



PART I:

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

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INTRODUCTION

Servant Leadership Positions

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.

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 12)

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.

“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.)

The Seven Duties

of an Effective and Responsible Conference President

1st Duty: COMMITMENT

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

- 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 retiring so that new leadership might take over.

2nd Duty: COMPREHENSION

A Conference President must **comprehend** and:

- understand fully the Rule of the Society and its applications.
- know the essential structure, operations, and functions of each unit of the Society.
- grasp the life and spiritual legacy of our Patron, St. Vincent de Paul, and the role of St. Louise de Marillac.
- identify with 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** in order to:

- share information about issues, decisions, and policies with their Conference members.
- 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 provide **cultivation** through formation, in order to:

- help to develop members both new and old (through Ozanam Orientations, Days of Recollection, Retreats, Serving in Hope Modules, etc.)
- find, train, and encourage Spiritual Advisors.
- remain aware of and encourage the three levels of conference membership in the Society.
- encourage the establishment of a Voice of the Poor Committee.
- cooperate in the implementation of the National Strategic Plan.

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 and other 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 to the Conference.
- facilitate and participate in discussions, but cast one vote only in the case of a tie.

7th Duty: CONTRIBUTIONS

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

- insure that solidarity dues are paid in a timely manner.
- assure that the conference submits annual reports, providing a complete accounting of all actions and income.
- be alert to the following issues of accountability:
 1. Does the treasurer provide a written financial report to the members present at each meeting or at least on a regular basis (quarterly)?
 2. Are there two signatories on each account? (Two signatures on every check, however, are not always necessary.)
 3. Does the Conference have an appropriate EIN number needed for bank accounts?
 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?
 8. Is there a need to file a form 990 with the IRS?
 9. Are there appropriate By-Laws? (The National Council Office has approved By-Laws that can easily be modified)



II. SVDP ORGANIZATION

Councils

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.

(Rule: Part 1, 3.6)

Conference:

The Conference is the basic unit, “the grass roots” of Vincentian organization. It constitutes the heart of Vincentian life and charitable service. Virtually all 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 and Conferences of special interest groups, i.e. prisons.

District Council

A District Council keeps 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 an (Arch)diocese.

(Arch)Diocesan Council

An (Arch)diocesan Council unites the District Councils, providing liaison and communication links between them, the National Council and the Bishop.

National Council

The Council of the United States, exercises jurisdiction over the Society throughout this country. The United States is divided into 8 Regions

International Council

The International Council animates and coordinates the activities of the Society throughout the world. The International Council General alone can institute new SVDP Councils and aggregate (affiliate) new Conferences.



Organizational Chart



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

¹excluding Marquette Diocese

²excluding Belleville Diocese

North Central

Illinois²
MI (Marquette)
Minnesota
North Dakota
South Dakota
Wisconsin

South Central

Arkansas
New Mexico
Oklahoma
Texas

Midwestern

Colorado
IL (Belleville)
Iowa
Kansas
Missouri
Nebraska
Wyoming

Western

Alaska
Arizona
California
Hawaii
Idaho
Montana
Nevada
Oregon
Utah
Washington



III. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE SOCIETY

Servant Leadership

“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.”

(Rule: Part I, 2.1)

As a leader, the spirituality of the Society, as captured in our Mission, 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:

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.

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 Core Values:

- **We are called to HOLINESS OF LIFE, and so we believe:**
that growth in intimacy with Jesus is a life-long process, and that prayer is essentially both personal and communal.
- **We are called to the SERVICE OF THE POOR, and so we believe in:**
the dignity of the human person, the preferential option of the poor, and the identification of Jesus with the poor.
- **We are called to live in HUMILITY, and so we believe in:**
the virtue of humility both personal and corporate, and that poverty of spirit is the primary beatitude.
- **We are called to live in SIMPLICITY, and so we believe in:**
the virtue of simplicity, in Divine Providence and that Jesus is the Evangelizer and Servant of the poor.
- **We are called to live in CHARITY AND JUSTICE, and so we believe in:**
solidarity and that charity is practiced within and outside of the Society.
- **We are called to live in Friendship, and so we believe in:**
a Community of Faith.

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: March 15



Frederic Ozanam
(1813-1853)

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 the Poor 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 the rural Poor 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 the Poor. St. Vincent de Paul is the patron saint of all charitable works.

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). St. Louise de Marillac is the patron saint of social workers.

The presence of **Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac** filled the landscape of France. They addressed the needs of all kinds of Poor: the refugees from the wars of religion, the foundlings, the beggars, the 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. The number of followers 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 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 the Poor, 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 God’s Poor. She guided them to go two by two to visit the Poor 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,” naming 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 the Poor. 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 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.

Youth and Young Adults

Pope John Paul II urged 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 the Poor 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 for the Poor. 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 the Poor and each other. Our future calls for greater “extension” of the Society into more parishes in this country. We must look upon “extension” not as mere growth of our organization but as a responsibility we have to provide others with the opportunity to share our mission of service to the Poor.

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 look forward eagerly to the challenges of the future. We have risen to the demands of over 175 years of an evolving socio-political nation and will continue to pair the solutions with the needs in the years ahead.



IV. SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Presidents as Servant Leaders

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.

(Rule: Part 1, 3.11)

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.

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 awakeners. They planted their vision firmly in the minds of their followers and never wavered from it. Their vision now lives on in us.

A Vincentian Servant Leader

As a Vincentian servant leader, you will also learn that you are not expected to do all of the work, but that you are called to delegate, encourage and inspire the members to work together to accomplish the mission. **Leadership in the Society differs greatly from commerce and industry because of its voluntary nature.** Accordingly, members need to be led rather than pushed, and persuaded rather than told. In the next several years your Conference is going to depend very much on you for its growth and development. The role of President is very important in the Society. You have taken on a responsibility to both your Conference and the people whom they serve.



V. YOUR GOALS

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 - Formation

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 - Your 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 – Your Spiritual Advisor

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 #5 - Your Members

Regularly invite people to join the Society so that you will have sufficient members to do all that your Conference wants to achieve. Strive for diversity in culture, sex, and age.

Goal #1 FORMATION

Formation of Members

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.

(Rule: Part 1, 3.12)

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, click on “**Order Materials**” which is located on the home page.

A. Developing the Spirit of the Society among members.

Vincentian Formation enables your Conference to grow in spirituality, to renew and 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. The following Vincentian Formation materials 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

- **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**

A comprehensive training and resource handbook for spiritual advisors.

- **Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change**

Responds to the challenge of helping the poor emerge from poverty.

- **Voice of the Poor Guide**

An educational guide regarding the issues impacting the poor today.

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

B. Improving our service to those we help.

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 BE A SERVANT LEADER

Servant Leadership

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.

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 11)

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
- bad management (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.

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 service and dining centers
- shelters for homeless people
- homes for the elderly

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 Foreign Twinning.

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

Finding people in various types of needs can be difficult. 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.

- **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.

WHAT CAN YOUR CONFERENCE DO FOR THOSE IN NEED

Your Conference has not the resources in money or trained personnel of Government; but 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.

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. Individual/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.

- **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. Too many Conferences 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.
- There are some individuals/families for whom the best aid is a food voucher for meat, vegetables, bread and milk as well as groceries. 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; saying "No" might be the best way of finding that long term solution.

- **Budgeting:**

Many people have sufficient resources but cannot handle them properly. The Conference should be prepared to assist them in preparing and carrying out their budget.

- **Ourselves:**

The poor want us to talk to them and especially they want us to listen to them. 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.

- **Service:**

Some people want assistance to do things that may be normal to our members. Obtaining and filling in forms for government benefits are some of the things the Society can do well.

- **Referring to Others:**

The Conference should have available to it the details of organizations who can provide specific services for those we serve. The approval of the individual/family concerned is necessary before referring them to other agencies. Confidentiality in what we do for those we serve is critical and imperative.



Goal #3 YOUR TEAM

Meetings of the Vincentian Members

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.

(Rule: Part 1, 3.3)

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.

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 Pastor should be notified when there is a change of Officers.

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, in regular attendance at your Conference meeting, and in full knowledge of Conference activities and especially your plans for the Conference. The Vice Presidents organize 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 be in regular attendance at 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 Treasurer is also responsible for completing the year end 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 who are poor.

Installation of the President and Officers

The President and Officers are officially installed in their office through a Commission Ceremony conducted during a Conference Meeting. The Prayer Services used for these occasions are found in the Vincentian Celebrations: Rituals and Ceremonies resource available from your Council or the National Office.

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.

- **Hospital Visitation**

To ensure that all requests from hospital 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

- Each account must 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.

Goal #4 YOUR SPIRITUAL ADVISOR

The spirit of poverty and encouragement

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.

(Rule: Part 1, 3.13)

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 a 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 they are a deacon/religious it is important that they be made welcome at your meetings and given an opportunity to express his/her views on matters being discussed by the Conference. 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 the members to:

- strive to reach a deeper faith awareness.
- grow in openness and respect for each other.
- strengthen their vocation as Christians and Vincentians.
- serve and minister to others.
- grow in community with the poor and needy.

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, prayers, retreats, special Masses and events.
- Assists the president in resolution of difficulties involving members of the Conference.

Goal #5 YOUR MEMBERS

The Journey together towards holiness

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.

(Rule: Part 1, 2.2)

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 the poor 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, if any, 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.

- The National Office has an excellent recruiting program called “Invitation to Serve”.
- 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.
- 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.



VI. CONFERENCE REGULATIONS

Conferences Meet Frequently

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.

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 5)

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.

CONFERENCE MEETING ESSENTIALS

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 7)

A Conference Meeting includes the following components:

- **Roll call**
- **Opening prayer** (See Manual, p.72) Prayer cards available from the National Office.
- **Welcome to New Members.** New members should be made to feel very welcome. It should be your practice to visit new members before they attend the meeting to explain the Society and its activities and procedures to them. This time of the meeting is also a good time each week to ask for the names of prospective new 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.
- **Approval of Minutes of previous meeting.** These should be brief and factual, recording only just what happened. There may be a need for some discussion on the business arising from the minutes.
- **Home visitation report.** A report is given on those who have been visited during the week. 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. Reports on Visits to Hospitals, Institutions, 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 between 50 and 100 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.

Either after each report or when all Reports are made (depending on your own preference) and if a follow up is necessary you should appoint the visitors for the following week. Past experience shows that it is bad practice to call for volunteers for visits. The President is in the best position to know who is the best person to visit a particular individual/family and should request certain members to make the visit. It is imperative for many reasons, and it is our Rule, that members always visit individuals/families in pairs.

- **President's 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 should 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 out in full.
- **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 you Conference membership is also available on the National Website, if you are authorized by your Council.

For further information regarding the National Data base, see p. 42.

AUDIT

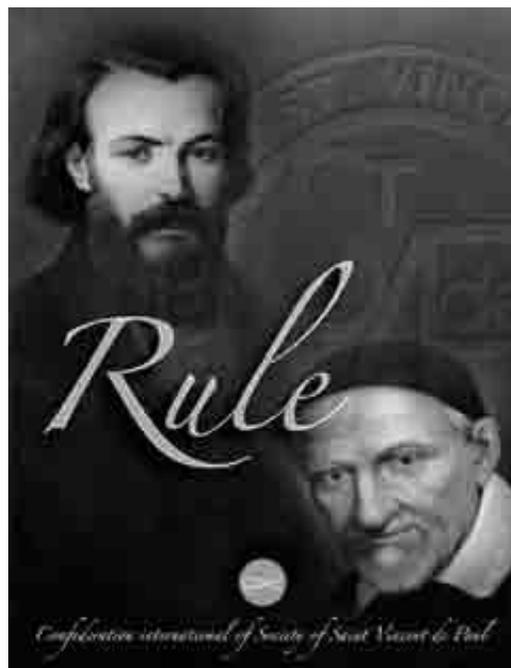
It is the recommendation of the Society that each Conference have an annual audit. This is an informal audit for the typical Conference that does not have Special Works. A formal audit is more appropriate for Conferences with Stores or other Special Works. Audits are especially appropriate when new officers are appointed.

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.

The Rule is the paramount authority of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Should any Bylaw, rule or regulation adopted by the Conference or Council level 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 By-laws, rules or regulations should be 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.





VII. RELATIONSHIPS

A close relationship

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.

(Rule: Part 1, 5.1)

The adoption of practical initiatives

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.

(Rule: Part I, 6.3)

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.
- 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 the Poor 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 bearing 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 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 to contact it.

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

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.

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 22)

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 to his Conference is to shut it off from the rest of the Council. The only losers are the Conference and those we serve.

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 frater-

nal 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 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. Keeping up to date with quarterly reports makes this a simpler task.

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.

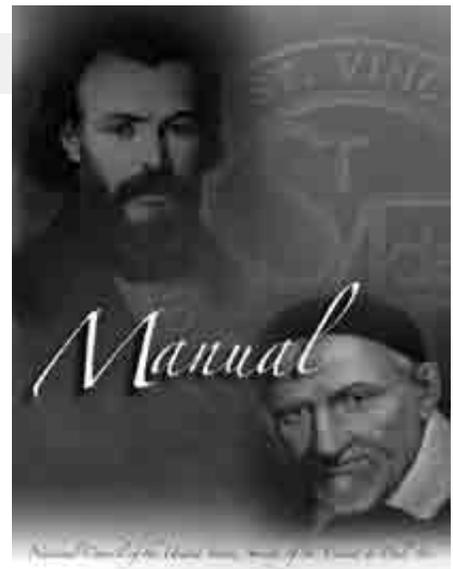
Unfortunately, many Conferences do not realize the seriousness of this Annual Report and there are undue delays in its completion causing severe embarrassment at the State and National level. The Society's year ends on September 30th. Please do your best to complete your Conference's Annual Report as quickly as possible after that and forward it to your Council. The traditional and reasonable deadline for an Annual Report is November 15.

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 at Seton Cove in Indianapolis, and the Council has scholarships available.

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.



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

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www.svdpusa.org**

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 Executive Director.

National Council Services:

- Spiritual formation
- Leadership development
- Resource composition and distribution
- Institution of Councils
- Aggregation of Conferences
- Fund development
- Management of International Twinning
- Communication
- Ozanam Newsletter
- Direction of Midyear meeting
- National and Regional meeting support
- National Committee support
- Vincentian Family relationships
- Annual Report
- National Stores' newsletter
- National web site
- Disaster funds disbursement
- Response to daily inquiries
- Liaison to the General Council
- Isolated Conference connection
- Strategic Plan implementation
- Conflict resolution teams
- Archives

Strategic Plan

In 2000, under the leadership of then-National President Eugene Smith, the National Council of the United States approved a Strategic Plan for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul:

Goal 1: Promote greater spiritual growth at every level of the Society

Goal 2: Enhance the image of the Society to become a more visible sign of Christ

Goal 3: Encourage greater unity at every level of the Society

Goal 4: Develop greater solidarity with and care for people who are poor

Goal 5: Build relationships with the Church, Vincentian Family, and other organizations serving people in need.

Goal 6: Prepare a comprehensive development program for coordinated fundraising.

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 Database

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 strive to make sure that the National database 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.

(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](#) and [Stores 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 Diocesan Council.

The online Annual Report and the Stores Annual Report will be available to you from September through February. You have three options available to you:

1. You can continue sending your paper version of both the Annual Report and Stores Annual Report to National to be entered online for you.
2. You can consolidate the report the way you always have in the past and enter the your report already consolidated online at the Council level.
3. Council Presidents can give the Conference presidents access to enter them online or you can enter them individually and let the Web application finalize or consolidate the report from the Conference level to the Council level.

