic were disturbers and awakers. They planted their vision firmly in the minds of their followers and never wavered from it. Their vision now lives on in us.

V. YOUR GOALS

Adaptation to a Changing World

(Rule: Part 1, 1.6)

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.

As the President, you will want to set for yourself five goals that you wish to achieve during your term in office. Goals which will allow you to leave your successor with an even more active Conference than you are now leading.

Goal #1 – Help Form Your Members in the Society’s Principles and Practices

Instill in your members the Mission, Values, and the Essential Elements of the Society. Encourage them to become more knowledgeable members in order to better serve those in need. And, train members who would make good Presidents when your term is up.

Goal #2 - Work For Your Conference as a Servant Leader

Look constantly at the needs in your area, discuss them in your Conference and with others outside the Conference, formulate plans to meet them and put these plans into action.

Goal #3 – Develop Your Officers into a Working Team

Your officers will assist you in important ways so that the Conference is a genuine community of faith and love, prayer and action.

Goal #4 – Work with Your Spiritual Advisor for the Growth of Your Members

Your spiritual advisor is an essential member of your Conference and he/she will assist you in centering the Conference in our mission, vision, and values. It is important to have your spiritual advisor trained so that they can be an active member of the Conference.



GOAL #1

Help Form Your Members in the Society's Principles and Practices

Formation of Members

Rule: Part 1, 3.12

It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor and help them be aware of the benefits, resources and opportunities that are available for the poor. The Society also offers members higher training in order to better help to raise the cultural and social level of those who request this support.

Basically, we belong to a simple, active Society. Our members wish to serve Christ by looking after the day-to-day needs of those who seek our help. We must try to improve the knowledge of our members. **The Supply Catalog and Order form** for all Vincentian materials can be found on-line at www.svdpusa.org. To order click on "Shop" which is located on the home page.

Developing the Spirit of the Society among members.

Vincentian Formation enables your Conference to grow in spirituality, to renew, and to revitalize. The most important place to form members is at the Conference meeting. It is also imperative for all members to attend the Ozanam Orientation. By a resolution of the National Council, all Active members are required to attend an Ozanam Orientation. This is especially required of Officers at all levels of the Society. It is highly recommended that Associate members also attend. The President should support your Spiritual Advisor in accessing and making use of the following Vincentian Formation materials that are available from the National Office:

- **Vincentian Reflections (Cycle A-B-C)**

This important resource is to be used for Prayer, Reflection and Sharing at Conference Meetings (Based on the Sunday Scripture readings and Vincentian Feasts).

Also available FREE on www.svdpusa.org

- **Serving in Hope: Video and Formation Guide Series**

Module I: Our Vincentian Vocation

Module II: Our Vincentian Spirituality

Module III: Our Vincentian Heritage

Module IV: Our Vincentian Mission

Module V: Our Vincentian Rule

Module VI: Our Vincentian Conference

Module VII: Our Vincentian Home Visit

It is important to note that the Serving in Hope Modules can be used effectively at Conference meetings. The Conference President needs to be supportive of the time this takes.

Other important resources:

- **Vincentian Celebrations: Rituals and Ceremonies**

Prayer services for Annual Commitments, Commissioning, Funerals, etc. Liturgies for our Founders, and other resource information.

- **Rule**

The Rule and International and National Statutes for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Reading and sharing on the Rule is recommended at Conference meetings.

- **Manual**

Fundamental information of the founders, history, spirituality, and organization of the Society.

- **Spiritual Advisor Handbook**

- **Voice of the Poor Guide**

- **Vincentian Guide to Multicultural/Diversity Issues**

- **Faces of Holiness: Portraits of some Saints in the Vincentian Family** by Father Robert P. Maloney

- **Mystic of Charity** by Father Robert P. Maloney

- **A New Century Dawns** by Father Robert P. Maloney

- **Tis A Gift** by Father Robert P. Maloney

- **Turn Everything to Love** by Father Robert P. Maloney

- **The Spirituality of the Home Visit: A Journal**

- **A Heart of Fire: Apostolic Reflection with Rosalie Rendu**
- **Members Handbook**
- **Vincentian Meditations I and II** by Father Tom McKenna
- **Walking the Vincentian Pathway: A Personal Guide**
- **Walking the Vincentian Pathway Conference President and Spiritual Advisor** can be a big help in planning when and how to use the available materials to help your Conference grow in holiness over time.

Improving our service to those we help.
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The use of brief discussions, during Conference meetings, about various Social Service methods of visitation and related subjects will help improve our service to those in need. By meeting and solving problems, seeking advice on problems from those able to help, and learning from our mistakes, we become more skilled in the art of helping people. When a problem is met, a good discussion about it at the Conference meeting will more likely than not bring up a solution.

Local Councils also provide training for members and you should encourage your members to attend as many of these gatherings as possible.

Brief study courses on various topics of interest to your members are frequently available. You should encourage your members to use them.

To survive as an effective organization in our changing world, the Society must provide a useful service related to current needs. This means that our thinking on social issues must be up to date. You are the person most concerned in making sure your Conference is aware of the needs and their possible solutions. You should keep yourself fully informed on current developments and how they affect the Society.



GOAL #2

Work for Your Conference as a Servant Leader

Servant Leadership

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 11)

Leadership positions in the Society, at any level, are always to be accepted as service to Christ, the members and the poor. Servant leadership is done in imitation of Jesus who said: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.

Every Vincentian knows that “No work of Charity is foreign to the Society.” Your Conference should be organized to meet the needs that occur in your own area and are within the capacity of your members. Periodically examine the changing role of the Conference; talk about new needs and look at ideas for new works; and then formulate plans for the future.

Below is mentioned the range of work that an ordinary Parish Conference could expect to cover. Special Works Conferences would be expected to concentrate on their own work.

TYPES OF WORK

- The **Home Visit** is the primary work of the Society, for it is in the home visit where we find:
 - **Material poverty caused by:**
 - unemployment
 - a deserted husband/ wife or a single parent
 - sickness and disabilities
 - disaster victims
 - inability to manage financial commitments (over committed to time payments, etc.)
 - lack of knowledge of government benefits
 - social conditions.

- **Social poverty caused by:**
 - aged people living alone
 - lonely people with no family
 - newcomers to a town or suburb
 - bereaved families.

- **Generational Poverty:**
 - families living in poverty for at least two generations
 - acceptance of poverty as a way of life
 - understanding and working the system
 - no hope for the future.

- **Situational Poverty:**
 - fallen into poverty because of current circumstances
 - no knowledge of how the systems work
 - non-acceptance of their situation
 - prayers and hope for saving grace.

- **People requiring help to find needed services:**
 - information on government benefits
 - referral to other agencies
 - help to complete forms, etc.

- **Visitation** to hospitals, nursing homes, institutions within the parish.

- **Providing a place** for people requiring help to contact us, such as itinerants.

- **Providing workers** at various special works of the Society (if applicable to your area) such as:
 - Society stores and dining centers
 - shelters for homeless people
 - homes for the elderly

- **Systemic Change** programs to help bring people out of poverty such as:
 - Bridges Out of Poverty/Getting Ahead Program (Ruby Payne/Philip DeVol)
 - Centro Rendu (Hispanic outreach)
 - Changing Lives Program
 - Circles
 - Communications Across Barriers (Donna Beegle, “If Not Me, Then Who?)
 - Faith in Family Togetherness Program
 - Loans
 - Neighborhoods of Hope
 - Re-entering Citizens Program
 - Side by Side
 - Stepping Stones
 - VOAN (moving low income families out of poverty)
 - Voice of the Poor

- **Twinning Program.** Twinning is a consistent commitment to another Conference, domestic or foreign, so that the receiving Conference has the ability to depend on the contribution. Each Conference should be encouraged to participate in Twinning. Some efforts will be required from your Conference to raise the required amount for the minimum of \$75/Quarterly. Regular correspondence should be kept up with the Conference, and all donations and procedures must be negotiated through the National Office for International Twinning.

There is another program similar to Twinning. It is known as Co-Pays. Twinning is a consistent commitment with a regular distribution of funds from a Conference to another Conference or Council. Twinning funds can be used by the receiver for any purpose. Co-Pays are a one-time assistance from one Conference to another to help a particular person or family with a bill to be paid. These have two separate purposes and, therefore, are accounted for differently.

- **Advocacy.** The society in which we live is changing rapidly and so are the needs of the people in it. The types of poverty are changing and so today, more and more, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is called to be a “Voice of the Poor.” Vincentians, through their experiences in home visits, are qualified to advocate for justice in addition to offering charity to those in need. The “Voice of the Poor” advocacy committees operate at all levels of the Society across the United States. In the spirit of Frederic Ozanam, we know that charity provides only temporary alleviation of pain and suffering, but it is not enough. The Society calls for the identification and elimination of the cause of the need in the first place. This demands charity and justice, and so we speak for the preferential protection of the poor and vulnerable particularly for those who are afraid to speak or cannot speak for themselves.

HOW TO LOCATE PEOPLE IN NEED

In making the following suggestions, it is emphasized that the better known the Society is, the more people will be seeking our help.

- **People approach the Society themselves.**
They may do this through a member, a Parish or other contact point. Every Conference should ensure that it is available to people by letting the community know how it can be contacted.
- **Friends and neighbors refer people.**
Here again we must advertise ourselves sufficiently so that when someone sees a family in need they think of the Society and make contact with us.
- **Referrals from Clergy, Government Officials, Police, Hospitals, Doctors, Schools, etc.**
Here again these people should know we exist, what we can do and where to contact us. Each Conference should make personal contact with these people at least once a year.

- **Referrals from other community organizations.**

All organizations should be aware of what services we can provide so that if, in the course of their work, they come across someone whom we can help, they will inform us. We may from time to time make contact with these organizations (such as Meals on Wheels) and ask for the suggestions of people to visit. SVdP information can be included in community referral lists as well as websites. Some communities also have special phone numbers for those who have emergency needs.

- **Members' own observations.**

You should encourage your members to be always on the lookout for people in need.

- **Surveys of your district.**

From time to time different organizations or people survey a district and this can provide us with opportunities for finding persons/families in need.

- **Brochures and Flyers.**

The Conference can develop brochures and flyers that briefly describe who we are, what services we offer, and how to contact us. These brochures and flyers can be given to the organizations listed above who can distribute them to those in need. There are some brochures and flyers available through the National Office order catalogue.

- A Conference can be listed in the local 211 directory. And it can have a website, although, if no one knows how to maintain it over time, it is better not to start one.

WHAT CAN YOUR CONFERENCE DO FOR THOSE IN NEED

Your Conference has not the resources in money or trained personnel of Government; however, it does have the time and talents of its members to show personal concern for the individual/family and their problem and to work with them in solving it.

The role of the Society in social welfare work is such, that when a family approaches the Society for help, we must determine their real problem and help to find a long-term solution to it. In the meantime, we will give immediate assistance. If the Conference is unable to find a long-term solution to a problem, it is advisable to refer the family to a person or organization with some specialist skills. The Society could then cooperate in any solution arrived at as a result of this referral. The concern the Society should show to the individual/family will be evidenced in the following ways:

- Regular visits to get to know them better and to be able to give realistic and appropriate help.
- Neighbor to neighbor approach with no evidence of any superiority or judgment on them.

- Perseverance even when we don't seem to be achieving results.
- Follow up contacts, after the initial problem is solved.

In the visitation of the aged, lonely and socially poor we should follow the same guidelines. Not only should we visit them regularly, but we should do little extra things for them to demonstrate our personal concern.

One of the most important duties that you as a Conference President will have to carry out is the selection of the best members to visit each particular individual/family. The President may do this or delegate this task to a few members who are willing to take on this important task.

TYPES OF AID YOUR CONFERENCE CAN GIVE

It will be your duty to supervise the kind of aid your Conference gives. Various suggestions are:

- **Advice:**

Do not be quick to advise. People living in poverty want us to talk to them and especially to listen to them. Individuals/Families are often best helped by encouraging their own solutions. But when wanted and appropriate, give advice that is correct and practical. Make sure the individual/family clearly understands the advice given. If your Conference is not sure what advice it should give in a situation, consult your District Council. Your Conference should have advisors such as clergy, lawyers, doctors, social workers, agency officials, to whom it can turn for help. However, we must never force our will onto those we help. Be sure that you don't make your assistance dependent upon them actually taking your advice. People must decide for themselves what advice they will take and to what degree.

- **Helping Person Find Resources:**

Bring a referral sheet to leave with the family and point out the best items for their situation. Listening to and helping the person/family think through their next steps is very important often.

- **Material Help:**

- Give the type and amount of help that is required by the individual/family at the time. Be sure it is relevant to their present need. It is inappropriate for Conferences to limit their aid to a food voucher (for an insufficient amount) and clothing (even though the immediate problem is the rent or the electric bill).
- Do not hesitate to give financial assistance. It is the type of aid that meets the needs of the majority of those we serve. Also their need may be for things other

than food and clothing. Give sufficient aid to the individual/family to cover the period intended. Avoid the assembly line process. Do not simply give the same amount to everyone so you can feel that you are being fair to all. Treat each case on its own merit.

- There are some individuals/families for whom the best aid is a food voucher for meat, vegetables, bread and milk as well as other groceries. If the business accepts your vouchers, it is important they do not allow tobacco and alcohol in the redemption of the voucher. Make sure that the business which handles your orders understands the Society and does not embarrass those using the voucher. For some people the best way to help them is to bring the actual food, purchased by someone who is used to shopping for similar individuals/families.
- Be generous with clothing, furniture, etc. that may be donated to your Conference. The items are given to us primarily for those individuals/families we help.
- After careful review, don't hesitate to refuse a request for immediate material assistance if you think it is advisable to do so. We are asked to love those in need in the best way possible, even if the answer is "no."

- **Credit Counseling Services:**

The Conference should be aware of the need that many people have for counseling about issues of credit. The Conference should be prepared to make referrals to individuals trained in credit counseling.

- **Moving Out of Poverty:**

The Society has made some significant steps in helping those we serve toward moving out of poverty and achieving self-sustaining livelihood. Our programs developed out of our vision of Systemic Change are aiding many of those we serve to better understand themselves and how they can improve their state in life. These programs include mentoring, training, loans, and addressing the root causes of poverty.

- **Ourselves:**

The poor want us to talk to them and especially they want us to listen to them. Often the biggest gift we bring is our time and ability to listen. We may be able to do little jobs around the house for them (minor repairs, lawn mowing, etc.). Or we may be able to transport them to appointments, etc. Especially, when visiting these people who are lonely or aged, remember things like birthdays as they often need and appreciate a change that enlivens their lives. Whenever possible, arrange something special for them to enhance their dignity and feeling of self-worth. In every case just described, however, be sensitive that there are potential liability issues and avoid getting your Conference members in over their heads.



GOAL #3

Develop Your Officers into a Working Team

Meetings of the Vincentian Members

Rule: Part 1, 3.3

The members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide Community of Vincentian friends.

President

The Society does not operate as a "one person band." It is a team operation. The full team consists of all the members of the Conference. The Conference will only operate well if every member is given the opportunity to, and does, play their role. A good rule to follow is that if a member of the Conference can carry out a particular job - give it to them. Delegation of duties is not only necessary to help a president, but it is also essential for the health and vitality of the Conference.

Like any team, some members must be given particular duties. The selection of the right people for each job will help you be a better President. With your election as President, all other offices become vacant and your first duty will be to fill them. Officers may be appointed for any length of time but they retire at the end of your term as President.

It is possible to reappoint the officers of your predecessor and it may be the right thing to do in some cases. You also must bring in new blood to help secure and build the future of the Conference.

When you have made a selection - and it is your prerogative to make these appointments - you should discuss your nominations with the members of your Conference both individually and at your meeting before finalizing them. In selecting your officers, although favoritism should not be practiced, it is a good

idea to select people who can work well with you and who are available for consultation. The President should NOT appoint a family member or someone in close relationship as an officer. It is also not a good idea for one person to fill multiple officer roles at once. In no case should the President also be acting as Treasurer.

Vice President

It is suggested that in the first place you select two Vice Presidents, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. Your two Vice Presidents should be people who would be capable of taking over for you, as President. It is good training for a future President. The Vice Presidents should be available to take over for you in your absence, regularly attend your Conference meetings, and have full knowledge of Conference activities and especially your plans for the Conference. The Vice President organizes the election of the next President.

Secretary

The Secretary has an essential and important contribution to the fulfillment of the mission of the Society, and the daily operations and development of the Conference. Carefully kept records provide the basis for accurate information and contain material for evaluating the spirit and the works of the Conference. The reporting duties of the Secretary are explained in the official Minute Book obtained from the National Office in St. Louis, MO.

Treasurer

The Treasurer should regularly attend meetings and keep an up to date record of Conference finances. There should be a Statement of Receipts and Expenditures and current Balance at every meeting. The President, Secretary and Treasurer are responsible for completing the year end annual report and forwarding it to the Council. The National Office has financial record keeping resources. Conferences should not accumulate, or stockpile, large sums of money. The Society has always lived in the spirit of Frederic Ozanam who trusted that Providence would provide us with the means to serve those in need.

Spiritual Advisor

The Spiritual Advisor is an important appointment and an essential team member. For further information see the next section on a Goal # 4

Other Team Members

Besides these people, you can appoint other members to your team for a special purpose, if appropriate for your Conference:

- **Stores**
To liaison with your local Store Committee, arrange drives, etc.
- **Literature**
To keep your supplies up to date, check for literature sales, etc.
- **Hospital Visitation**
To ensure that all requests from hospitals are followed up and regular visitation is organized.
- **Special Programs**
To guarantee that special programs such as Back-to-School, Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc. are organized and coordinated.

Basic Information

- Regular communication between the Conference President and the Pastor/Parish Council is essential. This is one way of assuring the health of the Conference within the Parish. The Pastor should be notified when there is a change of Officers.
- It is recommended that each account have at least two or three signers; do not include priests or deacons. Signers must be re-evaluated each time there is a change in officers. The name on the account and the tax id number (EIN) must be that of the Society, and not that of the Parish or any of the members. If you don't know what to do here, talk to your District Council President or staff.

NOTES



Goal #4

Work with Your Spiritual Advisor for the Growth of Your Members

The spirit of poverty and encouragement

Rule: Part 1, 3.13

Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Advisor is very important.

A very important member of your Conference is your Spiritual Advisor. If you do not have a Spiritual Advisor, one of your first duties will be to encourage and support someone to attend the spiritual advisor formation program. In the United States we are finding that the demands on the priests in the Parish prevent them from regular attendance at our meetings. In the spirit of our heritage where the lay man, Emmanuel Bailly, served as the spiritual advisor of our founding members, it is recommended that a member of the Conference be invited to serve in this role.

You should involve your Spiritual Advisor fully in your activities and discussions. If the Spiritual Advisor is a deacon/religious, it is important that she/he be made welcome at your meetings and given an opportunity to express his/her views on matters being discussed by the Conference. Ordained Spiritual Advisors (priests and deacons) cannot vote, cannot be signors on accounts, and cannot be officers. Spiritual Advisors should be specifically requested to help in the spiritual formation of members, principally by providing the formation materials from the National Office (See Formation section). The National Office has a Spiritual Advisor Handbook for training and formation.

The Spiritual Advisor assists members to:

- deepen their faith
- grow in openness and respect for each other
- strengthen their vocation as Christians and Vincentians
- serve and minister to others
- grow in community with those they serve

The Spiritual Advisor fulfills the following duties:

- Leads/arranges meeting prayers, spiritual reflections and discussion
- Seeks moments for spiritual development: home visit attitudes, discussions regarding priorities, times of judgment and criticism, etc.
- Organizes Vincentian Celebrations: commissioning, installations, etc.
- Resolves difficulties involving members of the Conference.

NOTES



GOAL #5

Regularly Recruit New Members for Your Conference

The Journey together towards holiness

Rule: Part 1, 2.2

Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity. Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their ideal is to help relieve suffering for love alone, without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves.

RETAINING MEMBERS

Being a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, being a Vincentian, is indeed a special calling from God. The Vincentian vocation is the desire to grow in spirituality by directly helping those in need by person-to-person service. This is done by the gift of one's heart and friendship in a community of faith, the Conference of lay persons each inspired by the same vocation. Some people who join the Society will leave it. One of your duties will be to make sure that the Conference functions efficiently and the spirit that exists in the Conference is such as to encourage members to stay on. If your Conference seems to be losing too many members, it should consult with its Local Council to try and find out why. To do its job effectively the Society needs as many members as it can get.

Very few members have ever left the Society from overwork. It is important that every member of your Conference feels needed by the Conference and is given sufficient work to do. Members expect to have at least one visit or activity each week. A member who is too eager and wants to do all the work can be bad news for a Conference. Similarly a President must guard against the temptation of doing too much of the work and not delegating by handing out visits, etc. to other members of the Conference.

New members bring new ideas into a Conference - most of them are worth consideration. The Society wants to keep up with the changes in our community. We must welcome ideas and evaluate their usefulness to the service the Society can perform. Whenever a new member comes to your Conference, make them feel welcome. It is a good idea to appoint a member to specifically look after the new member for the first few weeks and help them understand what is going on in the Conference.

RECRUITMENT

Each Conference can expect to lose some of its members in a year. For this reason a President must recruit members and do all that is necessary to retain. Probably more has been said on this subject than any other in the Society. It is a continuing need but we offer a few suggestions.

- New people should not be automatically accepted as members. It is recommended that new people be given formation in the understanding of the Rule and Vincentian Spirituality, a time for discernment, and approval by the Conference members. Rule Part 3, Statute 3 outlines the procedure for admission into a Conference. The Member Handbook, available from the National Office, also gives excellent guidance on new members.
- The National Office has an excellent recruiting program called “Invitation to Serve.” This program is a proven recruiting method that has been used throughout the country to entice anywhere from 3 to 150 interested people.
- The most successful way to get new members is by personal invitation.
- We have a Society that gives many benefits to its members. We must not be selfish about it and should ensure that as many people as possible will have the opportunity to join us. We must not be disappointed if we are refused as not everyone is attracted to the Society. Every Conference President has been surprised at least once by the person least expected, accepting the invitation to join.
- At least once a year the Conference should take a little time to draw up a list of names of likely prospects for membership and arrange for them to be contacted.
- It is a good idea to invite prospects to an informal meeting before they are invited to join. This enables the Society to be explained to them and all the questions answered. If such an occasion can be preceded by a talk from the pulpit this is even better.
- Members should be encouraged to bring their friends along to a meeting and encourage them to join.

- Each Conference is responsible for its own membership and before anyone is approached to become a member, the Conference, through yourself, should be informed and approval given.
- Members who have left the Conference or who may have been previously contacted can always be asked at some later date to rejoin your Conference.
- Look to the shifting population (school teachers, bank officials, public servants, etc.) when recruiting members. When they move to a new area they are often looking for something to do.
- Consider whether your Conference practices are excluding part of the parish. For instance, weekday morning meetings are great for retired people, but it means you will not have any active members who work.

NOTES

VI. CONFERENCE REGULATIONS

Conferences Meet Frequently

Rule: Part 3, Statute 5

Members of the Society, traditionally gather in communities called “Conferences,” which meet weekly, or at least twice a month. This is to affirm the importance of the spiritual and social dimensions of Vincentians coming together as a community of faith and love, prayer and action.

MEETINGS

The Conference meeting is the pivot of all Society activity. It provides a place where members can experience the fraternal relationship that should exist in the Society and it is the place where all our work is organized.

Your Conference should meet at a time of the week that best suits your Conference members (and likely members). It is a good idea to review at least once a year the time in the week that your meeting is held. There are many experiences of Conferences changing their meeting times and at least doubling their membership. Make sure that your meeting place is reasonably comfortable, private enough to allow uninterrupted discussions and central enough to your area to allow all members to get to it easily.

Your Conference meeting should not be a long drawn out one. The way you conduct your meeting will go a long way to determining your success as President. You should spend a time before each meeting preparing for it so that during the meeting you are not looking for correspondence, details of phone calls, etc.

It is up to the President to ensure that a meeting agenda is followed and in doing so keep the length of the meeting to a reasonable time. You must also ensure that the members have a chance to speak on all issues but must not let the length of discussion of any issue become burdensome to the Conference. If topics become too time consuming or controversial, further discussion should be postponed to another time. A good practice is to ensure that members have clearly stated information about topics for discussion in advance of the meeting so they can be prepared for the discussion. When a topic becomes time-consuming, designate a few members to study the subject and bring a report or recommendation back to the Conference. This is, in essence, a temporary committee. You may find that some areas benefit from a permanent or "standing" committee to work outside the meeting and bring a report to the meeting. Proper use of committees can make meetings much shorter, more effective, and more enjoyable for all.

Conference Meeting Agenda

Conference meetings should be held at least twice monthly. In order to qualify to be a valid Conference meeting, the meeting must address the three primary objectives of the Society of spiritual growth, fellowship, and service. In addition, the meeting must have a quorum of Active Members present. The recommended agenda to be followed in every Conference meeting is specified in *The Rule*, Part 3, Statute 7:

- **Roll call**
- **Opening prayer** (See Manual, p.72). Prayer cards are available from the National Office.
- **Welcome to New Members.** Prospective members should be made to feel very welcome. It should be your practice to visit prospective members before they attend the meeting to explain the Society and its activities and procedures to them. Prospective members and other “guests” should be informed at this time about the importance of confidentiality and that nothing spoken about in this meeting should be shared outside of the meeting. This time of the meeting is also a good time each week to ask for the names of prospective new members. The Member Handbook available from the National Office explains clearly the proper procedure for admitting new members and recommends a discernment period before they become officially Active members.
- **Spiritual reading (or meditation)** on which members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith. Your Spiritual Advisor should be asked to prepare this, especially using the Vincentian Reflections and Serving in Hope prepared by the National Council. It is expected that the Reading be followed by a discussion and sharing among the Conference members.
- **Discussion of the Rule (Parts 1 and 3)** is something that has been recommended and followed by many Conferences right after the spiritual reading and discussion. One or more Articles or Statutes of the Rule should be read, understood and discussed by the members.
- **Approval of Minutes of previous meeting. If you email draft minutes in advance of the meeting, you can save much time at meetings.** Minutes should be brief and factual, recording only just what happened. The minutes are not a factual record of what people said, it is a record of the topics discussed and what was decided. There still may be a need for some discussion on the business arising from the minutes or to correct any error in them.
- **Home visitation report.** A report is given on those who have been visited during the week. The issue the conference must consider is whether the

decision to help or not will be made at this meeting. If yes, then all relevant details of all cases will be given. This procedure works best in conferences that meet every week. If, however, the decision is made elsewhere, then the Conference should only share briefly the challenging visits, visits where you learned something new, and visits which particularly affected you spiritually. The report should not be long. After the first visit, the report should give all relevant known details about the individual/family. Later reports need only note changes that have occurred. The visiting members should then make a recommendation on future action. The Conference should then, if necessary, discuss any problem that might have arisen and decide what future action to take. Any reports on Visits to Hospitals, Institutions, and Special Works should be brief and any future action recommended.

There are many Conferences who have so much need in their area that they do more than 50 visits each week. For these Conferences, it is impractical and unnecessary to discuss each visit at the meeting. Only some of the more important or interesting visits should be discussed. There should never be a meeting when no visits are discussed.

After each report, or when all Reports are made (depending on your own preference) and, if a follow up is necessary, visitors for the following week should be identified and appointed. The President may often be the person who is in the best position to assign visitors. It is imperative for many reasons, and it is in our Rule, that members always visit individuals/families in pairs.

- **President's report.** Please keep in mind that you as president can eat up a lot of the meeting time with your report. Think about whether or not you want to do this or what you absolutely need to report.
- **Secretary's report** (including correspondence received, information about the Society or training points)
- **Treasurer's report.** A written statement of Receipts, Expenditures and present Balance of ALL Conference accounts should normally be presented at every meeting. Payment of bills and issue of vouchers noted.
- **Committee reports (including Formation Committee report).** Committee reports are given.
- **Correspondence.** The Secretary should have opened and studied all correspondence beforehand and need only summarize it at the meeting. Only selected letters need be read in full at the meeting.

- **Membership reports** on meetings and other activities attended by members on behalf of the Conference.
- **Resolutions** General Business. Plans for advancing Society charitable involvement, growth or funds.
- **Special Works reports**
- **Old business**
- **New business**
- **Time and Place of next meeting** (the calendar should include Festival meetings and Conference Liturgies)
- **Secret collection**
- **Closing prayer**
- **Adjournment**

RECORDS

Some record must be kept of Conference Activities. Once a year each Conference is asked to submit an Annual Report on its activities to the next higher Council. This is a simple report that is easy to complete if records are kept regularly. The National Office has resources for Conference records in the Secretary Minute Book. This is a very useful place to keep your records. It contains record sheets for compiling reports on individual/families, sheets for keeping membership records, details of Conference activities, Society prayers, sheets for the Quarterly and Annual Reports. The database for your Conference membership is also available on the National Website, if you are authorized by your Council.

Many Conferences keep their case records in a database. There are several available by subscription now. If your Conference chooses to develop its own system, please consider the long-term maintenance. Maybe a Member can write a great system for you, but who will be able to fix it ten years from now when that member is no longer around?

Further information regarding the National Data base is specified at the end of this booklet.

AUDIT

It is required in the Rule of the Society (Part III, Statute 23) that each Conference have an annual audit/financial review. This is an informal audit for the typical Conference that does not have Special Works. A formal audit is more appropriate for Conferences with Stores or other Special Works. Audits are especially

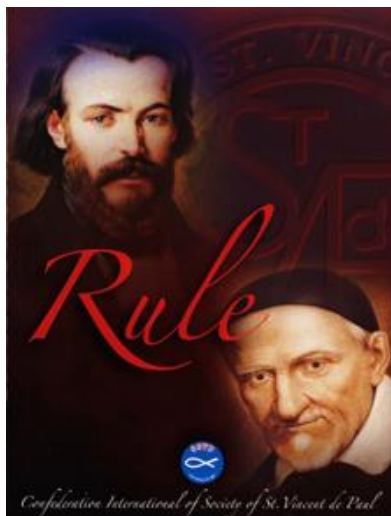
appropriate when new officers are appointed. In the Extension Portal of the National Website (www.svdpusa.org), you will find a detailed description of how to perform the informal audit and the worksheets needed for this task.

GOVERNANCE

For membership in the National Council of the United States, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, Inc. it is a requirement that every organizational unit (Conference and Council) have Bylaws. Bylaws are significant written rules by which an organization is governed. Bylaws determine how the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is structured and, along with state law, determine the rights of participants in the structure. Model Bylaws that have been approved by the National Council can be found on the National Website (www.svdpusa.org).

The Rule is the paramount authority of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Should any Bylaw, rule or regulation adopted by a Conference or Council conflict with the Rule and regulations of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as now promulgated or hereafter adopted by the International Council General or the National Council of the United States, then and in that event such elements of the Bylaws, rules or regulations are void and of no effect.

To remain in good standing, Conferences and Councils must maintain their Bylaws (including any and all amended articles) in updated and amended form. They must keep a copy of the Rule with their Bylaws. Bylaws should be reviewed no less frequently than once every three years for the purpose of determining if there is a need that they be revised or updated and that the advice of legal counsel be sought where deemed advisable according to the society's POLICY ON REVIEW OF CORPORATION/ORGANIZATION BYLAWS.



VII. RELATIONSHIPS

A close relationship

Rule: Part 1, 5.1

Faithful to the clear intentions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the Society has a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Respect of the members for the hierarchy provides the foundation for harmonious reciprocal cooperation.

The adoption of practical initiatives

Rule: Part I, 6.3

Conferences and Councils should establish a dialogue with their counterparts in other Christian churches or ecclesial communities and other faiths, with regard to cooperation in charitable work, wherever this is appropriate.

Relationship with Other Members

The most important relationship that must be maintained in any Conference is that of the Members with each other. Keep in mind that the second primary objective of the Society is fellowship. Nothing should exist in a Conference setting that can jeopardize those relationships.

Important Ways to Improve the Relationship with your Pastor

- First, pastors, as well as parishioners, should be regularly informed about the income, expenses, and works of the Conference in order to demonstrate that all funds received from the parish are being handled in an appropriate and responsible manner. Any such reports must certainly respect the confidentiality of those served, but are necessary to assuage any fears and to ensure the trust and cooperation of a pastor. The normal process is to provide a summary of activities and finances to the pastor at the end of each quarter.
- Second, if a pastor cannot attend regular meetings of the Conference, some mutually convenient time should be arranged between the Conference president and the pastor, providing each with an opportunity to share ideas, express concerns, and ask questions.
- Third, although the Society is a lay organization, it has always supported and respected priests. There is a mutual and necessary collaborative relationship

that must exist between pastor and Conference for our Society to thrive. In view of this, a Conference president should always be careful how Conference members treat a pastor, who, ultimately, has the final say about whether the Conference can function in the parish. In turn, pastors who are kept informed are more likely to provide support to and encouragement of the Conference.

- Fourth, establishing clear guidelines of operation with every newly assigned pastor is essential. What has been done under the administration of one pastor might make another uncomfortable. As long as the Rule of the Society is not violated in the process, compromise is a necessary and good thing.
- Fifth, providing a pastor with information about the Society and informing him regularly about what is going on, not just in the parish, but also regionally, nationally, and internationally is absolutely vital to the preservation of a solid relationship with a pastor and to a pastor's continued growth in knowledge of the Society's mission and purpose. In addition, a Conference president should help the pastor by providing the parish (most likely through the parish bulletin) with at least an annual report of the works of the Society in the parish, although more frequent reporting to parishioners is certainly encouraged.

Your Conference is an integral and important part of two Communities:

- The Catholic (and in a wider field, the Christian) community.
- The community at large.

It has an important role to play in both and it is important that your Conference plays this part.

The Catholic Church

The Society exists to bear witness to Christ by serving the Poor. Our particular role as Christians is to find those in poverty and give them the aid they need. The Society must do this as well as is humanly possible. A second-rate attempt is really not the most effective witness to Christ.

We are not the only Christian Organization that is devoted to helping those in need. Your Conference should develop a close working relationship with other Christian, civic and ecumenical organizations engaged in service of those who are poor in your area, to develop complementary services for those in need. There should never be any sign of competition between the various organizations. In working with other agencies, it is important to be aware of their respect for the doctrines of the Catholic Church.

There is an obligation on all Christians to practice Christian charity. Many want to carry out this obligation without joining any organization. The Society should be prepared to help them and encourage our fellow parishioners to undertake some

activity in this field. In any project we undertake we should welcome assistance from anyone who is prepared to help - even if only in a small way.

The Community

There is a growing awareness in our time of the needs of the disadvantaged members of our community. Many organizations are working to meet these needs either generally or in a specific area. Lately there is a tendency to coordinate this work and provide a better, more efficient and comprehensive service. Our Conferences should not only cooperate in these plans, but should also play a leading role in implementing them. The knowledge and experience we have gained must be available to others who wish to care for community needs.

At the same time we are a Society which recognizes our limitations. In your own community you must be prepared to cooperate with others to provide this comprehensive service. Before providing a service you must determine if the need still exists. If there is a need in the community that is not met, you can either decide to meet it in your own Conference or become the spearhead in a community effort to provide it.

As a President of the Conference, you will represent the Society in your community. In dealing with other organizations you must show the Society's willingness to cooperate in projects to improve the lot of the disadvantaged individuals/families in your area. You should make sure that organizations in your area know of the Society's existence, what it can do, and how it can be contacted.

Publicity

Although we do not seek publicity, it is the duty of every Conference to let the people in its parish and community know what it is doing. The National Office offers sample Bulletin Announcements corresponding to the Liturgical year and these are a very effective way of communicating with the parish. You should arrange for the distribution of the summaries of the Annual Reports to parishioners and other residents (especially benefactors) so that they are aware of what you are doing. This lets them know how you are spending the money they give you and encourages their support of your work and, above all, people will know that we are available to help if we are needed.

The National President is the only official spokesperson of the Society on national issues. The elected Council President is the official spokesperson for the society on local issues.

VIII. THE COUNCIL

Conference and Council Annual Review

Rule: Part 3, Statute 22

At least once a year, each Conference and Council must evaluate their service to the members, to the poor, the effectiveness of their special works, etc., and explore ways to provide better service. They should also consider new types of needs they may seek to alleviate and how to find those who are in need.

There should be very close contact between Conferences in the same area or town by regular contact between Presidents and members. There should be cooperation in any joint projects and constant discussion on a common approach to the needs facing the Society.

One of the worst things a President can do is to shut the Conference off from the Council. The only losers are the Conference and those we serve. That is why it is essential for the Conference President to attend every Council Meeting and pass on to Conference members whatever information is shared at that Council meeting.

You should encourage as frequent contact as possible between your members and the members of your Council and other Conferences.

CORRESPONDENCE

All organizations require a certain amount of correspondence to function. At your meetings not all correspondence should be read out loud, 90% of it can just be summarized.

An effective Conference will reply immediately to any correspondence needing a reply. It should be our #1 rule that any correspondence about individuals/families in need will be addressed within twenty-four hours. Someone may be waiting for a reply at the other end. Any Conference which does not attend to a case as soon as it is referred is not justifying its existence.

Similarly, Society correspondence should be answered quickly. Most Society letters are written by part-time volunteers like yourself who have undertaken an extra duty for the Society. The fraternal spirit of our Society demands that Presidents do their best to make everyone's job easier. Do not be afraid to communicate with other units of the Society. It is a quicker, easier and more efficient way to get a job done.

Most Councils have Conference Directories available so that your Conference can be easily put in contact with any Conference, Council or Special Work in the area.

REPORTS

Your Conference is asked to make a report once each year (known as the Conference Annual Report) to your Council of its activities. It is a simple report requiring a few basic details of your activities plus a financial statement. If your bookkeeping is up to date, it can be completed in less than an hour. Some Conferences use quarterly reports to help with this task. Check with your local a Council President for the recommended procedure.

The information supplied is needed to publicize the Society and to provide an Annual Report to Church Authorities, without whose support our activities could be severely curtailed.

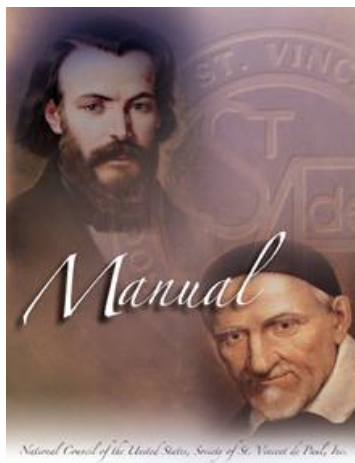
Unfortunately, many Conferences do not realize the seriousness of this Annual Report and there are undue delays in its completion causing severe embarrassment at the State and National level. The Society's year ends on September 30th. Please do your best to complete your Conference's Annual Report as quickly as possible after that and forward it to your Council. The traditional and reasonable deadline for an Annual Report is November 30. However, if your Conference does a Thanksgiving project, it would be best to complete your annual report by Oct 31.

FORMATION AND TRAINING

The National Office sponsors a leadership formation program for current and emerging Vincentian leaders, called “**Invitation for Renewal.**” The program is conducted twice a year in St. Louis, and the National Council has scholarships available to help people attend.

THE MANUAL

Further information on Councils and Conferences is found in the **Manual.**



IX. THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OFFICE

The National Council Office for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of the United States is located in St. Louis, Missouri. It was in St. Louis, at the Basilica of St. Louis (the Old Cathedral), that the first Conference of the Society started in the United States in 1845, only twelve years after the founding of the Society in Paris.

The National Council Office provides leadership, formation, technical assistance, management training and resource development to the Councils and Conferences in the United States. The National Council Office is managed by the National CEO.



**National Council of the United States
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
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Website: www.svdpusa.org**

National Council Services:

The National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul provides leadership and support for the growth and health of the Society's Councils, Conferences and Special Works.

The National Council enables the Society to better serve its local communities by creating materials for the spiritual formation of the members; networking information on advocacy and justice issues; facilitating the response to the needs

of those who are poor throughout the world by Twinning and giving assistance to victims of disaster.

National Database/“Member Portal”

Every organization depends upon effective communication to achieve its goals. **(Rule: Part I, Article 3.15)** The Society’s Strategic Plan calls for improved communications at all levels. The National Office staff strives to make sure that the National database/“Member Portal” has accurate and complete information on all members, so that they can keep everyone informed about important matters affecting the Society.

The National Council Office has an obligation to keep our contact information current. The vision of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to “embrace the world in a network of charity.” Our membership database is the nucleus of that network. By keeping every portion of it accurate and up-to-date, we ensure that Vincentians across America stay connected and can embrace the world together. However, the National Office can only do this if Vincentians in Conferences and Councils throughout the US consistently update their information so it is accurate.

(Arch)Diocesan Council Presidents can request a username and password from the National Information Technology Specialist. Once they get their username and password they can give access to all District Council Presidents and Conference Presidents, who serve with them, to manage their own membership lists. In addition to managing Conference and Council membership lists, you can also do the [Annual Report](#), [Stores Annual Report](#) and [Special Works Annual Report](#) online.

Note: The National Information Technology Specialist will issue a Username and Password for all Isolated Conference Presidents and District Council Presidents that do not have a Diocesan Council in place. If there is a National Council Member in the Diocese they are the issuing authority for that entire Diocese.

It is important to note that if your Conference puts its leaders in the National Database with appropriate leader titles, they will get email specific to their roles from National, Region, and possibly Council levels. All members in the database will get the weekly E-gazette. The National Office does not sell the mailing lists derived from the national database, although National will send members its own fundraising requests.

The online Annual Report, Stores Annual Report, and Special Works Annual Report will be available to you from September through February.

- Only isolated Conferences can send reports to the National Council office. If reports are sent from Conferences that have Councils, Membership services will return them or send them to the Council.

Inside back cover



Strategic Plan



Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA | Strategic Plan

A network of friends, inspired by Gospel values, growing in holiness and building a more just world through personal relationships with and service to people in need.

EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN OUR NETWORK OF FRIENDS



- Create a culture that encourages and values servant leadership
- Strengthen organizational capacity at Council and Conference levels
- Increase the number of members, Conferences and Councils
- Promote Vincentian cultural beliefs of "One Society" and friendship

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT VINCENTIANS ON THEIR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY



- Celebrate our essential element of Vincentian spirituality
- Enhance the formation, and grow the number, of spiritual advisors at all levels in the Society
- Increase opportunities for Vincentian spiritual formation

ADVOCATE FOR AND WORK TOWARDS A MORE JUST WORLD



- Inspire membership to embrace Catholic Social Teaching
- Establish St. Vincent de Paul as a thought leader on poverty and justice
- Be a Voice for the Poor at national, state, and local levels

PROMOTE DEEPER AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE WE SERVE



- Deepen our understanding of the challenges of poverty
- Advance acceptance of those who are different from us
- Reinforce the importance of the Home Visit as a mutual transformational experience

DEVELOP, IMPROVE, AND EXPAND SERVICES



- Formalize a national process to share and promote model programs that can be replicated by member councils
- Strengthen and expand retail operations
- Strengthen and support Councils in providing housing and services to those without shelter
- Promote efforts to fulfill unmet community needs using the talents of our members

The Strategic Plan is continually updated in order to enable the Society to grow and become more effective in serving Christ's poor. The Strategic Plan is the plan for the entire Society in the United States. It belongs to each and every Vincentian.



**National Council of the United States
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