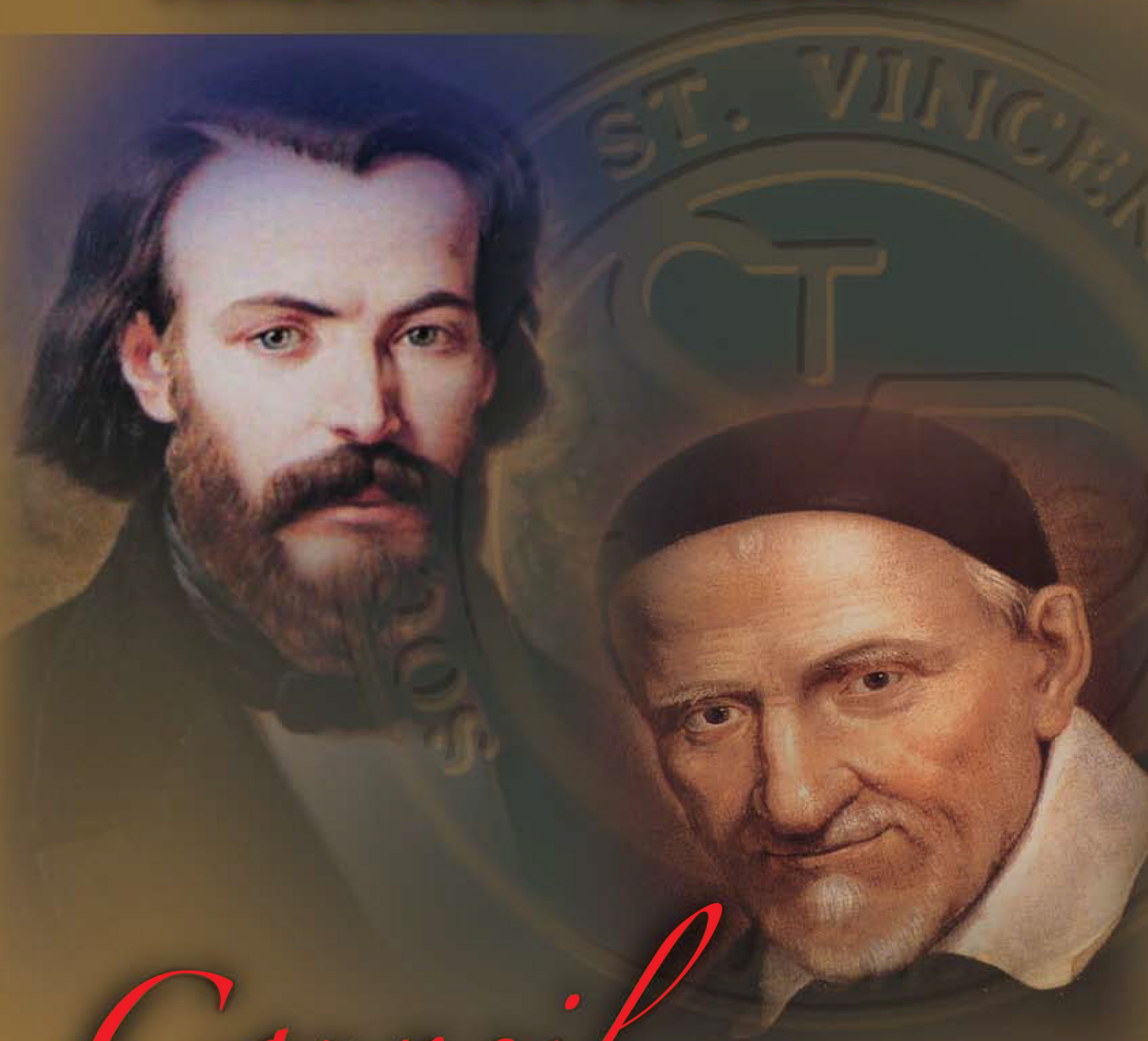


VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP



*Council*

PRESIDENT GUIDELINES

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





## PART I:

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL COUNCIL PRESIDENT

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## I. THE CALL AND DISCERNMENT

### *The Call to Leadership*

**“Leadership positions in the Society, at any level, are always to be accepted as service to Christ, the Church, 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)**

Planning, Organizing, Implementing and Evaluating are the key elements for any organization’s success. As we read the New Testament Scripture we find that Jesus instilled these key elements during his life on earth. Jesus’ teaching formed the plan; choosing his Apostles and disciples and defining their roles was the organization; implementing his message became real and alive by the way he touched the lives of people; and his evaluation criteria was seeing how those who heard and experienced his plan were then able to live life to the full.

Leadership is what makes this process work. Therefore, Calling, Discerning, Accepting and Forming leaders become a central requirement for the continued viability of the organization. The mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will only succeed if these elements are present in its life and work.

## **CALLING:**

Every Vincentian responds to a call to live a life similar to Christ's life in holiness and uplifting the lives of others especially those in poverty. This call and response is called a vocation. It raises one's dedication as a total life experience rather than a ministry which calls for a partial commitment of time, talent, and treasure.

A Vincentian leader is called to cultivate the Vincentian vocation of their members and to lead by example. A leader is called to be a servant as Christ exemplified in his washing of the feet of his disciples. This call to leadership may take many forms: Your Vincentian community may ask you to lead them; current leaders may ask you to accept a leadership position; or the Holy Spirit may ignite a fire in you to step up and lead. Every Vincentian must be open to such a call as were Jesus' disciples.

It is imperative that current leaders of a District or (Arch)Diocesan Council create opportunities to seek out ways for potential leaders to better understand and receive support to answer the leadership call. A powerful method is for the District or (Arch)Diocesan Council annually to conduct a leadership workshop to outline what a leader is and provide ways for potential leaders to discern their call.

## **DISCERNING:**

It is important for a potential leader to take time to pray, reflect, study and discern their call to be a servant leader. Prayer and reflection with a Spiritual Advisor is recommended. Study of the Rule and Manual as well as these Council President guidelines is important. Mentors can also be assigned to help potential leaders sort out the questions and to understand the Vincentian way to organize and lead.

## **ACCEPTING:**

If you feel that God is indeed calling you to accept the role of leadership, trusting in his grace, make known your decision to the members who will then nominate you for election or appointment to an office.

## FORMING:

### Walking the Vincentian Pathway

All Vincentians are encouraged to follow *Walking the Vincentian Pathway* in their personal formation. The book by this title may be found in the Materials Store at <https://ssvpusa.org/materials/>.

This book will guide you through Discovering, Developing, and Deepening your understanding of Servant leadership, along with the three Essential Elements of Spirituality, Service, and Friendship. The next level of the Vincentian Pathway, Discernment, can be found on the National Council website at <https://members.ssypusa.org/formation/>.

Here, you will discover more resources help you in your role as a Council President, and in discerning other roles in which you might one day serve.

### Invitation for Renewal

The *Invitation for Renewal* is a Vincentian Servant Leadership Formation Program for current and emerging Vincentian Leaders. It is offered twice a year. This program invites leaders to move forward in ways that are true to both our spiritual foundation and the needs of those who are living in poverty today. Participants accept the call to renew the Society today and beyond. If you have not participated in this program, plan to attend as soon as possible after assuming your leadership role.

### Vincentian Leadership: Council President Guidelines

These guidelines attempt to address the key elements of forming Vincentian leaders to go forth in carrying out the mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Leaders must review these guidelines frequently and the (Arch)Diocesan and District Councils will conduct training using these guidelines as the guide.



## II. VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP

### *Servant Leadership Positions*

**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)**

**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.**

**(Rule Part 3, Statute 12)**

A Conference helps people, a District Council helps Conferences, and (Arch)Diocesan Council helps District Councils. Whatever the group, they must be a team, especially at the Council level where Conference or District Council Presidents have a dual responsibility of representing the Conference at Council meetings and representing the Council at Conference meetings.

Successful SVdP leadership is based upon a deep understanding of the Vincentian vocation and spirituality. The ability to listen to others and to catalyze group decisions are evidences of capable leadership. The Society endeavors to cultivate this kind of Vincentian Servant Leadership.

It is important to note that when decisions are made consensus is the usual approach taken. Our Rule indicates:

“To ensure democracy in the Society decisions are often made by consensus. Consensus decision-making requires that everyone agree with a decision, not just a majority as occurs in majority-rule processes. In consensus-based processes people must work together to develop an agreement that is good enough, though not necessarily perfect. In rare circumstances, if consensus cannot be reached the decision may be put to a vote.” (Rule Part 3, Statute 16)



### III. THE FOUNDATIONS AND 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 1, 2.2)**

The mission of the Society is rooted in the mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church. As a leader, the spirituality of the Society, as captured in our Mission, Identity, Essential Elements, Virtues and Key Beliefs, 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 Frédéric 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 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 Frédéric 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:**

### **SPIRITUALITY**

- 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 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 Essential Virtues: (Rule: Part 1, 2.5.1)**

**Vincentians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:**

- **SIMPLICITY:** frankness, integrity, genuineness.
- **HUMILITY:** accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts, talents and charism, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.
- **GENTLENESS:** friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, sweetness and patience in our relationship with others.
- **SELFLESSNESS:** dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.
- **ZEAL:** a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

## **Our Cultural Beliefs:**

**SPIRITUAL GROWTH:** I grow in holiness through my prayer, Vincentian service and friendship.

**ONE SOCIETY:** I contribute to the success of our Vincentian work when I support ONE Society.

**SERVANT LEADERS:** I develop myself and others to become Servant Leaders.

**TODAY'S SOCIETY:** I strengthen the Society by embracing new and diverse ideas and people.

**EMBRACE ACCOUNTABILITY:** I build a strong Society by holding myself and others accountable to our Mission, the Essential Elements, and good Governance.

**INCLUSIVE PLANNING:** I foster ownership by involving membership in planning and decision making.

**ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE:** I advocate with the poor for just policies and practices at 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



**Bl. Frédéric Ozanam**  
(1813-1853)

Founder of the Society of St.  
Vincent de Paul 1833

**Beatified:** August 22, 1997

**Feast Day:** September 9



**Bl. 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 FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM

Frédéric 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, Frédéric Ozanam. As a university student at the Sorbonne, Frédéric joined 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 Frédéric and other Catholics were challenged to “Show us your

works!” This pierced the heart of Frédéric 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,” after its patron saint. Frédéric 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 Frédéric 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.

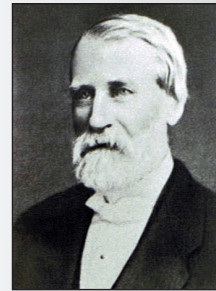
# The Founders



Jules Devaux  
(1811-1880)



Blessed Frédéric Ozanam  
(1813-1853)



Auguste Le Taillandier  
(1811-1886)



Paul Lamache  
(1810-1892)



Emmanuel Bailly  
(1794-1861)



François Lallier  
(1814-1886)



Félix Clavé  
(1811-1853)

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

“Frédéric 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. Frédéric 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 Frédéric 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 Frédéric “envisioned the establishment of a network of Charity and social justice encircling the world.” (Rule: Part 1, 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 Frédéric Ozanam, 1845**

## CHALLENGES

Through your leadership as a Council 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. Louise de Marillac have given us the mission and Blessed Frédéric 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

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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

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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, Frédéric’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. Frédéric, 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. Frédéric “envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and justice encircling the world.” (Rule: Part 1, 2.4) Indeed Vincent and Frédéric 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 Council 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 Council and the people whom they serve.



## V. VINCENTIAN 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)**

The formation and training of Presidents and members are the responsibility of Councils. Members seeking to help those who suffer must be so careful in their attitudes lest they offend. They must be conscious always of the dignity of people and conscious of the need to exercise justice and charity. We offer necessities in justice and luxuries in charity. Because these attitudes need to be learned, formation through seminars or meetings should be held at regular intervals so that members can learn and re learn them and the techniques of other members who are more experienced. **The Supply Catalog and Order form for all Vincentian materials** can be found on-line at [www.svdpusa.org](http://www.svdpusa.org), click on “Shop” which is located on the home page.

## Formation Resources

Vincentian Formation enables your Council to grow in spirituality, to renew and revitalize. You should always work closely with the Council or Regional Formation Chair, and obtain a copy of the latest Vincentian Formation Guidelines from the National Council website.

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](http://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
- **Vincentian Celebrations: Rituals and Ceremonies**  
Prayer services for Annual Commitments, Commissioning, Funerals, Liturgies for our Founders, and other resource information.
- **Rule**  
The Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Reading and sharing on the Rule is recommended at Conference meetings.
- **Manual**  
Fundamental information on the founders, history, spirituality and organization of the Society.
- **Member Handbook**  
Overview to introduce new members, and refresh current Members on essential aspects 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.
- **Governance: Council and Board**  
A manual describing the various aspects of governance for Councils and Board of Directors.
- **Governance Training**  
A DVD and Participants Manual covering necessary information on how to effectively and efficiently run a Council. Intended for all present and potential officers, board members, committee members and others.

## Ozanam Orientation

Membership in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is both a vocation and a ministry. It is a ministry not only to the poor and to those in need, but also to our own membership. Since our primary goal is growth in holiness, we should be striving constantly to help each other, to guide each other, to encourage each other in that growth. Therefore, it is imperative for all members to attend the Ozanam Orientation. The purpose of Ozanam Orientation is twofold. First, it is to introduce to new members **“who we are and what we are all about.”** Second, it is to re-acquaint existing members with our **“spirituality and heritage.”**

**All elements** of the National Ozanam Orientation Program are expected to be presented by the formators. **There are no optional items – no substitutions.** This is necessary in order to present a consistent message throughout the United States. Each Region and Council is expected to select and train people to be **Formators**. It is anticipated that two or three people should work together to present the **Ozanam Orientation**.



## VI. 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 located in a Catholic parish, 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 unites Conferences from the same city or county, or other appropriate geographical division. Council size varies greatly. District Councils represent a minimum of three and ideally a maximum of twelve Conferences in an (Arch)Diocese. If no (Arch) Diocesan Council exists, the District Council keeps the Society in relationship with the Bishop.

#### **(Arch)Diocesan Council**

An (Arch)Diocesan Council unites the District Councils within a (Arch)Diocese, providing liaison and communication between them and the National Council. The (Arch)Diocesan Council keeps the Society in relationship with the Bishop.

#### **National Council**

The National Council of the United States exercises jurisdiction over the Society throughout this country. The National Council approves the creation of (Arch)Diocesan and District Councils. The National Council President approves and requests their Institution from the Council General in Paris. The United States is divided into eight Regions.

#### **International Council**

The International Council animates and coordinates the activities of the Society throughout the world. Presidents of National Councils are ex-officio members of the International Council. The International Council General can institute new SVdP Councils and aggregate (affiliate) new Conferences.



# *SVdP Organizational Chart*

## INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL PARIS, FRANCE

*152 Countries—5 Continents—44,600 Conferences and 800,000 Members*

## NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES ST LOUIS, MISSOURI

*65,892 Active, 32,650 Associate*

*A total of nearly 100,000 members in 8 Regions throughout the U.S.*

## (ARCH)DIOCESAN COUNCILS

*54 (Arch)Diocesan Councils uniting and supporting the District Councils*

## DISTRICT COUNCILS

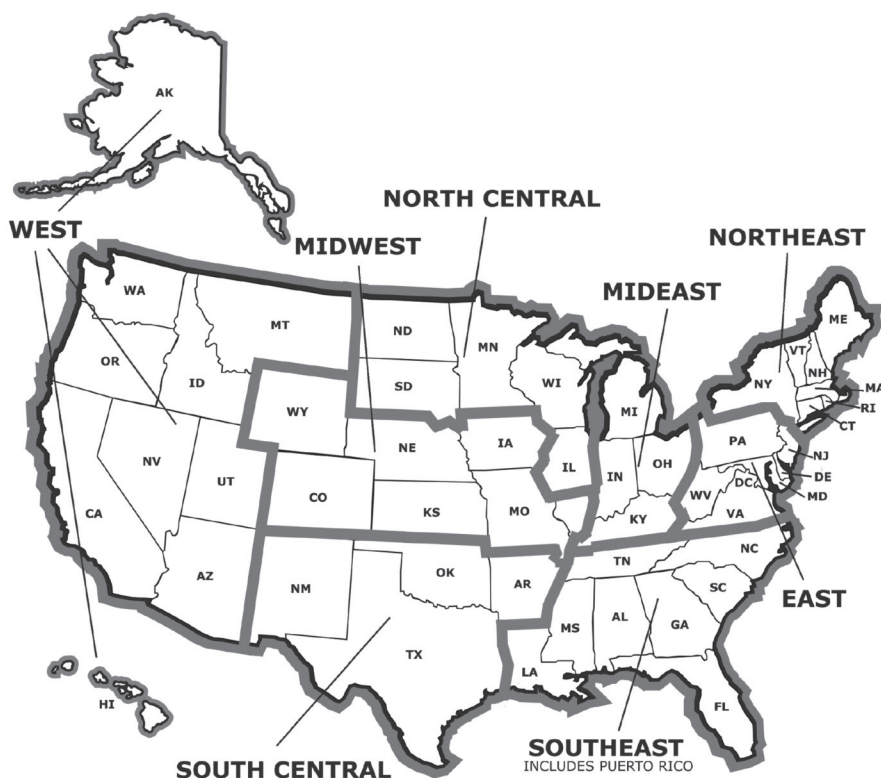
*500 District Councils uniting and supporting the Conferences*

## CONFERENCES

*4,428 Conferences, the basic unit of organization  
in Catholic Parishes, Universities and Special Works*



## 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  
Michigan<sup>1</sup>  
Ohio

### North Central

Illinois<sup>2</sup>  
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

<sup>1</sup>excluding Marquette Diocese

<sup>2</sup>excluding Belleville Springfield Dioceses



## VII. COUNCILS

### *Councils*

**Councils at appropriate levels are particularly called to:**

- create new Conferences,
- help existing Conferences to expand,
- promote Special Works,
- prepare training courses and encourage Vincentians to attend them,
- foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian Family,
- promote cooperation with other organizations and Institutions,
- develop friendship between members in the same area,
- provide communication to and from Conferences and higher Councils.

**In summary, to promote the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world.**

**(Rule: Part 1, 3.6)**

### DISTRICT COUNCILS

As the first Conference grew in numbers, division into smaller groups became necessary. The founders were determined, however, to maintain the original spirit of belonging and membership. As one means of achieving this unity, District Councils were formed. Under this arrangement, all Conferences in a given city or area were brought together through representation and delegate participation. Each Conference President was accepted as an ex-officio member of the area District Council. Meetings, at least monthly, were and are recommended.

Helping is a keyword in every Vincentian dictionary. It describes not only the day to day services of the Society but also relationships among members and within the SVdP organization. *Mutual helping* is the kind of rapport between Conferences and Councils that Council organization is intended to encourage.

Conferences give to the Council their experiences, their ideas, a willingness to assist other needy Conferences and a sharing of responsibility for whatever special works are undertaken by the Council. Conferences take from the Council the knowledge and inspiration of all participants. Because of these insights, they are helped to expand their Vincentian horizons and sense of worldwide responsibility.

# *The Seven Duties*

of an  
Effective and Responsible District Council President

- **1st Duty: COMMITMENT**

A District Council President must make a solemn **commitment** to:

- grow in understanding and living out the Vincentian charism.
- attend the regularly scheduled meetings of the (Arch)Diocesan and/or 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.
- make certain that Conference presidents serve no longer than two consecutive three-year terms before retiring so that new leadership might take over

- **2nd Duty: COMPREHENSION**

A District Council 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 Frédéric Ozanam, and study the role of Blessed Rosalie Rendu.

- **3rd Duty: COMMUNICATION**

A District Council President must **communicate** in order to:

- share information received from the National Office, the National Council Member (formerly known as Trustee), or the Regional Vice President about issues, decisions, and policies with Conferences.
- express in appropriate ways and through appropriate channels any concerns, issues and ideas important to your District Council and the Conferences under it to the National Office and the National Council Member.
- remain informed about National, Regional, District, and Local issues.

- **4th Duty: CULTIVATION**

A District Council President must provide **cultivation** through formation by

- developing members both new and old (through Ozanam Orientations, Spiritual Retreats, Serving in Hope Modules, etc.).
- finding training, and encouraging Spiritual Advisors (delegating duties here can help).
- developing new Conferences (delegating duties here can help).
- visiting existing Conferences to build bonds of friendship.
- developing special works if appropriate.
- along with advocacy, considering various systemic change programs and initiatives.
- working to implement the National Strategic plan.
- sharing Governance Training.

- **5th Duty: COLLABORATION**

A District Council President must **collaborate** with:

- Conferences and with other Councils (especially through approved Domestic and International Twinning arrangements).
- other members of the Vincentian Family.
- local pastors and the local bishop.
- other non-profit organizations, both secular and religious.
- Conferences to encourage close collaboration with pastors and to keep them informed about the work of the Society.

- **6th Duty: CHAIRPERSON**

As the **Chairperson**, the District Council President must:

- conduct regular, orderly meetings of the Council.
- delegate duties in a reasonable manner.
- make sure that all Conference Presidents are voting members of the Council Board (this may vary for Councils with separate or Advisory Boards).
- make appropriate appointments to the Council.
- facilitate and participate in discussion, helping to reach consensus, but cast one vote only in the case of a tie.

- **7th Duty: CONTRIBUTIONS**

A District Council President oversees **contributions** and financial matters and must protect the **credibility** of the Society by insisting on accountability to:

- ensure that solidarity contributions (where applicable) are paid in an appropriate and timely manner.
- assure that the all Conferences submit annual reports, providing a complete accounting of all actions and income.
- be certain that the following issues are addressed:

1. Has the District Council ensured that Conferences have tax exempt status and that this tax exempt status is maintained?
2. Has the District Council or each Conference complied with requirements of the IRS that organizations with annual receipts of \$50,000 or less must file a 990-N, and those with receipts under \$200,000 and assets under \$500,000 must file a 990-EZ? Others with receipts and assets exceeding these limits must file an IRS Form 990. Be alert that IRS guidelines can and do change. Always check for the current ones.
3. Does the District Council and each Conference have its own, or an appropriately assigned, EIN number needed for bank accounts.
4. Has the District Council explored the need for insurance coverage?
5. Does the District Council and each Conference conduct appropriate and timely audits or financial reviews?
6. Is the District Council incorporated? Should it be?
7. Are there appropriate Bylaws? (The National Council Office has approved Bylaws that can easily be modified.)

### **Unity**

District Councils serve both to preserve the individuality of each Conference and to combine all in a strong union. Through the efforts of a Council it is possible to multiply the number of Conferences, increase the number of poor visited, increase funds collected and the good accomplished. The District Council promotes unity of direction, while maintaining the autonomy and freedom of its affiliate Conferences. The Council is a protection against the dangers of isolation, of fighting the battle alone. It provides support.

The District Council is so very important. It can and ought to be a powerful catalyst for SVdP enthusiasm, charitable action and Christian friendship. The Society's history makes it clear that, although the core of Vincentian effort is person to person on the Conference level, this spirit of charity needs to be sustained by the opportunity of meeting with one's brothers and sisters from other areas.

### **Responsibilities**

Presidents of District Councils coordinate Conferences, and so they carry an important responsibility in the Society. They must:

- Conduct meetings.
- Visit Conferences.
- Ensure Conferences have properly elected and installed Presidents.
- Collaborate with other organizations.
- Oversee special works, or ensure that there is an appropriate board and/or paid staff who can do so.
- Encourage twinning and projects.
- Make the work of the Society known.
- Be an effective unit in the National and (Arch)Diocesan Councils.

### **Communication**

Letting everyone know what is going on is an important task. It is the responsibility of the District Council to keep the Conference Presidents advised of SVdP notices and activities. The District Council prepares special and annual reports of Vincentian works. As a responsible community organization, the District Council gives an accounting of its stewardship to the Church, the Community, and, where the structure exists, to its (Arch)Diocesan Council.

### Some Committees and Special Works

Through committees, District Councils help maintain Vincentian mission and solidarity. They nurture the religious quality and practices of the Vincentian spirit; they seek to extend SVdP membership and charitable activities. District and (Arch)Diocesan Councils promote, organize and direct projects having community wide aspects. Some committees may include:

- **Extension** is a paramount and continuing responsibility. It includes the orientation and training of new Conferences and new Conference members. The Society must actively seek to recruit and retain members without regard to race, creed (with the exception of active members), color, gender, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, veteran status, national origin, age or physical handicap.
- **Formation** requires periodic but regular sponsorship of the Ozanam Orientation, workshops and retreats through which members can grow in holiness and become knowledgeable about ways of helping people and community resources.
- **Youth Work** includes efforts to recruit young people into the Society and to meet their special needs.
- **Networking** maintains contacts with public and other private social welfare groups.
- **Domestic and Overseas Twinning** establishes partnership ties between affluent and needy Conferences through the National Council.
- **Stores Committee** helps to define changes in policies and procedures for SVdP facilities for the distribution of contributed clothing and household goods.
- **SVDP Planning** entails study of community challenges relating to charity and justice issues and of the Society's role in addressing these "unmet" needs.

## (Arch)Diocesan Councils

The (Arch)Diocesan Councils have diocesan wide responsibility. Their work is similar to that of District Councils but there are differences. District Councils relate, as a rule, to Conferences in a more restricted geographical area, such as a city, or city district, or county. (Arch)Diocesan Councils, on the other hand, provide coverage for an entire diocese, including all cities and counties within that Diocese. There is another difference. District Councils minister to Conferences. (Arch) Diocesan Councils serve District Councils and some very Isolated Conferences within the diocese and, only indirectly, the Conferences that are already associated with their District Councils.

Because SVdP organizational life tends to be dynamic rather than highly formalized, the functioning of (Arch)Diocesan Councils has not been uniform throughout the United States. In dioceses where the Vincentian spirit is in full bloom and District Councils have progressively developed, the major task of the (Arch)Diocesan Council may be to serve as a forum for the regular exchange of ideas and progress reports. In such cases, quarterly meetings of those who constitute the (Arch)Diocesan Council may suffice. At least one general meeting annually for the total diocesan membership is ordinarily scheduled. In other dioceses, the (Arch)Diocesan Council may be given major responsibility for special works and projects, particularly when these involve considerable staffing and qualified management.



## Responsibilities

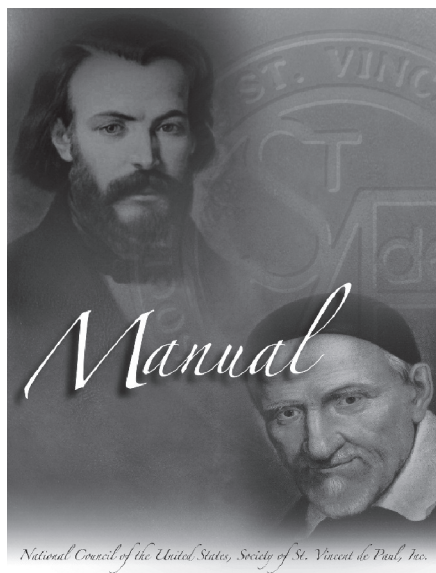
(Arch)Diocesan Councils have responsibilities in such SVdP endeavors and programs as the following:

- They animate and coordinate the activities of the District Councils in their diocese.
- They encourage initiatives and strive to bring about the establishment of Councils, Conferences and new works. They cooperate with District Councils in this sphere of activity.
- They provide or help arrange formation and training sessions for District Council Presidents and officers.
- They develop, or assist in developing, a diocesan wide disaster preparedness plan in accord with the National Council Disaster Plan.
- They review and analyze the regular and annual reports of affiliated District Councils.
- They represent the Society before the local Bishop and in diocesan planning bodies.
- They constitute a principal point of contact between the SVdP National Council and the Society in any particular diocese.
- They publish, if possible, monthly bulletins and distribute these among members and friends of the Society.

**(This is not meant as an inclusive list.)**

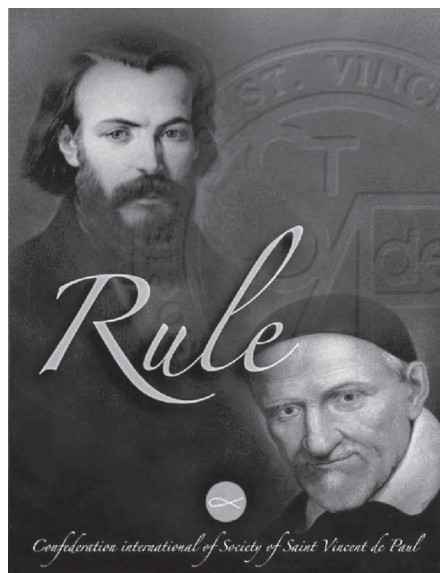
## Rule

St. Vincent said, “Love your Rule and keep them as the road which God intends to lead you to Himself.” Therefore, the Rule is the primary document for the heart and soul of the Society. The latest Rule approved by the International Council, together with the U.S. Statutes, was published by the National Office in 2018.



## Manual

Further important information may be obtained in the Manual, which is also available from the National Office.







## VIII. ARCH(DIOCESAN) AND DISTRICT COUNCIL GUIDELINES

### *Conference and Council Annual Review*

Periodically, but not less frequently than once every three years, each Conference and Council must evaluate their service to the members and the poor, the effectiveness of their special works and all activities, 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)

Each Council and Conference must, at all times, maintain accurate records and submit an annual report to the next higher Council on forms provided by the National Office.

(Rule: Part 3, Statute 23)

### **The (Arch)Diocesan/District Council President**

The President, as a servant leader, is the first among equals and, in the spirit of the Rule, must be the most humble of all. The President must be dynamic and patient, gentle and firm, have the spirit of youth, the wisdom of age, the capacity to lead, and implement the decisions of the Council. Clearly, the President must be a person of prayer, for who could possibly be all this without Divine guidance? The President's leadership must embrace the principles of subsidiarity and democracy.

The strength of the President lies in their example of living the Vincentian spirit and vocation. The effectiveness of a Council depends on the leadership of its President who should occasionally ask the following:

- Are the poor being found?
- Are they being effectively helped?
- Do the Conferences have sufficient members?
- Do members attend the meetings regularly?
- Are Conferences constantly seeking new members who are diverse in race, ethnicity, age, and gender?
- Is the Spiritual Advisor involved?
- Can the Conferences see beyond local needs?
- Is there collaboration with other organizations?
- Is the work of the Conferences known to others?

The Presidents should be prepared to confront many responsibilities and demands during the three to six years of their term in office. It is suggested that Council Presidents give first priority to Council duties after those of their family and livelihood.

## The Board

A Council must have one **Vice President**, but may need two. The first task of a newly-elected President is to look for a possible successor. In addition to replacing the President when he/she is absent, a Council Vice President should visit Conferences when asked and specialize in some aspect of Council activities; e.g., recruitment, training, special works, collaboration with other organizations; depending on his/her talent and interest. A Secretary is needed to record the minutes of meetings, is responsible for correspondence, arranging meetings and other clerical work. A Treasurer is needed to maintain an up to date record of Council finances, and is responsible for completing the year-end report.

## Installation of the President and Officers

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

## Meetings

One of the important tasks of a President is to conduct meetings. Anyone can conduct a meeting, but not everyone can conduct a good meeting, and a good chair draws people to his/her meeting while a poor one repels them. St. Vincent de Paul members, being committed to their vocation, attend meetings better than most; so, if members do not attend meetings they must be dull or ineffective meetings.

A good meeting is:

- **Interesting:** It must flow from topic to topic, with adequate time to discuss problems, without it becoming a bore. Preparation is a must.
- **Spiritual:** Prayer, reflection and sharing are important for the spiritual growth of the members. Spiritual Formation deepens the understanding of the Rule and helps the members grow in holiness.
- **Decisive:** Decision-making is the basis of most effective meetings. We are a collegial Society that is a body of equals, and members must feel that they make the decisions and not simply confirm the President's opinion. Whenever possible, all should be invited to express their view, especially the quiet ones. Decisions are often reached by consensus and not by voting. If contention arises, a decision should not be forced. The matter should be deferred for further prayer and reflection and raised at a later meeting.

- **Fraternal:** The most important characteristic of a Vincentian meeting is the fraternal spirit, for without that the meeting is a sham. The President sets the tone by his/her obvious concern for all the members. Meetings are the most effective form of communication in the Society structure. Councils should time their meetings to conform with other Councils at different levels so that communication flows up and down as well as across. Non attendance breaks this chain.
- **Agenda for District and (Arch)Diocesan Council Meetings:**
  - Opening Prayers and Spiritual Reading
  - Minutes of previous meeting
  - Treasurer's Report
  - Welcome to new members
  - Announcements of interest
  - Correspondence summarized if necessary
  - Reports by Conferences, District Councils if a (Arch)Diocesan meeting, and Special Works (These are not given at every meeting, but staggered over the year.) or
  - Discussion on a new work
  - General Business (old and new)
  - Reflection by Spiritual Advisor
  - Closing Prayers
- **Agenda for District and (Arch)Diocesan Festival Meetings:**
  - Mass
  - Opening Prayers and Welcome
  - Report by Council President, membership, other Society works, finance, etc.
  - Report on Special Work, or Formation Talk by member, or
  - Guest Speaker on Social Welfare or appropriate topic
  - Spiritual Reflection by Bishop or Spiritual Advisor
  - Closing Prayers

## Visitations

A President visits Conferences/Councils. In visiting, the President goes both to teach and to learn, to be a friend rather than a superior, to observe the agenda and waits to be invited to speak. Appreciating that a Conference/Council is almost autonomous, except in adherence to the Rule and the Bylaws, the visiting President should combine suggestions with support so the fraternal spirit of the association is not damaged. The President should be conscious that there is more than one way of doing things, and perhaps his/her way is not always the best.

## Collaboration

The SVdP Rule requires that Councils cooperate with other organizations. Cooperation should not be restricted to information, but include activity, too. Vincentian Family collaboration is greatly encouraged.

## Correspondence

Communication between Conferences and Councils is best made by personal contact. Even the telephone is second best. However, there are many times when the written word must be used. As the Conference forms part of the Council team, it can only be an effective team member if it has knowledge of the team's goals and problems. Contact must be regular, informative and encouraging. If at all possible, Council Presidents should communicate monthly, mentioning points which arose at the last Council meeting, matters for discussion at the next meeting, items of general interest and, of course, the names of deceased members and benefactors.

Isolated Conferences working alone may be without regular meeting contact. Such Conferences especially should communicate with the National Council regularly, seeking guidance on problems, giving annual reports of activity and on matters of finance.

## Records

Effective administration requires easy and quick reference to what has gone before, and this means records. A Conference President needs a minute book with provision for details of families adopted, roll call and general items of information found helpful. A Council President needs this and some files for specific subjects. Suggested files include spiritual formation or training information, one for each special work and one for each Conference or Council attached to the Council. These confidential records are best kept in secure locked files. Consult the Manual of the Society for advice on record retention.

## Publicity

It is necessary to publicize the works of the Society for the following reasons:

- those who need help learn where to find it;
- those who wish to join learn where to find it;
- those who wish to help learn how; and
- so that our works will bear witness to Christ.

Annual reports must be compiled by Councils for the information of the National Council and ultimately the International Council General. Regional, Diocesan and District Councils should publish annual reports so that the Church, civil authorities, the community and our benefactors know what has been achieved.

Newspapers, local and Catholic, should be informed of Society events which are taking or have taken place in the area. Radio and TV are interested in news, and they will often help with an appeal for a special project or objective. "Open" days for special works are a worth while publicity venture, whether or not funds are required. Include social media when appropriate.

Signs and the National logo on Society buildings should identify the Society with the work, even if the name of the work does not.

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.

## Foreign Twinning

Conference twinning with foreign Conferences should be encouraged, and it would be ideal if every American Conference had an overseas twin. The spiritual aspect of overseas relief should not be forgotten. Councils must approve the twinning of their Conferences and guarantee the financial commitment. Conferences are expected to raise their own twinning money by church collection, social function, Conference funds, etc., and Councils should encourage them to do so. Council twinning assists overseas Councils in their administration. It involves an exchange of ideas, literature, etc., and a variable financial commitment. All foreign twinning is coordinated through the National Council.

## Advocacy

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 Frédéric 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.

## Special Works

Councils are responsible for the management of special works, and special work chairpersons are appointed by Council Presidents after consultation with the Council. Most special works are run by paid staff, who are hired by an advisory board. Standard Bylaws typically have the Council President appoint members of advisory board with approval of the Council. Special works are developed to satisfy needs that arise in the Council area. Council Presidents should regularly consider the services provided in their area with the aim of proposing new special works to their Council should the need be there. Existing special works include, but are not limited to:

- Stores for clothing, furniture, etc.
- Food Pantries and meal service
- Specialized Facilities for Alcoholics
- Criminal Justice Ministries
- Summer camps
- Sheltered work centers
- Homes for aged
- Temporary shelters and housing programs
- Free Pharmacies

Contracts to buy property or build should be carefully drawn up in accord with legal requirements and all pertinent building statutes and should have the approval of the District and (Arch)Diocesan Council Boards. If you intend to own property or have paid staff, your Council should institute an Advisory Board of professionals with appropriate and up-to-date skills to oversee these works. This board may be up to 50% non-Vincentians.

## Finance

A Council needs a treasurer, a bank account and funds to work with. Its income is derived from dues from Conferences or Councils, income from special works, donations, collections at festival meetings and other money raising activities. Where there is a store or center within a Council area, it is usual for it to be overseen by a committee representing and reporting to that Council. Income resulting from the work should be transferred to the Council on a regular basis. Council expenses include formation and training, postage, stationery, traveling expenses of Council officers, grants to needy Conferences, Councils and special works, expenses of meetings, twinning payments, central office rent and staff services.

## Formation and Training

The National Office sponsors a leadership formation program for current and emerging Vincentian leaders called **“Invitation for Renewal.”** The program is intended to help the Society return to its roots to better understand its mission and values, and to develop and strengthen leaders to move the Society forward in ways that are true to both our spiritual foundation and the needs of those who are poor today. The program is conducted twice a year in St. Louis, and the National Council and/or the Local Council has scholarships available.

## Spiritual Advisor

As a Catholic organization, the Society is spiritually-based, and our Rule calls for the participation of a Spiritual Advisor. The spirituality of members is an important responsibility of the President. Therefore, all Conferences and Councils need Spiritual Advisors who need to have the formation necessary to understand their role and should be supported in fulfilling it.

Councils encourage the spiritual life of their members by mentoring them in use of the formation materials produced by the National Office. Councils observe the patronal feasts of the Society with liturgy on a day close to it that is convenient for the members. They also arrange retreat days for spiritual growth and formation.

The Council Spiritual Advisor has the following responsibilities:

- Be the direct liaison and advocate on spiritual matters with the bishop
- Assist the Council President to communicate the value, works and needs of the Society to the local Diocesan administration and parish communities
- With Council and Conference members, seek ways in which the Society’s ministry and mission have a complementary role in relationship to Diocesan programs and social services
- Attend, when and where possible, regional and national meetings and participate actively in the spiritual components of these meetings
- Understand and encourage the development of Vincentian spirituality in him/herself and in the members of the Council.

In collaboration with the Spirituality/Formation/Training Committee, the Council Spiritual Advisor:

- Assures that Spiritual Advisors have the qualities necessary and appropriate to their role.
- Organizes formation/training sessions and materials for Conference Spiritual Advisors
- Frames the spiritual portion of Society gatherings. This will necessitate attendance and participation at these gatherings
- Guides Conference Spiritual Advisors on matters of Vincentian spirituality
- Supervises the spiritual growth and development of the Conferences
- Arranges for retreats, Vincentian Celebrations and Vincentian liturgical opportunities for Ozanam Sunday, the feast of Blessed Frédéric on September 9th and the feast of St. Vincent de Paul on September 27.

### **Council Executive Director**

Many Councils hire an Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who serves as the primary resource to the Council Board of Directors, participating as a partner with the elected and appointed Council leadership in the promotion, development, and support of the Society. As a specialized ministry within the Society, this position provides stability, consistency, and professional administrative services to the Council and its affiliated Conferences.

The Executive Director is under the direction of the President of the Council, who, after consultation with the Council's Board of Directors, fills and terminates this position. The Board of Directors determines the duties and responsibilities of the Executive Director based on the needs of the Council. The Executive Director consults with the Board President regarding all St. Vincent de Paul operations and acts as a consultant to Council officers, Conference Presidents and Society members. The Executive Director keeps the Board informed of the state of the Council and its ministries, the needs of the community, and welfare trends.

This is a key position requiring full-time commitment, loyalty to and knowledge of the mission and values of the Society, together with professional skills. The Executive Director is responsible for the fiscal and operational management of the Council as it relates to local policy and the Rule of the Society.

Further information about this position may be obtained from the National Office.





## IX. NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER

### *Subsidiarity and Freedom of Action*

**The Society embraces the Principle of Subsidiarity as its basic standard of operation. Decisions are made as close as possible to the area of activity to ensure that the local environment and circumstances (cultural, social, political, etc.) are taken into consideration.**

**(Rule: Part I, 3.9)**

The (Arch)Diocesan Council President assumes the additional role of service as a National Council Member of the United States. This National Council position is accepted with the humility of Frédéric, the strength of Vincent and the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ for His Poor.

The Council of the United States was instituted by the International Council General on November 21, 1915 with authority over all of the Society in the United States of America. The United States Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul states that “the National Council of the United States represents the Society in this country, animating and coordinating its various activities and assisting the Councils attached to it.” (Manual p.42) It is fully empowered to deal with the religious and civil authorities of the country.

### **Governance and Leadership**

The National Council is directed by a President, the National Board and the National Council Members who ensure that the Rule and the basic principles and policies of the Society are respected and carried out. The corporate Bylaws of the Council of the United States requires an annual meeting of its National Council Members and makes provision also for a Midyear meeting of this governing body. National Council Members of the United States have the honor, privilege and, most importantly, the obligation to advance the Mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and to assist its National President in providing the governance and leadership necessary for its operation.

National Council Members have the added responsibility of assisting their brother and sister members of the Society to “grow spirituality” by their person-to-person service to the needy and suffering, in the traditions of our Founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, our patron, St. Vincent de Paul, and our Patroness, Mary, Our Mother Immaculate.

- The National President (elected by the general membership).
- The duly-elected and currently serving President of the highest level Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in each (Arch)Diocese. If there are several Councils of the Society of equal level in any (Arch)Diocese, then the President of the first Instituted Council among these is qualified as the National Council Member (Resolution, Boston, 1996).
- Former National Presidents.

# *The Seven Duties*

## of an Effective and Responsible National Council Member

### • 1st Duty: COMMITMENT

A National Council Member must make a solemn **commitment** to:

- grow in understanding and living out the Vincentian charism.
- ensure that solidarity contributions are paid in a timely manner.
- attend the regularly scheduled meetings of the National Council and the Region.
- be adequately prepared to vote on issues and policies that will be discussed.
- serve on a National Committee, if asked to do so.
- 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 National Council Member 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.
- be familiar with the life and spiritual legacy of our Patron, St. Vincent de Paul, and of our Founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

- **3rd Duty: COMMUNICATION**

A National Council Member must **communicate** in order to:

- share information about issues, decisions, and policies with Councils and Conferences.
- express in appropriate ways and through appropriate channels any concerns, issues, and ideas important to the Council and its Conferences.
- remain informed about national, regional, district, and local issues.
- be prepared for public relations issues.

- **4th Duty: CULTIVATION**

A National Council Member must provide **cultivation** through formation by

- developing members both new and old (through Ozanam Orientations, Spiritual Retreats, Serving in Hope Modules, etc.).
- finding, training, and encouraging Spiritual Advisors (delegating duties here can help).
- visiting existing Conferences to strengthen bonds of friendship.
- encouraging the formation of a Voice of the Poor committee and advocacy.
- working to implement the National Strategic plan.
- sharing Governance training.

- **5th Duty: COLLABORATION**

A National Council Member must **collaborate** with:

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

- **6th Duty: CHAIRPERSON**

Every National Council Member is also a Council President and as such will be the **Chairperson** of meetings that will discuss and share National Council matters at home. The Nation Council memeber should then always be prepared to:

- conduct regular, orderly meetings of the Council.
- delegate duties in a reasonable manner.
- make sure that all Conference Presidents or District Council Presidents are are voting members of the Council Board.
- make appropriate appointments to the Council.
- facilitate and participate in discussion, helping to reach consensus, and casting one vote only in the case of a tie.
- discuss and make plans to implement any policies or decisions made by the National Council.

## • 7th Duty: CONTRIBUTIONS

A National Council Member oversees the **contributions** and financial matters and must protect the **credibility** of the Society by insisting on accountability to:

- ensure that solidarity contributions are paid in an appropriate and timely manner.
- assure that all Councils and Conferences submit annual reports, providing a complete accounting of all actions and income.
- be certain that the following issues are addressed:
  1. Has the National Council Member ensured that all Conferences and/or Councils have tax exempt status and that this tax exempt status is maintained?
  2. Has the District Council and each Conference complied with requirements of the IRS that organizations with annual receipts of \$50,000 or less must file a 990-N, and those with receipts under \$200,000 and assets under \$500,000 must file a 990-EZ? Others with receipts and assets exceeding these limits must file a Form 990.
  3. Does each Council or Conference have its own, or an appropriately assigned, EIN number needed for bank accounts?
  4. Has each Council or Conference explored the need for insurance coverage?
  5. Does each Council or Conference conduct appropriate and timely audits?
  6. Is the Council incorporated?
  7. Are there appropriate Bylaws and have they been regularly reviewed (usually every three years)?

## Responsibilities

- **National:** Each National Council Member is expected to attend the National Council of the United States Annual Meetings. The Member is expected to register by submitting the Registration Form and Credential Form which are sent in advance of the National Meetings. He/she is also expected to read, study and be prepared to vote on issues and policies in the best interests of the Society.

In attending the National Council Meetings, the Member represents his/her Council and has the responsibility to represent other District Councils in the Diocese where there is no (Arch) Diocesan Council, and should express issues and concerns of the local Council(s).

Although attendance at the business meeting of the National Meetings takes priority over all other meetings at the National Meeting, National Council Members may also be asked to attend and serve on National Committees. These Committees meet regularly during the National Council Meetings but do not conflict with the National Business Meeting.

Following each National Meeting and on an ongoing basis throughout the year, the Member should report to Vincentians in his/her Council, and to any other District Councils in the Diocese, relevant National Council issues, decisions and policies. The Member is the key link in the communication process of keeping the first-line Vincentian informed and a participant in the work of the Society nationwide.

- **Regional:** The National Council Member is expected to attend Regional Meetings also on an annual basis and to serve on Regional Committees for the good of the Society. Members should maintain close contact with and provide support to the Regional Vice President on a regular basis.
- **District Council:** The National Council Member should attend the Council meetings and functions of District Councils within his/her jurisdiction as often as possible. This will assure that he/she is informed and aware of activities and issues within the (Arch)Diocese and that the Council can lend support as appropriate. The National Council Member should also urge District Council Presidents to visit the Conferences in their District Council to support, educate, inform, and offer suggestions to Vincentians and to stress the importance of Aggregation of Conferences.
- **Local:** The National Council Member must:
  - understand the spirituality of the Society, and have a commitment to Vincentian Formation.
  - have a working knowledge for application of the Society's Rule at all levels: National, (Arch)Diocesan, District and for Conferences.
  - know the basic and essential structure, operations and functions of each Society unit.
  - have a well developed plan for Conferences to recruit new members, and/or District Councils to develop new Conferences and to extend the Society within the Diocesan area.
  - establish an active plan to assist the Conferences and/or District Councils to form Youth Conferences with their eventual integration into the local Conferences and/or District Councils and consider including youth members on the Board.
  - review the Council's Bylaws to assure they are in accordance with the Society's Rule and Bylaws; send a copy to the National Council to ensure Rule adherence and for not-forprofit status. Be sure your Council is tax exempt either through your own 501(c)(3) IRS Status or by inclusion with the National SVdP Group Exemption.
  - assure your Council has adequate insurance coverage for its operations (liability, property, auto/truck, etc.). There is a limited group insurance program available through the National Office for small Councils and Isolated Conferences without property. For information contact the National Office.
  - make use of the Council Self-Evaluation /Accountability Questionnaire annually which is distributed by the National Council.
- **Council Meetings:** The National Council Member is the convener of Council meetings. He/she should set the schedule of meetings for the Council, establish agendas and ensure that they are mailed out in advance. With the agenda, minutes of the previous meeting and pertinent materials related to the agenda should also be sent.

- **Vincentian Spirituality and Formation:** During the course of a year, at selected intervals, the National Council Members should ensure that the Ozanam Orientation and Spiritual Retreats are scheduled for all Vincentians. Vincentians need to be introduced to and strengthened in the concept of Vincentian spirituality, the Rule of the Society and the many ways to assist the Poor.
- **Committee Chairs:** The National Council Member should appoint committee chairs and urge that committees function on an ongoing basis. At a minimum the Council should have the following standing committees: Vincentian Formation and Spirituality, Disaster, Special Works (Stores, etc.), Voice of the Poor and Development.
- **Publicity:** In a modest but straight forward manner, the work of the Society within the (Arch)Diocese should be known to the greater community. This is essential for community support and to encourage prospective Vincentians to join the Society. Good vehicles of a public information program include newspaper articles, radio, television and parish bulletins. To foster effective public information it is suggested the National Council Member appoint a standing public information or communication committee. Include social media when appropriate.
- **Contact with the Bishop and other (Arch)Diocesan Officials:** The National Council Member should send a letter with a copy of the Council's Annual Report to the Bishop. Also, the Bishop, church officials and pastors should be kept aware of the Society's activities and issues as a matter of courtesy and to maintain their support.
- **Twinning:** All Vincentians should shun parochialism and be willing to reach out to the Poor beyond the Conference or Council boundaries as resources permit. In this regard, the National Council Member has the responsibility of promoting Twinning within the Council from Conference to Conference, Council to Council within the Region, throughout the United States from Council to Council, and, throughout the world, from local Conference to local Conference.
- **Collaboration:** In the spirit of cooperation, the National Council Member should maintain contact with other charitable organizations in the (Arch)Diocesan community. There are many ways in which organizations can assist each other in the common goal of helping the poor without sharing financial resources. Likewise, in these days of limited resources, duplication of services in a community is a waste of resources. Vincentians should not be competing with other organizations in service to the poor.



- **Communication:** All Vincentians in the (Arch)Diocese should be kept informed by the National Council Member about activities and issues within the Council, throughout the United States, and the International Council. The National Council Member must take steps to ensure that each Vincentian receives Frédéric's E-Gazette by updating the member's contact information in the database at the National Council of the United States, as well as any other National and Regional newsletters. Likewise, the National Council Member must ensure that someone continues a local newsletter or letter from the National Council Member periodically.
- **Legal Requirements:** The filing of local, state and federal documents by each (Arch)Diocesan Council is the responsibility of the National Council Member. Obviously, this function can be delegated to the Treasurer of the Council or the Executive Director as appropriate.

The National Council Member should also ensure that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council Annual Report be completed and filed with the National Council on an annual basis by March 1. Likewise, the Solidarity Contributions are due to the National Council as soon as possible after the start of the fiscal year, October 1. The National Council coordinates the work of the Society nationwide and maintains the unity of the Society.

- **Special Works:** In order to ensure financial viability and good business practice, the National Council Member must oversee all Special Works of the Council. The actual day-to-day activities should be delegated to a Special Works Committee which must report at every Council meeting. Minutes of the Special Works Committees and their financial statements should be disseminated to the National Council Member, as well as to all Council Board members on a monthly basis.
- **Good Governance:** The National Council Member ensures that the Council is structured in compliance with the Rule, has Bylaws that are reviewed on a regular basis, adopts Governance Process Documents if required, has a Conflict of Interest Policy, provides insurance, and follows good governance principles.

As a National Council Member you have the honor and the obligation to advance the Mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. If your Council has a professional business like operation, tempered with Vincentian spirituality, flexibility, sensitivity, compassion and love for your sister and brother Society members, you will have the organizational support of the Society to serve the Poor in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and Bl. Frédéric Ozanam.



## X. VISIONING AND PLANNING

### *The Strategic Plan*

**The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.**

**(Rule: Part 1, 7.1)**

The Society is called to look to the future with ways and means not only to sustain those in poverty but to search and implement plans to eliminate poverty. Many feel it is impossible when they recall Jesus' words: "The poor will always be with you." This statement is true because of the human state. However, Jesus strived his entire life to change this vision of life to a new paradigm of faith, hope and love, and anyone who followed this way would have life to the full.

St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam shared these possibilities creating organizations and structures to guide this vision. Thus was born the Vincentian Family and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Today the Society in the United States has created a Mission Statement and Vision to achieve Jesus' aspiration of humanity. We have placed our plans and actions in the hands of Divine Providence to lead our way.

St. Vincent de Paul understood achieving visions and ideals require that they must be clearly defined, thoroughly planned and clearly achievable for those working in the "vineyard." Today we call this process strategic visions and plans to achieve the vision.

#### **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.

The Strategic Plan is continually renewed 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.

In 2021, the National Council, under President Ralph Middlecamp, updated the strategic plan as follows

**Focus Area 1: Expand and strengthen our network of friends**

- 1-1 Structure Conferences for a future which attracts diverse members
- 1-2 Strengthen organizational capacity at Council and Conference levels

**Focus Area II: Encourage and support Vincentians on their spiritual journey**

- 2-1 Foster a greater sense of membership in the Society as a vocation
- 2-2 Identify and develop more expert formators
- 2-3 Increase accessibility and opportunities for Vincentian Spiritual Formation

**Focus Area III: Advocate and work towards a more just world**

- 3-1 Develop programs to educate Vincentians regarding Catholic Social Teaching
- 3-2 Grow VOP Committees in every District Council
- 3-3 Educate and advocate for issues that directly impact those we serve starting with more affordable housing

**Focus Area IV: Promote deeper and more meaningful relationships with those we serve**

- 4-1 Open-our hearts to a deeper understanding of the challenges of poverty
- 4-2 Provide a framework for a reimagined home visit, including follow-up, mentoring, and collaboration

**Focus Area V: Develop, improve, and expand services**

- 5-1 Initiate and share a National Process to promote model programs that can be replicated by member Councils
- 5-2 Strengthen local retail operations and expand number of stores nationally
- 5-3 Strengthen and support Councils in providing services to neighbors in need
- 5-4 Promote efforts to fulfill unmet community needs through collaboration and the talents of our members



## 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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Maryland Heights, MO 63043 3706  
Telephone: (314) 576 3993  
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E mail: [info@svdpusa.org](mailto:info@svdpusa.org)  
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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 Chief Executive Officer.

### **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; and 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**

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.
- Council Presidents can give Conference Presidents access to enter annual reports online. Conference reports are entered individually and then consolidated at the District and Council level.
- The Web application will consolidate the conference reports at the District and Council levels. Council or District Presidents will verify and finalize consolidated reports.

Please Note: It is the Diocesan Council President's responsibility to see, at a minimum, that the 501c3 status and Leadership roles for the Council are kept up to date in the National DB, and that District Councils and Conferences do the same. Without that, National cannot send focused information to people in different roles.





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