

The funds of the Society shall be used for the works of the Society, including Vincentian twinning and collaboration in payments for people we serve. However, no matter how worthy the cause, funds shall not be diverted in the form of donations or contributions to other organizations or charities, except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family. The Treasurer is charged as the responsible officer to ensure adherence after consultation with the Conference or Council. (Rule: Part III, Statute 26)

At first glance, this particular statute of the Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul may appear incongruent with the overall goals and mission of our organization. Vincentians are often confused by this restriction and many try to excuse actions that are in conflict with this statute by saying things like, “What difference does it make how the money gets to the poor as long as it gets to them?”

On the surface such thoughts appear to provide us with ample and righteous justification for non-compliance to the Rule, but in reality there are strong reasons and great wisdom behind this directive. Sharing the resources of the Society with other organizations violates our own mission, ignores the intentions of our donors and disregards the guiding principles and very essence of who we were called to be.

From the first days of our Society until today, we as Vincentians have functioned solely as frontline or primary providers of services to the needy. SVdP conferences and councils do not fund others to do our work for us. On the other hand, some other well-respected charities such as the Untied Way, Board of Visitors and various foundations, exist primarily as second level or supportive groups to fund the works of others. While financially supporting the work of others is valuable, this has never been the function of the Society. Vincentians deliver the gifts they have been given directly to those in need.

As our culture becomes more and more complex and as more and more scam charities come on the scene, it becomes extremely important that our Society remain transparent and that we remain vigilant in honoring the intentions of our donors. The groups, organizations, businesses, families and individuals who support us are giving us money and goods to help the poor directly, to do what Vincentians do in a Vincentian way. As members of the Society, we are free to donate to other causes in our own name. We are free to work and help support fundraising for other worthy cause. We cannot, however, divert funds given to the Society to a cause just because we have determined to be worthy.

This concept applies even to our in-kind donations. For example, a conference may not hold a food drive for or with another charity unless that connection is disclosed up front to our donors. If a conference works in a collaborative relationship where Vincentians work in the food bank in the name of the Society, they can do a mutual food drive provided donors are made aware of the relationship. We must never assume that our donors know what we are doing with their donations especially if they are being used for things outside of the normal activities of the Society.

Many conference can and do support outreach works in areas that do not have a SVdP conference such as a sister parish or outlying mission. Vincentians can use the funds of their conference and the Society to help outside our normal area of service provided that Vincentians are actively involved in the actual ministry and the distribution of goods. This means that instead of sending \$1,000 worth of gift cards to the Principal of a Mission school, Vincentians must get into their cars, drive to the Mission, meet with the people and hand out the gift cards.

The most important reason for not sharing our funds with other charitable groups is that it violates the very essences of the Society. Our Manual points out, "Ministry is the bridge that connects the Gospel to the needs of the people. Through ministry, we share with others a glimpse of Jesus. The ministry of a conference of St. Vincent de Paul is to bring concrete aid and the comfort of the Gospel to those who are poor and suffering. (p. 19) For Vincentians, money is the means rather than the ends. We render aid so that our brothers and sisters can experience the love of Jesus Christ firsthand not indirectly.

The words of the Society as articulated in the Manual are clear and articulate the focus and limits of our work. *Funds donated to the Conference must be used only for the works that involve the personal service of members of the Society. As generous as the Conference should be to needy individuals, it cannot provide funds to causes outside of the Society, except occasionally, for other branches of the Vincentian Family. The Society does not raise money for activities in which its members are not personally and substantially involved.* (p. 27)

As Vincentians we bring God's love to those in need; no one can do that for us. We serve the Lord by the strength of our backs and the sweat of our brows. It must be our actions that proclaim God's concerns for his people. It must be our prayers that are lifted up in the homes of the needy. It must be our hands that carry in food boxes. It must be our arms that embrace the broken hearted and it must be our love that encircles the, God called us and sent us to the poor. The Lord did not ask us to send others to do the work for which we were called that is ours to do.