There has been much discussion over the last several years related to the frequency of Conference meetings and what constitutes a valid meeting in compliance with the Rule. This brief article addresses this issue, hopefully answering most questions that come up related to it.

David Williams, considered to be the guru of the Rule internationally, noted it requires that Vincentian Conference meetings take place at least twice monthly (ideally weekly). Those meetings should consist of three specific segments which reflect the objectives of the Society: Growth in holiness, community (friendship/fellowship) and service to those in need. If any of those segments is not present, it is not a valid meeting. We must add that a valid meeting requires a quorum of Active Members.

In the new Part III of the Rule, Statute 7 provides a comprehensive list of components an agenda could include. Here is where reality comes into play:

If a Conference has no active committees doing special things for the Conference, then committee reports are not needed. However, if there are active committees, it is appropriate to have someone from that committee report on the work those Vincentians have done. This is one way in which we honor the work of our fellow Vincentians.

If there are no Resolutions to come before the Conference, then that portion of the meeting may be skipped. These are just two examples of how the agenda is flexible.

So let’s look at what is absolutely required. We will address two specifics first and then what David Williams has identified. By virtue of the offices they hold, the Secretary and Treasurer are required to present a report at every meeting. The Secretary presents, at a minimum, the minutes of the last meeting and opens the floor for corrections before final approval of the minutes. The Treasurer reports on the status of all financial accounts of the Conference and answers any questions asked by members. Since all decisions of the Conference are made by the Active Members as a whole, the members must be aware of the current status of all activities and accounts.

And now let’s look at David Williams’ specifications:

Growth in holiness: This is covered by the opening/closing prayers and the spiritual reading and discussion by the members. In some cases Conferences have gathered for a Mass or special liturgy and this will suffice, but the spiritual reading and discussion is the primary way in which this is fulfilled within the meeting.

Community (friendship/fellowship): In the recommended agenda this is fulfilled by the spiritual reading and discussion by the members, and by the discussions which center on the Home Visit reports and other work of the members (committees, special works, etc.). In some cases this is fulfilled by the members planning for and/or actually doing a work of service together at that time. Sometimes it is fulfilled by a social after the meeting itself. This will satisfy the requirement if it includes everyone present at the meeting and not just one or two people.

Service to those in need: In Statute 7 this is fulfilled by the reports on Home Visits, committee activity and special works. As in #2 above, this is also fulfilled by the members planning for and/or actually doing a work of service together at that time.

As can be seen in the above explanation, the agenda presented in Statute 7 is a reasonable way to plan each Conference meeting; however, it is not the only way. It is highly important that every meeting have an agenda to keep things moving in an orderly fashion and complete the meeting in a reasonable amount of time.
Rule Part III, Statute 7: Conference Meeting Essentials

A Conference meeting shall incorporate Spirituality, Friendship, Service and our Cultural Beliefs, and could include the following components:

• A punctual call to order
• Roll call
• Opening prayer (which should always include a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary and a prayer for those whose suffering they wish to share)
• Spiritual reading (or meditation, address) on which members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith
• Approval of Minutes of previous meeting
• Home visitation reports
• President’s report
• Secretary’s report (including correspondence received, information about the Society or training points)
• Treasurer’s report
• A review of one or more parts of the Rule
• Committee reports (including Formation Committee report)
• Membership reports
• Resolutions
• Special Works reports
• Old business
• New business
• Time and place of next meeting (the calendar should include Festival Meetings and Conference Liturgies)
• Secret collection
• Closing prayer
• Adjournment