

# *Ownership and Control*

by Mike Syslo

There are two themes that keep re-occurring in working with Conference members and leadership. Those themes relate to the ideas of ownership and control and I will address those separately here.

## **Ownership**

We have published in the Newsletter on multiple occasions the *Three Most Common Reasons New Members Leave a Conference*. Those reasons are: 1) they don't feel welcomed by other members; 2) they are not included in the work to be done; and 3) the Conference does not walk the talk – it fails to follow the Rule and Spirit of the Society, and practice the principles members learned in their training. The first two have to do with ownership and number three may fit as well.

Even though we talk about how much we need new members in our Conferences, when push comes to shove, we turn away more than we keep. Our existing members tend to feel such strong ownership of what they are doing that they don't want to share it with new people. We have heard statements like: "We already have our visiting teams set up, you'll have to find someone else to go out with" and "Stocking the pantry shelves is my job, you'll have to find something else to do" and "They don't speak English, so they can't help; it's too much trouble to have to translate." There are many other examples that can be given. This is similar to the NIMBY (not in my back yard) attitude toward serving the homeless. We want to bring more people into the Society as long as it doesn't affect me or *my personal ministry*.

As Vincentians, we should be open and ready to share what we do with others. The only way to help our body (Society) grow is to nurture new cells – not kill them off before they get started.

## **Control**

Control may also be closely related to ownership. This usually manifests itself in the form of one or two people running the Conference, making all of the decisions, telling the Conference members what they should be doing. This often happens when you have a person with a very dominant personality doing all of the talking. This is not always the Conference President. We all know who these personalities are. They tell what needs to be done rather than listen to what is suggested. Knowingly and unknowingly, these personality types intimidate other members into silence. They always have the only solution.

This is contrary to the RULE and Spirit of the Society. Our Conference leaders are supposed to be servant leaders. They need to listen to the Conference members, allow them to make the decisions, and do what is possible to make the decisions a reality. Servant leadership leads more directly to a democratic way of decision making which is the philosophy promoted by the Society.

Be very careful when selecting someone for a leadership role in your Conference. You may get more leadership than you want or need.