

**Society of St. Vincent de Paul**  
**Birmingham Diocese, Huntsville District Council**  
**Procedures for Prospective Members of SVDP Conferences/Council**

When a prospective member attends his/her first meeting, the conference should introduce itself, one-by-one, to the prospective member. The President then provides a short explanation of the basic procedures in the conduct of the meeting and invites the prospective member to participate in any of the discussions. If the prospective member was invited to attend by a current member, that current member should be assigned to assist the prospective member and to encourage him or her to attend the next meeting (calls to remind them of the upcoming meeting and/or offers to pick them up and take them to the meeting). If not invited by a current member, the President should ask for someone to assist the prospective member unless the conference has a permanent position or committee for such a purpose and if so they will provide the assistance. The President should ask the prospective member(s) if they would like to accompany a team on a visit to clients. If yes, they should accompany one of the more experienced teams. Make sure they are informed that they can be a part of the conversation with the client so they don't feel like an uninvolved tag along.

Upon attending the next meeting they should be informed of the procedure for becoming an Active (Full) member of the society. Active (Full) Members are those that participate regularly in the prayer life, meetings, and charitable activities of the conference or council (Statute 3). An Active (Full) Member accepts the Rule and Statutes of the Society, belongs to the Catholic Church, and is received as a Vincentian brother or sister into the Society's conference or council with which he or she is affiliated (Statute 3). If the candidate desires to continue, the conference President, or designated representative, provides the Council Formation Committee with contact information of the candidate by e-mail with copy to the Council President. A candidate for active membership is afforded a period of training and discernment which includes formation in the essential elements and core values of the society as well as its Rule (Statute 3). Thereafter, they are to attend one of the Ozanam Orientation Part 1 (Introduction to the Society) sessions that will be provided once a month, during the first 2 months of the quarter, by the Council Formation committee. This training will be followed later by the Ozanam Orientation Parts 2 and 3 also provided by the Council Formation Committee. The Ozanam training will be conducted when there are several prospective members to attend but at least once a quarter unless there is no one to train. Upon completion of the Ozanam Training, (Part 1, 2 and 3), the Formation Committee will initiate a training certificate (see attachment A) indicating that the candidate has completed the required Ozanam Orientation. The certificate will be provided to the conference President for distribution to the prospective member and will indicate that training requirements for Active Membership have been met. Prospective members are expected to attend conference meetings regularly for six months. Unless they do not feel comfortable visiting clients, they should be assigned to accompany a team or be the second party if one team member is not available. No prospective member should be assigned to manage a case until they have completed all the requirements and have been designated a full-fledged Active Member of the society.

If the prospective member feels uncomfortable to go on visits, the President or his/her representative should find out what interests or talents the prospective member may have and then explain that there are other important background type of activities they could fill to include visiting nursing homes, answering the phone when clients call, working in the pantry or in a Thrift Store, etc. They should be informed that there are many committee positions at the council level where they may be able to use their God given talents in helping the poor. Every effort should be made to find some activity within SVDP that they would like to do. All persons, Catholics in particular,

should be interested in their spiritual growth, the prime goal of the SVDP society. They can just attend meetings to grow spiritually or to develop in friendship the second goal of the Society, if that is all they wish to do, and by contributing to the secret collection they are also providing for the poor. Prospective members should not be lead to believe early on or be told that SVDP is not for everyone until after appropriate effort has been made to find where their talents would be helpful in serving the poor. If, after this effort, the prospective member feels that SVDP is not for them, then it would be kind and a form of encouragement to let them know that SVDP is not for everyone and that they may find fulfillment in some other organization or activity.

Pope Gregory XVI approved the Society in 1845; both he and Blessed Pius IX enriched the Society with Indulgences. According to the Doctrine of Indulgences, issued by Pope Paul VI on January 1, 1967, "An indulgence is the remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned." Members may gain a plenary indulgence on the day of their admission to the Society, and when participating in a Festival Meeting, provided they make their Confession, receive Communion, pray for the intentions of the Pope, and promise to observe faithfully the Rule of the Society. Conference presidents inform new members of the plenary indulgences they can obtain, and they fix the "formal" date of admission with this in mind (Manual Page 10).

The commissioning of new members of the Society should take place after they have gained experience in the Society (Statute 4) along with the proper training. Candidates must complete the entire Ozanam Orientation (Parts 1, 2, and 3) in order to be commissioned as an active member. Before being commissioned as a member, the Spiritual Advisor (or President) consults with the candidate to discern readiness for active (Full) membership (Statute 3). If a prospective member wishes to test their Vincentian vocation, that person may defer for a time formal admission into the Society (Statute 3). The name(s) of person(s) proposed for active membership are submitted to the Conference President by the Vice President or other person designated to do so. Upon completion of all the requirements, the Conference President notifies the Council Secretary. The council will complete an Active Member Certificate, signed by the Council President, attesting to the fact that the candidate has met the requirements and is now an active member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul once commissioned. The Active Member Certificate (see attachment C) will be provided to the Conference President. The Conference President provides information concerning the recommended person(s) to the Conference (Statute 3). The Conference takes formal action, normally by a resolution (see attachment B), to accept the candidate into active (Full) membership (Statute 3). Acceptance into membership is entered into the conference minutes to officially record the date the candidate became an Active (Full) member. The conference President then administers the commissioning ceremony (see attachment D) and presents the certificate along with a St Vincent de Paul pin and a copy of the commissioning ceremony to the new Active Member(s) at a regular meeting of the conference. Or, the commissioning, the certificate and the pin can be presented by the conference President at a special activity, if one is scheduled to occur soon, such as at a Conference liturgy, a Festival Meeting, a council retreat, or Day of Recollection, where potentially more Vincentian brothers and sisters will be there to congratulate and welcome them into the Society. All members shall annually renew their promise of service to the members and to the poor, thereby deepening the spiritual dimension of their vocation (Statute 4). The normal occasion for commissioning renewal is at a Conference liturgy, or a Festival Meeting (Statute 4).

**Could you provide me with a short statement describing how you put this program in place?**

It was obvious that the way the conferences were operating all a potential member had to do was show up and go out as a team member to serve the poor. Many new members were quietly asking others when will we get visit training? Also, there was nothing special required to become a member and nothing indicating they have become a member. We noticed that many conferences were not recording membership in the minutes and after a few years no one was sure of when a person actually joined, sometimes not even the member. All this caused us to look more closely in the Rule and Manual to see what might apply. We found that in several places there were applicable requirements for training and experience required to become a member. Considering the needs of potential members and the requirements for training and experience, we were able to pull together into a procedure something that would be meaningful for member training and experience and would allow them to know they have achieved something – they have become a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

**What was the process you used to get buy-in from the Conferences.**

We presented everything to the council to include requirements and rationale stressing the value of the Plenary Indulgence granted when you have met the requirements, answered their questions and then relied on the conference Presidents to present the New Active Member Procedures to the conference. After it was approved, we also included information in the Ozanam Orientation about the Plenary Indulgence that can be received when meeting the requirements and having been accepted into the conference/council.

**How many meetings did you have to review this process before you finalized on it?**

There was a definite learning process and the first version did not include everything but as we investigated and learned more we ended up with the 2<sup>nd</sup> version and it took two meetings for each version. We got a consensus for the 2<sup>nd</sup> version and it was approved by resolution for the procedure. There was about a three month time span between the versions.

**Was there push back and how did you deal with it?**

Yes, there was a slight push back but it is believed that it was based on resisting change (we never did this before, why now?). We added in the procedure the identification of where it was required by the Rule or Manual and emphasized that because it was fragmented in the Rule and Manual it was never put together into a distinct procedure. Additionally, we created a certificate that designates the individual as an Active member of the Society and presented it to them with a SVDP pin. This was well received.

**What have the results been since this has been implemented?**

We went from almost no requests for Ozanam Orientations to now providing one every quarter. Previously, there was resistance to training. We are training more people than ever before. Now new Active members feel that they have achieved something in becoming a member of SVDP and they have something in the form of certificate and a pin to show it, and they have been approved by the conference and commissioned which is recorded in the minutes.

# Certificate of Membership



This is to certify that

John Doe



Having completed all requirements is hereby designated  
an Active Member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,  
Birmingham Diocese, Huntsville District Council,

Your Conference

On the 8th Day of May In the Year 2010



Signed \_\_\_\_\_

John G. Miscik  
President  
Huntsville District Council



# Society of St. Vincent de Paul Huntsville District Council



Serving in hope

presents this certificate to



Jane Doe  
Name

Name of  
Conference

in acknowledgement of having satisfactorily completed the

## OZANAM ORIENTATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
Council President

06/25/2011  
Date

# Attachment B



## Resolution

### Society St. Vincent de Paul

Birmingham Diocese

Huntsville District Council

Name of Conference

Date of conference meeting

A Resolution to accept a New Active Member into the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

*Whereas* the person of \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_, has declared his/her desire to become an Active Member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and

*Whereas*, he/she desires to grow in holiness and to always promote the Mission and Values of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and to provide compassionate service to all those who are poor and suffering. and

*Whereas*, he/she desires to serve Christ's poor in some capacity either by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, helping them to pay for basic necessities, comforting the afflicted, visiting the sick, the elderly, the lonely or the imprisoned and to serve them in charity and justice, with love and compassion always striving to see the face of Christ in the poor. and,

*Whereas* he/she has met the Ozanam training and meeting attendance requirements and

*Whereas*, he/she agrees to faithfully abide by the policies, procedures, by-laws and especially the Rule of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. and,

*Whereas* the conference President and/or the Spiritual Advisor has talked with and determined that he/she is properly committed and accepts and will comply with the Rule and Policies and Procedures of the Society, and

*Whereas* the conference President recommends to the members of the conference the acceptance of \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ as an Active Member so the society; therefore be it

*Resolved* that the Conference approve the acceptance of \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ as a New Active Member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and that this acceptance be so recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Resolution (year and number)

# Certificate of Membership



This is to certify that

Jane Doe

Having completed all requirements is hereby designated  
an Active Member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,  
Birmingham Diocese, Huntsville District Council,

Name of Conference

On the 6th Day of June In the Year 2011

Signed

John G. Miscik  
President  
Huntsville District Council





# Attachment D



## COMMISSIONING CEREMONY

### Installation of a New Active Member

Opening Song:	(Begin with an appropriate song)
President:	<p>As the people of God, we are called to a profound love of God and love of our neighbor. Gathered here in God's name, we testify to our common desire to be faithful in assisting one another to carry out this commandment.</p> <p>Today, with joy and gratitude we join together to welcome and commission our new member. After prayer, formation and discernment, _____ (Name) has been proposed for membership into the _____ (Conf Name) Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Our Conference has reached a prayerful decision and approved _____ (Name) to share our mission in the service of those who are poor.</p> <p>As a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, you will witness to your love for God and your concern for God's poor. We now ask you to commit yourself to the mission that God, in His Providence has given to you.</p> <p>I ask you:</p> <p>Will you strive to affirm the dignity of each person by compassionate service to all those who are poor and suffering</p>
New Member:	Yes, I will.
President:	Will you strive to grow in holiness?
New Member:	Yes, I will.
President:	Will you strive to attend meetings and to grow in friendship?
New Member:	Yes, I will.
President:	Will you strive to always promote the Mission and Values of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul?

New Member:	Yes, I will.
President:	In accepting the call to serve those who are suffering as a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, do you promise to fulfill the obligations of that ministry to best of your ability?
New Member:	With God's help and with the help of those with whom I serve, I do promise to fulfill these obligations to the best of my ability.
President:	I do believe and trust that you will use your God-given gifts for the good of all who are touched by the healing mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.  And now I ask all of us here present: Will you support our new member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul by your loyalty, your support and your prayers?
All:	We promise to support and pray for <u>      (Name)      </u> as we together carry out the mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We ask God to bless your ministry with vision, strength and peace.
President:	I ask all of us now to extend our hands in blessing as we commission him/her as a member of the Society by praying together:  Father, you have called <u>      (Name)      </u> to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and comfort the afflicted in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Sister Rosalie Rendu, as a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.  We pray your blessing on <u>      (Name)      </u> , and on each one of us so that together we may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grow in holiness,</li> <li>• deepen our spirit of friendship with each other, and</li> <li>• serve the poor in charity and justice, love and compassion. Amen</li> </ul>
President:	It is an honor to welcome you as a member of our Conference, and I now present to you the Certificate of Active Membership and the pin of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
Closing Song:	(Conclude with an appropriate song)
Note: New member keeps copy of this Ceremony	

# Certificate of Membership



This is to certify that

John Doe

Having completed all requirements is hereby designated  
an Active Member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,  
Birmingham Diocese, Huntsville District Council,

Your Conference

On the 8th Day of May In the Year 2010

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

John G. Miscik  
President  
Huntsville District Council

