Welcoming New Members

Society of St. Vincent de Paul Midyear Meeting
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In my work overseeing and coordinating Conferences, the questions I am most often asked are—how do we find new members? And how do we keep the members we have? In this session, I hope to give you a few ideas and some insight into what makes people join a Conference, and what makes them stay (or go).

So, our goals for this session are:

1. To understand why we need to recruit,
2. To understand how we need to recruit,
3. To understand who we need to recruit,
4. And to understand how to welcome the people we recruit and set them up for success and an understanding of the mission of SVDP and the vocational aspect of our Society.

We’ll also be sharing a new tool that can help you in onboarding new members—this brand new tool is the MEMBER HANDBOOK. We’ll go through this a little bit later, but this is something that’s been needed for a long time. It’s an approachable tool that explains our mission and our work in a readable and engaging way.
A New Tool to Welcome New Members

MEMBER HANDBOOK

A Tool for New Members:
Understanding that our Vincentian vocation is a call to grow together in spirituality, friendship and service, the Member Handbook will welcome and guide new members on the Vincentian journey toward holiness.

A Tool for Existing Members:
Deepening and reigniting the fire in their hearts, the Member Handbook will enable every member in the Conference to walk with the new member as they discover their Vincentian vocation.

Member Handbook Catalog # 4900 @ $1.00 ea
Recruiting

Why Recruit?

- To keep the Conference strong and vibrant
- To offset natural attrition of members
- To bring new ideas and energy to the Conference
- To motivate current members
- To expand the works of the Conference
- To increase the Conference’s diversity

So, why do we recruit?

This should be obvious, and as leaders, you could easily answer this question. You wouldn’t have signed up for this session if you didn’t know how important recruitment is.

The biggest mistake I see in Conferences is that they wait to recruit until they are really short on members. Don’t wait! The goal of recruiting is not just to have enough bodies to do the work—it is to have enough people with enough energy, talent, and vision that they will see new work that needs to be done. Remember, “no work of charity is foreign to the Society”. Seeking diversity also increases the chances of recruiting people with different ideas.

As far as leadership goes, even if a Conference has plenty of members, they wait until a President is at the end of their term to look for another. You should mentally know who you can approach to become the next President, VP, etc. are at least a year before they take over. Build up responsibility gradually. Observe people inside and outside of the
Conference. What are their strengths?
Recruiting: Make a Recruitment Plan

What types of members do you need?

- Active members or Officers?
- Home Visitors?
- Call Takers?
- Project-Oriented Associate Members?

So, we’ve talked about why we should recruit. Now let’s talk about the “how” and the “who”.

Often, our recruitment “plan” is for someone to show up at a meeting one time, and voila! They are a member. But to get the kind of members we want, and to keep those members active in the Conference, we need to be intentional in recruiting.

How many of you have a recruitment plan in place? This is a good goal for every Conference.

We need to understand and be aware of who we want to recruit, and what roles we need to have filled.

Let’s talk about both of those things.
How to Recruit

- Personal Invitation by all members
- Presentation to Parish Groups
- Ministry Fair
- Bulletin Announcements/brochures
- *Invitation to Serve*
- Be visible!
- New Parishioner Coordinator/Welcoming Committee
- RCIA

What’s the best way to recruit?
On an ongoing basis—all members should be involved—a minimum of 1-2 new members a year should be the goal

Personal invitation is always the best approach. If you see someone who you think would be an asset, approach them! Tell them what unique gifts you see in them that would enhance the Conference. Share with them what you think they would enjoy about Conference life.

Ask to present at the PTO, Parish Council, Stewardship weekend, Social Action ministry, RCIA. Talk about SVDP and what the Conference is doing with others in the parish. Don’t hide your light under a bushel! Monthly bulletin blurbs or a quarterly insert with an appeal for new members can also be effective. Example—HANDOUT

I’m sure that you are all familiar with National SVDP’s Invitation to Serve program. Use all or part of it to create a coordinated recruitment plan.

ALL Conference members recruit Talk to Pastor about what your needs are New Parishioner Coordinator/Welcoming Committee—have something in new parishioner packet RCIA—yearly visit about putting Catholic Social Teaching into action
Okay, so we know WHY we’re recruiting—let’s talk about WHO we want to recruit.
So, who are these people who might be likely to join our Conference? Here are some groups that are worth tapping into. Talk about each of these

People who had a life change

FRIENDRAISING—once a year, challenge each member to bring a friend to a meeting.
“Why should I join?”

- To love and serve God and neighbor
- The work is extremely rewarding
- We grow together in holiness
- Helping those in need
- Making new friends
- You are needed

YOU GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR

You are needed for a specific task, and here it is! Get new members started asap.

Ask questions about why someone wants to volunteer. Don’t assume that an accountant wants to be your Treasurer, etc. Volunteering can be a time to develop new interests and skills that people haven’t had an opportunity to develop in their career or other settings.

BEING A VINCENTIAN IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER VOLUNTEER “JOBS”. With that being said, one of the best ways to recruit and THE single best way to retain members is to encourage formation that helps them see themselves not as a volunteer, but as a Vincentian.

Remember, YOU GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR
What Keeps People From Joining?

- “Closed club” feeling
- Meetings are at an inconvenient time
- Meetings are awful
- “Too busy” is a myth!
- There is nothing for them to do
- Home visit/pantry hours are inconvenient for them

To recruit effectively, we need to understand what attracts new members, but we also need to understand what might keep them from joining.

- Too busy is a myth
- Have alternating meeting times
- Ask Conference members what they would like to see on an agenda
- Social meetings are key
- If you don’t have anything for them to do, call your Council! Ask for ideas for new projects—“no work of charity is foreign to the Society”
Develop a Process for Admitting New Members

**National New Member Admission Process**

During a period for discernment, prospective members:

- Read Member Handbook
- Are matched with a sponsor
- Attend Meetings
- Go on Home Visits as an observer
- Meet with Spiritual Advisor for formation and discernment
- Attend Ozanam Orientation as soon as possible

*Hold Commissioning Ceremony for all new members*

OK, so you’ve got your new member. As I mentioned previously, the best way to retain members is to help them think of themselves as VINCENTIANS. How do we do that?

I’d like to take a few minutes to describe what I consider an excellent process for admitting new members.

Nothing is sadder to me than meeting someone who’s been in a Conference for a number of years and doesn’t understand what it is to be a “Vincentian”, doesn’t think of themselves as a Vincentian, doesn’t understand the Rule, and doesn’t feel part of a larger whole. This process addresses all of those issues. It also helps people understand what the Conference does, trains them, helps them find their niche, and helps them get to know other Conference members.

**HANDOUT—go over as a group BRING COPIES**

**USE NEW TOOL—Member Handbook during period of discernment**

Briefly go through handbook contents
The pay as a Vincentian may not be great, but the retirement plan is heavenly! ☺️