



SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
ARCHDIOCESAN COUNCIL OF ST. LOUIS

... NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS ...

For Conference Presidents: Selections from the Rule and Manual

Core Beliefs of the Society:

“The Essential Elements of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are Spirituality, Friendship and Service.” (National Statute 1)

“The vocation of the Society’s members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.” (Rule 1.2)

“The Vincentian vocation affects all aspects of members’ daily lives, making them more sensitive and caring in their family, work and leisure activities. Vincentians are available for work in the Conferences only after fulfilling the family and professional duties.” (Rule 2.6)

“The Rule unites all Vincentians throughout the world. It mandates the formation of its members and officers, in order to increase their knowledge of the Society, deepen their spirituality, and help them improve their service to the poor.” (Manual 2.1)

The five essential virtues: simplicity, humility, gentleness, selflessness, and zeal (Rule 2.5.1)

Spirituality:

“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul calls its members to holiness; such was the intent of its founders in 1833 and such is its intent today.” (Manual 3.1)

“Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity.” (Rule 2.2)

“The Society has been Catholic from its origins. It remains an international Catholic voluntary organization of lay people, men and women.” (Rule 1.1)

“Members of the Society are distinguished by loyalty to their Christian faith and to the discipline of Catholic life. Vincentians are faithful to the Church and to its leadership.” (Manual 3.1)

“The Society’s special ministry of aid to the needy should be seen in the broader context of the Church’s saving mission and understood as part of it.” (Manual 2.1)

Officers:

“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)” (National Statute 11)

“Following Christ’s example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavor to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charism of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.” (Rule 3.11)

“The term of office of a Conference, District or (Arch)Diocesan Council President is three years, once renewable; for Youth Conferences the term is one year, once renewable. Once a President has served for two consecutive three-year terms, that person will not be eligible for re-election as President until a three-year term has elapsed under a different President.” (National Statute 12)

“Each Conference or Council should have at least a Vice President who exercises all the functions of the President when the latter is absent, a Secretary and a Treasurer, all of whom are appointed by the President after consultation with the members. The President may appoint other officers.” (National Statute 12)

“The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The President, Vice-President and Spiritual Adviser should, therefore, be Roman Catholic.” (Rule 6.5)

“In no event should any one person hold more than one officer position in the same Conference or Council at the same time.” (National Statute 12)

“Because the primary purpose of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to increase the holiness of its members, the role of Spiritual Advisor is essential to its life and mission.” (Manual 2.5)

“The president of the Conference, in consultation with the pastor, appoints the Conference Spiritual Advisor. That person should be dedicated to his or her spiritual life and should understand, or be willing to learn, the meaning and essential features of Vincentian Spirituality. The Conference president may appoint an Associate Spiritual Advisor as necessary.” (Manual 2.5)

Members:

“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States has two types of membership: Active Members and Associate Members. Active means Full membership.” (National Statute 3)

Active Members: participate regularly in the prayer life, meetings, and charitable activities through personal contact with the poor of the Vincentian Conference or Council into which they have been received; accept the Rule and Statutes of the Society; belong to the Catholic Church; may hold office and vote. (National Statute 3)

Associate Members: may or may not belong to the Catholic Church and may or may not attend Conference meetings or engage in the works of the Society on a regular basis. (National Statute 3)

“The commissioning of new members of the Society should take place at an appropriate time and occasion after they have gained experience in the Society.” (National Statute 4)

“All members shall annually renew their promise of service to the members and to the poor, thereby deepening the spiritual dimension of their vocation.” (National Statute 4)

“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 3.12)

Conference Meetings:

“Conference meetings are privileged occasions during which members manifest Christ’s love to one another and experience his healing presence.” (Manual 2.1)

“The Conferences meet regularly and consistently, usually weekly, but at least every

fortnight (twice a month).” (Rule 3.3.1)

“Meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.” (Rule 3.4)

“The members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized.” (Rule 3.3)

“Unlike other organizations within and outside the Church, the Conference meets less to conduct business than to celebrate and deepen its unity for essentially spiritual reasons. Opening and Closing Prayers, together with the Vincentian spiritual reflections, heighten our awareness of the Holy Spirit’s presence.” (Manual 2.1)

“Every Conference meeting includes a spiritual component that promotes active participation and discussion. The presence and participation of the Conference’s Spiritual Advisor are especially important.” (Manual 2.1)

“The Conference meeting is the best forum for the continuing education and formation of members both spiritually and as helpers. This ongoing formation complements the special formation session sponsored by the local Councils.” (Manual 2.1)

“All decisions are made by consensus after the necessary prayer, reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate, matters are put to a vote.” (Rule 3.10)

“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.” (National Statute 16)

“All decisions made by a Conference or Council must be made consistent with the Rule and Statutes of the Society, Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and governance policies of the Society.” (National Statute 16)

Home Visits & Serving Neighbors:

“From the Society’s beginning, the central and most basic activity of Conferences has been the visitation of the needy in their homes.” (Manual 2.1)

“Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for the peace and joy of Christ.” (Rule 1.7)

“No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.” (Rule 1.3)

“The Society serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions.” (Rule 1.4)

“Vincentians endeavor to help the poor to help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community.” (Rule 1.10)

“Vincentians are sincerely concerned with the deeper needs and the spiritual well-being of those they help, always observing a profound respect for their conscience and the faith they believe in, listening and understanding with their hearts, beyond both words and appearances.” (Rule 1.11)

“Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. Accurate records must be kept of all money received or spent. The Society may not allot funds to other organizations, except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family, save under exceptional circumstances.” (Rule 3.14)

“It is wrong for a Conference to seek financial security by building up a large balance for the needs of the future. Conference balances generally should not exceed what they expect to spend during an average quarter. Surplus funds should be shared generously with more needy Conferences or the special works of the District Council.” (Manual 2.1)

The “direct link between two Conferences or Councils, consisting of sharing prayer, a profound friendship and material resources, is called twinning.” (Rule 4.1)

Awareness & Recruitment:

“Actively inviting others to join is as important as the service rendered to the needy.” (Manual 2.1)

“The Conference must create awareness for itself in the parish community, finding ways to keep parishioners informed about its charitable works and inviting them to become part of this

special ministry. Its President is responsible for maintaining communication with the parish staff, parish council, and other parish social ministry programs.” (Manual 2.1)

“The President contacts potential members and privately discusses their interests, qualifications, and background with them, along with the responsibilities of membership.” (Manual 2.1)

Subsidiarity:

“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 3.9)

“The Conference is the basic unit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and this is where the strength of the Society lies.” (Manual 2.1)

“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 3.6)

History of the Society:

“In 1833, less than three years later, in walking distance of the Chapel of the Daughters of Charity, Frederic Ozanam established the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It also spread quickly. Blessed Frederic saw the Society established in many countries, including the United States, Canada and Mexico.” (Manual 1.1)

“The continuing growth of the Society in and outside of Paris necessitated a Rule. This was formulated in 1835.” (Manual 1.2)

“While historians differ on how the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was introduced into the United States, all agree that it was established at the “Old Cathedral” (the Church of St. Louis of France), St. Louis, Missouri, in 1845.” (Manual 1.2)