Jeanne

WELCOME to Conference Revitalization
Jeanne - This time, I’m asking for a **moment of silent personal conversation with God**, which I believe is as much part of our Vincentian spirituality as are our communal prayers and reflections.
Jeanne –
Revitalization lets define it - - Revitalization is about **learning, growing, changing and leading change**!

In SVdP, revitalizing a council or conference involves challenging, inspiring, connecting, and equipping its leaders and members to live out our Vincentian mission.

[www.renovateconference.org](http://www.renovateconference.org) – info on Revitalization....
Jeanne

**Two sections/perspectives** to this workshop:

1) **devise** a plan.... Don’t impulsively respond to issues but **set up a plan NOW** – although always with flexibility built in to accommodate individual conferences in different communities.

2) **Define** plan details.... What will you do specifically to revitalize a conference

Struggling conferences root cause issues will differ.

**List in the chat box - what you believe identifies struggling conferences in your area (next slide)**
Jeanne

Let’s see how close the responses in the chat box are to the reasons reported by fellow Vincentians when they entered into Revitalizing a Conference.

These are some of the most often noted issues in struggling conferences.

Certainly there can be many others, sometimes not obvious but having strong negative effects.

Some are more deeply rooted and often result in challenging attitudes...
Tom
You can spot some obvious struggling conferences through the annual report – conferences with members declining, lack of home visits, non attendance at OOs, lack of participation in district meetings. If you use the Standards of Excellence process, the SoE questionnaire or the Conference Audit worksheet will also highlight areas for improvement.

**Resources available**
- Revitalization Plan for Existing Conferences
- What is expected of a Conference (34 pg)
- Minimum Requirements for a Conference
- Conference Audit Manual and Worksheets
- SoE Questionnaire
TOM

Once you identify a struggling conference, call the President. If you’ve not already been asked to come and help, explain that you’ve been asked to visit conferences, discuss their challenges, and ask for an hour at an upcoming meeting. Remember that the meeting time does affect who attends….lifestyle has an impact. So ASK.

Initial meetings are important for setting up a cooperative environment rather than adversarial. Inviting current members while also including the pastor, the deacon if available, and members of other parish ministries helps that ---- engenders a welcoming attitude.

Model Vincentian behaviors – e.g. make sure you begin and end the meeting with a prayer, use a reflection if possible that fits the situation at the conference

Start with their history. Let them describe their current state and what is working well. LISTEN as they tell you what they like about their conference, their work, their history.

While focusing on strengths, it is also fair to ask what could be better? What challenges are they facing? (membership, the number & types of aid requests they get, meeting attendance, spirituality & friendship in their meetings, etc).
LISTING NEXT STEPS

- Recruiting
- Formation & training
- Changes to service practices, meeting times and practices…
- xxx
- At each gathering, pray, ask questions and listen!

TOM
For the strengths they want to build upon, or the challenges they want to address, develop an initial list of actions to be taken, a timeline, set the next meeting date.

Share what some successful conferences have done to address those, what tools are available from the Society for training & formation & recruitment.

 Doesn’t mean there won’t be frustration or anger or resistance but you need people to attend to begin with!
SOME CHALLENGING ATTITUDES

- “We never heard about a Rule telling us how we should do things”
- “We’ve always done things this way and it works so why should we do things differently now?”
- “We’re a parish group so why should we listen to you people outside the parish?”
- “We never knew we were part of a larger organization”
- “What is “formation” and why do we need it? We’re fine”

TOM
These are just some examples of negative attitudes, and you’ve probably heard many more. So how do we approach struggling conferences with gentleness and compassion, but also with firmness?
JEANNE
Usually we don’t like change, so admit and accept this up front – and name it!

Let the members know that you realize change is not easy,

but that it needs to happen and you’ll provide the support that is needed.
JEANNE

Likely the door is only partially opened – some members are willing to listen, but others aren’t open. You often will be walking a tightrope so it’s important to remain flexible, gentle, kind and welcoming. They have opened the door, but you have the task of welcoming them back into the fold. However, this doesn’t mean ignoring your plan.
JEANNE

Ideally, with revitalization that is planned, implemented with patience and compassion, and with appropriate support, the current members will be transformed and will willingly welcome new members to grow and flourish the conference.
JEANNE

We maybe walking the tightrope – and We must have a positive attitude which helps deflate the challenges.
Try not to meet the conference with a negative attitude - - don’t blame them for not doing their job, don’t threaten to close the conference or remove them from the Society if they don’t meet minimum requirements.
Our Rule, part 1, is a visionary statement - a mountain top standard (like in the picture) that we all strive for, but often fall short of.

Part 3 of the Rule is our U.S. statutes – here there are more “rules” but use them as growth challenges, not a cudgel = a short, thick stick used as a weapon..

Start with recognizing what they do well, their strengths.
JEANNE

Important that we keep prayer our focus during this journey to revitalize a conference. We must pray for guidance and encourage the conference members to do the same. Call on the Holy Spirit as you plan, and before each meeting. But we also must stay open to the Spirit’s guidance if that leads to closing a struggling conference. Sometimes that is what needs to happen.
TOM
The revitalization process will not necessarily be quick, as it depends on the conference’s strengths and weaknesses, and their root cause issues.

In all cases, be clear during Invitations to Serve and with prospective new members that our primary purpose is growing in holiness. Service is a secondary byproduct. Ground everything in the Rule - - including meeting frequency, meeting agendas that give balance across the 3 key elements (spirituality, friendship, service). Use the tools like Ozanam Orientation, the new Member Handbook, Spirituality of Home Visit Journal.

Be Creative – each conference has its own history, past culture, personalities & politics, so will require some different approaches to address that starting point. For example, to get the leadership needed and for sufficient members and funds, a multi-parish conference may be the answer (e.g. merge with strong neighboring conference). Change meeting times to accommodate working parents and young adults / teens. Each situation will be a bit different so while there are critical common steps, how they are applied may differ.
FORMULATION FUNDAMENTALS

- Vincentian vision & mission
- The Rule
- Spirituality / Friendship / Service balance
- Primary purpose: growth in holiness
- Service to the poor flows from spirituality

TOM

Formation is the foundation of the Vincentian charism. Start with these. Always remain open to questions, even the tough ones, and respond truthfully.

Don’t just read the mission & vision but ask for reactions, discuss. Note that we have a Rule and not “rules” - read some short excerpts from the Rule to show how beautiful it is. Help them understand the difference.

Our 3 basic elements - spirituality, service, friendship are like a 3-legged stool, without each leg in balance, the stool falls down.

Spirituality leads to service and not the reverse. Good spirituality also feeds our friendship. Keep in mind that for many people, our focus on spirituality is a strong incentive to know more and to join us.
TOM
For Vincentians, our growth in holiness is primary, which leads to serving Christ in the poor.

Volunteers are important to a community and a parish. However, as Vincentians we have a vocation – a calling. Through this vocation, Christ living in us recognizes and meets Christ in those we serve. This vocation also means that we live according to the Rule. Think about other vocations: priesthood, religious life, married life. Each vocation challenges us to set aside our will to sacrifice for others and for God.

As Vincentians we can provide any work of charity that is needed. We certainly provide food, clothing, rent, utilities but any legitimate need, provided through person to person service can be met by a conference. Home visits are key in the Society and are unique to the Society. Let them know that training and mentoring on home visits can be provided.

Any person-to-person service, done with Vincentian spirituality, is who we are.
Jeanne

Spirituality is an essential aspect of person-centered compassionate care. We experience being Christ’s hands and heart working with those in need.
A basic element of spirituality is meaning and purpose in life.
Viktor Frankl in Man’s Search for Meaning related: Spirituality is the ESSENCE of our humanity!
MISSION: Members Grow in Holiness and then experience a spiritual awakening as they serve the Christ in those in need.

https://www.svdpusa.org/members/Membership/Best-Practices/Formation-Spirituality

I promise you, a focus on Spiritual Growth as a main Strategy Goal will amaze you on the results.
Everything gets better, as Jesus said in John 15 v7 "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, then you may ask me for whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."
Spirituality is necessary and you can see it’s important in the Essentials for Conference Revitalization:

ESSENTIALS FOR "CONFERENCE" REVITALIZATION
HOLY SPIRIT FILLED MEMBERS - Acts 1:4-8 / Eph. 5:18 / Gal. 5:25

Many “conferences” have “meetings” but the Holy Spirit is not in charge!
Healthy “conferences” are Holy Spirit filled and that makes all the difference in the “meeting”.
We’ve seen lifeless, cold and dead “conferences” that were not Holy Spirit filled.
These “conferences” had grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit so much that they don’t even realize that His power is gone.
Any “conference” that wants Revitalization will seek and teach the members to be Holy Spirit filled.
A Holy Spirit filled “conference” will glorify God and be a blessing to others around them.
A Holy Spirit filled “conference” has a healthy, powerful, witnessing, bold, loving, caring, and faithful “conference” membership.
Are you and the members of your “conference” Holy Spirit filled?
May today we not only live in the Spirit, but be filled and walk in the Spirit.
May God bless your “Conference”.

http://strengtheningchurchministries.com/documents/REVITALIZATIONONESSENTIALS.pdf

I was just helping a Vice President as he was working with a struggling conference and it was a growth experience and I promised to find him some help - I went online and found this explanation of struggling conferences without the presence of the Holy Spirit. Based on Acts 1:4-8 and Ephesians 5:18 and Galatians 5:25.
Many conferences have meetings but the Holy Spirit is not in charge! Then they are not very healthy conferences.

Healthy conferences are Holy Spirit filled and if you just say the opening prayer, it would help them be Holy Spirit filled - the words call the Holy Spirit to the meeting and that makes all the difference in the meeting.

How do we get Holy Spirit filled conferences....we saw from your answers in the chat that you have seen lifeless, cold and dead conferences that were (not where) not Holy Spirit filled. These conferences grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit so much that they don't even realize that His God's power is gone.
A Conference that wants Revitalization will teach the members to be Holy Spirit filled and that is why we have a mentor walking with the conference. I went every two weeks for the first three months with a conference where the president was selected because he had email. They became more and more spirit filled and how the spiritual reflection helped them to grow in the spirit. Previously they would have people line up 30+ standing and waiting to be seen and given a voucher for assistance - instead of home visits --- that all changed not easily but with the Spirit, they changed. They began to see this was NOT respectfully serving those in need and not in accordance with the Rule.

A only Spirit filled conference will glorify God instead of the griping you wrote about in the chat box - instead they will be sharing gratitude for the home visit and how the home visit changed their heart then they will become a blessing to others around them. That is what we pray for, we pray we can see the Christ in them and most importantly we pray we they can see and feel the unconditional love of God through our service to them -- so that we can become a BLESSING to them.

A Holy Spirit filled conference has a healthy, powerful, witnessing, bold, loving, caring, and faithful membership. -- they are able to challenge each other in a respectful way, is there another way to think of this and use consensus which is the Vincentian way to resolve issues -- this is a very healthy way -- what is it that bothers you - what change could we create so that you could agree even if it isn't what you want when the rest of the group is in agreement. We are not leaving until this is resolved, so help us understand your concerns and lets think about what we could do to help your approval. This needs to be done in a spiritual form -- these are NOT tasks to check off -- these are working together - even if it takes longer -- Trust in the Holy Spirit - Trust in Providence just as someone wrote in the chat.

Are you and the members of your conference Holy Spirit filled???
If not today may we move towards living in the Spirit, and also may we be filled and walk in the Spirit
May God bless your Conference.
JEANNE

If the initial meetings result in finding that one of the key revitalization needs is to grown the number of members, discuss best practices in recruiting new members. Explain the concept of recruiting at Masses using the Invitation to Serve formula, followed by an information evening.

Also encourage one to one personal invitations – those are often is the most successful recruiting approach.

A strong conference has at least 8-10 active members and more associate members.

It’s important going forward to consider various ages, genders and lifestyle, i.e. young adults, parents, single persons, religious, ethnic groups, etc. Recognize that the conference should mirror the parish – and ideally, the friends in need it serves - in its diversity.

That diversity, and what it means in terms of people’s free time availability, also must be considered when scheduling the information meeting (and conference meeting) times.

Resource tools = Invitation to Serve, Taking a Formational Approach to Recruiting
JEANNE

If the number of new members is significant in relationship to the number of past members, you need to consider moving forward like this is a “new conference” start-up – - election of (new) President, appointment of new officers, delegation of tasks (refer to handout on Delegating Conference Responsibilities) ...all the steps you’d take with a new conference (refer to the New Conference Formation materials on the web site)

All of this will take time, encouragement, support but also commitment to the agreed-to timeline.
Encourage prayer and discernment for identification of officers and SA.

Resource Tools – Delegating Conference Responsibilities
JEANNE

Obviously, the officer handbooks and description of responsibilities might need to be done before the election. Describe election process and help as needed.

Describe the beauty and importance of the Commissioning Mass. Provide a copy of the ritual. Talk about reviewing all prior conference “guidelines” and the need to revisit those.
If one of the revitalization issues is a breakdown in conference friendship, that can be more challenging than simply having to recruit more members. Where relationships are strained, take the time to interview each member privately...then de-brief with the entire group what you heard and where the challenges appear to be.

If they have a good Spiritual Advisor, involve him or her in guiding the group back to friendship. A retreat can be a very good way to address relationship issues, grounded in Vincentian spirituality. In a recent situation with a conference where relationships had badly broken down into two warring camps, I worked with their Spiritual Advisor a retired priest. He led a reconciliation meeting where he asked each each person to say what they had done or not done in words or actions to hurt others in the conference, asked each of them to apologize for those things specifically, say how they will act differently in the future, and choose someone who will hold them accountable for their pledge, and sign a personal agreement. This conference is still healing. Several members have left, and they are now working to recruit new members to rebuild the conference.

If conference practices in their services are the flash point for disagreements, make sure that any decisions to change are truly consensus-based, and not imposed from the top, or rammed through on a divisive majority vote. There are some excellent materials available from the
Society on how to effectively achieve consensus based decisions through Vincentian discernment. Good external source is www.treegroup.info
If the root cause of the need for revitalization is based on governance disputes, reach out to the National Governance Committee for advice.

In some respects, the approach you must take to determine the real issues and frame an action plan are similar to revitalizing a conference where friendship has broken down. Start with separate interviews with all the parties - - for example, conference or council members, the Board members if a separate Board exists, the Executive Director and Special Work Manager.

Review their bylaws to see what they spell out in terms of the division of Roles and Responsibilities and who makes or must approve various decisions (e.g. budget, expenditures, etc).

The need for revitalization of Governance may also exist within a conference if the issue is that the President (or a long standing member) makes ALL decisions, or dominates the conference meetings causing people to leave because their input is not respected. In some instances, as a last and final resort, revitalization may require asking some people to leave the conference or council.
Resource tools – Governance Roles & Responsibilities (2 versions)
FOLLOW-UP ... MENTOR SUPPORT AS LONG AS NEEDED FOR

- Home Visits
  - Conference guidelines
- Finding resources on National website
- Brainstorming fundraising ideas
- Determining local community needs & resources
- Attend Council, region, & national meetings and other Vincentian gatherings

TOM
Mentors need not be at every conf. meeting but be available as needed via phone, text or email or even a FaceTime or Zoom video call.
Training and formation will likely be a key element in any conference revitalization. We have a rich repository of tools available.
TOM
We provided you a handout with links to these key resources.

The National website has a portal for all growth & revitalization information, listed by category: Formation, Revitalization, Starting & Growing, Conference Officer Training, Introduction to the Society, Social Media, Invitation to Serve, Clergy Relations, Spanish Documents, Diversity, Youth, Young Adults.

Mentoring conference/Vincentians can assist in accessing information and resources.
EVERY CONFERENCE/COUNCIL IS UNIQUE IN ITS

- Service / Special Works
- Personalities
- Commitment
- Involvement with community, parish, etc.
- Allow the Holy Spirit to guide the revitalization and renewal process
- Pray for discernment & divine providence

JEANNE

EVERY Conference/Council is UNIQUE in its

Types of Service they offer - Home visits, etc / Special Works they may run – pantries, Getting Ahead, shelters, housing etc

Personalities – enjoy all types are Vincentians

Commitment – for many being a Vincentian is a strength in their life

Involvement with community, parish, etc. – local collaboration groups, etc.

MOST IMPORTANTLY

- Allow the HOLY SPIRIT to guide the revitalization and renewal process
- Pray for discernment & divine providence
• Change is difficult
• Prayer first and always
• Listen
• The process & timeline will vary
• Sometimes we need to let go…new growth may come from apparently fallow ground — trust in Providence

Final Comments

1st person as stated throughout --- Change is difficult —we talked about it in the chat room --- It can look very differently depending on the circumstances

As Vincentians we prayer first and always throughout the times of Revitalization Pray before the call to the clergy-- even pray in the call – Thanking God for the clergy’s support and generosity and gratitude that he gave permission to discuss about his parish conference.

As God’s partners in our work – we Listen first to Him and then always to the Christ who is in others!! two ears and a wonderful workshop on Vincentian listening

There is no magic bullet – each conference and council has their OWN process & timeline will vary -- it is in God's time -

As faith believers == we know to LET GO AND LET GOD…new growth may come from apparently fallow ground -

As Vincentians we TRUST in Providence  God is always our partner we are never alone - we listen to him in the silence and we ask Christ to walk with us
Revitalization brings about Councils or Conferences that

**Learn all at different speeds and realize the** Distance can be a problem in the learning so it is wise to find other diocesan Vincentians and conferences willing and available to be mentors.

**Grow in their own time** -- flexibility is important most and the issues and challenges will be different in every community Growth depends on mentoring - like we had to do for South and North Dakota - the distance can be a problem -- But when the Holy Spirit is in charge...things fall in place...the Bishop put me up at the rectory and they would pick me up at the airline and take me to the rectory -- he would deliver my suitcase to my room -- and help set up for all the meetings - it was long distance - the Bishop wanted it to happen -- the Holy Spirit was in charge

**Lead them into Good change**

**Connect them to** their Lord and to each other. That will inspire themselves and those they ARE Revitalizing and help them to see that Christ is in those they serve and those they serve with. The Holy Spirit can affect the leaders....in Rapid City Bishop Gruse said he wanted to see the people in the pews growing in holiness – He was excited about the Society of St Vincent de Paul growing in his diocese--- they are growing because they had a Bishop who had a vision. And **each other and it is** wise to find mentors -- Sioux Falls were Godsend for Rapid City - helping with the Ozanam Orientation and trainings of the new Vincentians in Rapid City.Henry, Gladys, Mary – they all helped, Jay from Fargo helped with Bismarck, when I left these new councils and conferences -- they had a mentor in their state - they knew they were NOT alone.

**Inspire themselves and each other and this will**
Equip them to see Christ in Those They Serve and
Knowingly realize the challenge will affect leaders, members, their parish,
their communities and Those They Serve
Please list your question in the chat room and we will work on answering the
same....THANK YOU for LISTENING today!!!
Know our prayers are with you in your Revitalization projects throughout the
Region.
Lord, we thank you for our discussions and insights, our challenges and opportunities, our inspirations and our growth!
For all this and more – we pray: Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, forever and ever Amen
Jeanne

In this presentation it has not been possible to address everything about revitalization.

Hopefully this has at least given you a starting point, some ideas that will get your creative juices flowing.

Also remember to check the web site for best practices – and share yours! If you approach revitalization with prayer and patience it can work.
QUESTIONS?

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