Vincentian Discernment and Consensus:

Objective: Promote the use of Vincentian Discernment in the creation of a culture of consensus in the conference. Focusing on an understanding of discernment and consensus and the strategies that promote engagement and alignment among conference members. Assist the President and other leaders to create the environment that optimizes relationships through servant leadership.

Demonstrate how the Vincentian Virtues inform our conference relationships:

- Zeal drives us to stay focused on the flourishing of all the gifts that Vincentians bring to their conferences and councils.
- Humility and Selflessness remind us to honor the dignity of all members by encouraging their participation and creativity and by meeting behaviors that support inclusion of all voices.
- Simplicity inspires straightforward communication and compassionate truth telling.
- Gentleness informs a patient loving attitude during times of conflict.
**Decision-making Rule, Part III, Statute 16: Subsidiarity and Democracy**

- 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.

- 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.

- For the Society, subsidiarity and consensus are not about “who wins the vote” It is about the quality of our working relationships and our ability to “come to consensus” through Vincentian discernment.

- Ask the group how well implementation goes when there are perceived “winners and losers” from a vote. It is worth it to bear the uncertainty, face our conflicts, and reach true consensus.

- AND, in the end decisions need to be consistent with the Rule and Statutes.
Decision-making and Democracy

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

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• Ask the group how well implementation goes when there are perceived “winners and losers” from a vote. It is worth it to bear the uncertainty, face our conflicts, and reach true consensus.

• AND, in the end decisions need to be consistent with the Rule and Statutes.
What is Consensus?

A cooperative process in which group members develop and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole.

What is consensus?

Review the definition and be sure we take the time for the dialogue. if folks want to challenge or disagree or redefine,

Main reasons to use it on next slide.
Reasons to Use Consensus

1. High quality decisions
2. Builds connection among members
3. More effective implementation

Review each of these, talking a little around the “why”:

Decisions include the whole wisdom of the group, we take the time to work through tensions that end up making the solutions stronger, through the work of building consensus.

We find ways to connect and become stronger friends.

Finally, consensus based decisions have an advantage during implementation, as the whole group agreed on it.

Check out the website. Tree Bressen Facilitation & Workshops  Eugene, Oregon. (This is the content that Ralph Middlecamp is using to drive consensus decision making at the national level.)
Cooperation is the Basis

We all get more of what we want when we cooperate

• We genuinely try to work together, typically based on some shared interest, purpose or calling
• We search together for the best solution for all; it’s “us against the problem” not “us against each other.”
• We optimize creativity when relationships support an atmosphere of solidarity
• No “winners and losers”

Basic Principles

Review these principles

This is where we start making the case that the Society Rule, Mission and Ministry all point in the direction of the conditions necessary for Consensus.

On this slide it is about the conditions for cooperation that are built into our culture

We ARE trying to work together, we DO have a common and shared interest and calling.

We are journeying TOGETHER towards Holiness, with a foundation of commitment to friendship!

We DO believe that when we gather together the Holy Spirit is in and among us and deepens our mutuality and friendship and enhances our service to the neighbor
Consensus Synthesizes Group Wisdom

• Unity, not unanimity, not everybody’s first choice

• Arriving at a “sense of the meeting” - something you can support, are willing to let go forward, or you “can live with it”

• Value all kinds of input (rational, emotional, kinesthetic, etc…)

Basic Principles
Same spirit with this slide. As you review the basic principles, relate to who we already say we are.

**We seek unity**, and that doesn’t mean everyone agrees on everything, but that we are more committed to honoring consensus and recognizing our own ego traps that we are able to find the common ground and support and accept the will of the Group that reflects our discernment of God’s will.

**Value all kinds of input:** We say we are all equal in the society, and that we honor the dignity of one another and those we serve. Does this show up in our actual meetings and relationships? Are some folks overpowered by others? Does everyone get a chance to speak? Do we honor the needs of different temperaments? Do we give our introverts time to process so that their wonderful ideas can emerge? Do we spend our time listening and learning or figuring out what we are going to advocate for? *(Consensus is a questioning process, more than an affirming process)*
Consensus Synthesizes Group Wisdom

- Consensus is a questioning process, more than an affirming process
- Share, question, and learn from each other’s experience and thinking
- Encourages lifting everyone up to their highest potential, instead of knocking down your opponents

This is all about the journey to integrating our aspirations for who we are becoming as Vincentians into the way we evolve conference relationships. We say we practice the Vincentian Virtue of Zeal: a passion for the flourishing of the human person. (Share, question, and learn from each other’s experience and thinking) That MEANS “lifting everyone up to their highest potential, instead of knocking down your opponents.”

As Officers, Spiritual Advisors, and Vincentians this is the place for the integration of who we say we are spiritually with how we are with one another. An amazing opportunity for Spiritual Advisors to leverage their calling to be that non-anxious presence that gently reminds folks of who we are becoming and how we have agreed to get there by modeling Jesus, our Saints, and acting from a Vincentian Virtue based foundation.
Basic Principles

• *Remember the spirit and process of the system are even more important than the structures*
• There is no substitute for being friends with each other
• A positive attitude will get you everywhere
• *Meetings should be fulfilling—if they’re not, then ask why, and change it!*

Basic Principles

Review this slide in the same way. Each of these points is consistent with the Vincentian Ethos.

**Focus on the last bullet.** The quality of our meetings, our community spirit, is as important as the quality of our ministry with the neighbor. If meetings are not fulfilling, it sub optimizes the opportunity we have for personal fulfillment, journeying together to Holiness, and ultimately the service we provide.