

LEADERSHIP ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



GUIDE FOR COUNCIL PRESIDENTS



INTRODUCTION

The leader of a Society Council is the President, and it is the President's responsibility to administer or manage the affairs of his/her group so that they will bear witness to Christ. The Council President is a servant leader who acts in a spirit of democracy, utilizing the principle of subsidiarity.

The group may be Presidents of Conferences or Presidents of Councils, but they will be voluntary people with a variety of backgrounds who have joined the Society for different reasons.

They will remain members for as long as they are satisfied with their participation in the work and spirit, and this will depend to a large extent on the quality of administration.

A Conference helps people, a District Council helps Conferences, and a Central or Diocesan Council helps Councils. Whatever the group, they must be a team, especially at the Council level where Conference or Council Presidents have a dual responsibility of representing the Conference at Council meetings and representing the Council at Conference meetings.

SVDP ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

The International Council General represents the world-wide Society members.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL

NATIONAL COUNCILS

DIOCESAN CENTRAL COUNCILS

DISTRICT COUNCILS

CONFERENCES

Regional groupings facilitate the work of the National Council of the U.S.

In the USA, Diocesan Central Councils are organized. To each is usually attached three District Councils.

District Councils operate in the USA. Each District Council unites a number of Conferences in the same city or county.

Over 4500 USA Conferences are active.

CONFERENCE

The Conference is the basic unit, "the grass roots" of Vincentian organization. It constitutes the hub and heart of Vincentian life and charitable service.

Its membership is relatively small - a cell group of usually not more than seven to ten active doers in charity. Virtually all of the 4000 plus Conferences in the United States are parish-centered, although other organizational foci are allowed and can be recommended, e.g., school Conferences; youth Conferences; Conferences of retirees; Conferences of special interest or vocational groups.



DISTRICT AND DIOCESAN COUNCILS

A District Council unites Conferences from the same city or county, or other appropriate geographical division.

Council size varies greatly according to local practices and geography. Councils including more than 25 Conferences are regarded by many observers as unwieldy. Less than three Conferences is seen as too few for establishing a formally constituted District Council.

When it becomes advisable to unite by a Council the Conferences within a more extended circumscription than that of a District Council, there may be instituted for this purpose a Central Council.

In the United States, Central Councils are organized along Diocesan lines and are now referred to simply as Diocesan Councils.



***Around the Clock
in 132 Countries of the World
Over 650,000 Volunteer Members
Serve People in Need***

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COUNCILS

The Council of the United States, organized in 1916 and incorporated in 1946, exercises jurisdiction over the Society throughout this country. The Society is currently functioning in the majority of USA dioceses.

The national governing body is constituted by a board of trustees, one from each diocese which has Council structure. The national office is located in St. Louis, Mo.

The International Council animates and coordinates the activities of the Society throughout the world.

Presidents of National Councils are ex-officio members of the International Council. Others, because of their personal abilities or because they effectively represent areas lacking National Council structure, are appointed by the President General.

Only the International Council General can institute new SVDP Councils and aggregate (or affiliate) new Conferences.

DISTRICT COUNCILS - STRUCTURES TO PROMOTE VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND SERVICE

As the first Conference grew in numbers, the creation of smaller groups became necessary. The founders were determined, however, to maintain, among all, the original spirit of belonging and membership. As one means of achieving this unity, District Councils were formed. Under this arrangement, all Conferences in a given city or area were brought together through representation and delegate participation. Each Conference President was accepted as an ex-officio member of the city-wide or area District Council. Meetings, at least monthly, were and are recommended.



Caring thru Sharing

HELP! HELP!

Helping is a keyword in every Vincentian dictionary. It describes not only the day-to-day services of the Society but also relationships among members and within the SVDP organization. Mutual helping is the kind of rapport between Conferences and Councils that Council organization is intended to encourage.

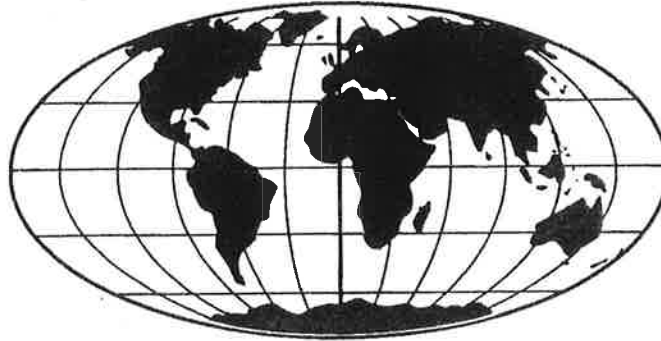
Conferences *give* to the Council their experiences, their ideas, a willingness to assist other needy Conferences and a sharing of responsibility for whatever special works are undertaken by the Council.

Conferences *take* from the Council the knowledge and inspiration of all participants. Because of these insights, they are helped to expand their Vincentian horizons and sense of worldwide responsibility. When an individual Conference faces heavy demands for person-to-person financial aid, the Council, to the extent it is able, offers support from the Common Fund. *Mutual helping* describes well the basic ties between a District Council and its affiliated Conferences.

DISTRICT COUNCILS COMMUNICATE

Letting everyone know what is going on is an important task. It is the responsibility of the District Council to keep the Conference Presidents advised of SVDP notices and activities. It is the obligation of the Conference President to pass that information on to all members in the Conference.

The District Council prepares special and annual reports of Vincentian works. As a responsible community organization, the District Council gives an accounting of its stewardship to the Church, the Community, and, where the structure exists, to its Diocesan Council.



Overseas Help

STANDING COMMITTEES AND SPECIAL WORKS

District Councils help maintain basic SVDP purposes and Vincentian solidarity. They nurture the spirit and practices of Vincentian spirituality; they seek to extend SVDP membership and charitable activities. District and Diocesan Councils promote, organize and direct projects having community-wide aspects.

Recruitment is a paramount and continuing responsibility. It includes the orientation, formation, and training of new Conference members.

Formation requires periodic but regular sponsorship of workshops and programs through which members can become knowledgeable about ways of helping people and community resources.

Youth Work includes efforts to recruit young people into the Society and to meet their special needs.

Networking maintains contacts with public and other private welfare groups.

Domestic and Overseas Twinning establishes partnership ties between affluent and needy Conferences through the National Council.

Stores and Workshops Committee supervises SVDP facilities for the distribution of contributed clothing and household goods.

SVDP Strategic Planning entails study of community welfare problems and of the Society's role in meeting "uncovered" needs.

DISTRICT COUNCILS AND SVDP SPIRITUALITY

Councils are concerned about the spiritual life of constituent SVDP groups. Councils observe the patronal feasts of the Society with religious solemnity. They arrange days of spiritual recollection; they provide reminders to members and Conferences that prayers be offered for Ozanam's canonization and for the sick who petition our founder's intercession. Ozanam Sunday is celebrated on the last Sunday of April in the United States. The Feast Day of Blessed Frederic Ozanam is September 9. The Feast Day of St. Vincent de Paul is celebrated on September 27 or a day close to it that is convenient for the members.

WHEN A COUNCIL DOES ITS JOB

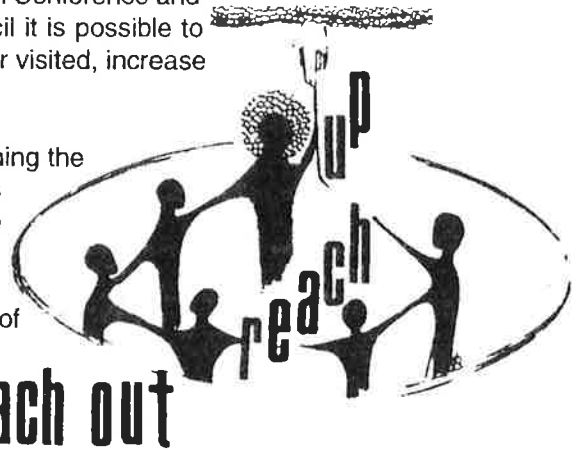
District Councils serve both to preserve the individuality of each Conference and to combine all in a strong union. Through the efforts of a Council it is possible to multiply the number of Conferences, increase the number of poor visited, increase funds collected and the good accomplished.

The District Council promotes unity of direction, while maintaining the autonomy and freedom of its affiliate Conferences. The Council is a protection against the dangers of isolation, of fighting the battle alone. It provides support.

The Society's history makes it clear that, although the core of Vincentian effort is person-to-person on the Conference level, this spirit of charity needs to be sustained

- by the freshness of new encounters
- by the opportunity of meeting with one's brothers and sisters from other areas
- by the creative and spiritual initiatives which are generated when people of good will come together.

This is why the Council is so very important. It can and ought to be a powerful catalyst for SVDP enthusiasm and charitable action and Christian friendship.



DIOCESAN COUNCILS WHAT AND WHY

SVDP Diocesan Councils have diocesan-wide responsibility. Their work is similar to that of District Councils but there are differences. District Councils relate, as a rule, to Conferences in a more restricted geographical area, such as a city, or city district, or county. Diocesan Councils, on the other hand, provide coverage for an entire diocese, including all cities and counties within that Diocese. There is another difference. District Councils minister to Conferences. Diocesan Councils, on the other hand, usually serve District Councils and some very Isolated Conferences within the diocese and, only indirectly, the Conferences that are already associated with their District Councils.

DIOCESAN COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Diocesan Councils have responsibilities in such SVDP endeavors and programs as the following:

- They animate and coordinate the activities of the Conferences and of the District Councils in their diocese.
- They encourage initiatives and strive to bring about the establishment of Councils, Conferences and new works. They cooperate with District Councils in this sphere of activity.
- They provide or help arrange formation and training sessions for Council Presidents and officers.
- They develop, or assist in developing, a diocesan-wide disaster preparedness plan in accord with the National Council Disaster Plan.
- They review and analyze the regular and annual reports of affiliated District Councils.
- They represent the Society before the Local Bishop and in diocesan planning bodies.
- They constitute a principal point of contact between the SVDP National Council and the Society in any particular diocese.
- They publish, if possible, monthly bulletins and distribute these among members and friends of the Society.

NOT ALL DIOCESAN COUNCILS ARE ALIKE

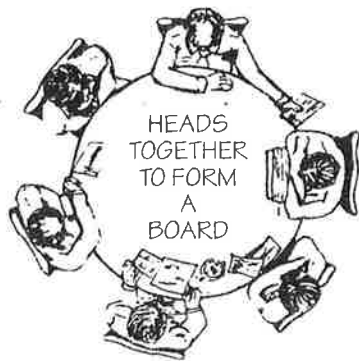
Because SVDP organizational life tends to be dynamic rather than highly formalized, the functioning of Diocesan Councils has not been uniform throughout the United States.

In dioceses where the Society is in full bloom and District Councils have progressively developed, the major task of the Diocesan Council may be to serve as a forum for the regular exchange of ideas and progress reports. In such cases, quarterly meetings of those who constitute the Diocesan Central Council may suffice. At least one general meeting annually for the total diocesan membership is ordinarily scheduled.

In other dioceses, the Diocesan Central Council may be given major responsibility for special works and projects, particularly when these involve considerable staffing and qualified management.

TIPS FROM THE TOP - FOR ALL COUNCILS

THE PRESIDENT ...



As an old manual says, is the first among equals, and, in the spirit of the new Rule, must be the most humble of all. The President is a servant leader. The President must be dynamic and patient, gentle and firm, have the spirit of youth, the wisdom of age, the capacity to lead, and yet implement the decision of "the" Council with which he or she may disagree. Clearly, the President must be a person of prayer, for who could possibly be all this without Divine guidance? The President's leadership must embrace the principles of subsidiary and democracy.

BOARD ...

A Council must have one Vice-President, but really needs two. The first task of a newly elected President is to look for a possible successor and should use the offices of the board to train him/her. In addition to replacing the President when he/she is absent, a Council Vice-President should visit Conferences when asked and specialize in some aspect of Council activities; e.g., recruitment, training, special works, collaboration with other organizations; depending on his/her talent and interest. A Secretary not only records minutes of meetings, but is responsible for correspondence, arranging meetings and other clerical work.

MEETINGS ...

One of the important tasks of a President is to conduct meetings. Anyone can conduct a meeting, but not everyone can conduct a good meeting, and a good chairman draws people to his/her meeting while a poor one repels them.

St. Vincent de Paul numbers, being committed to their vocation, attend meetings better than most; so, if members do not attend meetings they must be dull meetings. A good meeting is:

INTERESTING: It must flow from topic to topic, with adequate time to discuss the problem, without it becoming a bore ... preparation is a must.

INFORMATIVE: Members should depart knowing more than when they came, through the interchange of ideas and methods and the application of the Rule and Spirit.

DECISIVE: Decision making is the basis of most effective meetings. We are a collegiate Society that is a body of equals, and members must feel that they make the decisions and not simply confirm the President's opinion. Whenever possible, all should be invited to express their view, especially the quiet ones. Decisions are often reached by consensus and not by voting. If contention arises, a decision should not be forced. The matter should be deferred for further reflection and raised at a later meeting.

FRATERNAL: The most important characteristic of a Vincentian meeting is the fraternal spirit, for without that the meeting is a sham. The President sets the tone by his/her obvious concern for all the members. The President should be to them what the members are to the poor they visit. Meetings are the most effective form of communication in the Society structure. Councils should time their meetings to conform with other Councils at different levels so that communication flows up and down as well as across. Non-attendance breaks this chain.

VISITATIONS ...

A Council President visits Conferences/Councils as a Conference President visits people. The Council President in visiting a Conference goes both to teach and to learn. He/she goes as a friend rather than a superior, observes the agenda and waits to be invited to speak.

Appreciating that a Conference /Council is almost autonomous except in adherence to the Rule, the visiting President should combine suggestions with support so the fraternal spirit of the association is not damaged. The President should be conscious that there is more than one way of doing things, and perhaps his/her way is not always the best.

CORRESPONDENCE ...

Communication between Conferences and Councils is best made by personal contact. Even the telephone is second best. However, there are many times when the written word must be used: Email, fax, mail.

As the Conference forms part of the Council team, it can only be an effective team member if it has knowledge of the team's goals and problems. Contact must be regular, informative and encouraging. If at all possible, Council Presidents should write to their Conferences monthly. He/she should mention points which arose at the last Council meeting, matters for discussion at the next meeting, items of general interest and, of course, the names of deceased members and benefactors.



Isolated Conferences working alone may be without regular meeting contact. Such Conferences especially should communicate with the National Council regularly, seeking guidance on problems, giving annual reports of activity and on matters of finance.



RECORDS . .

Effective administration requires easy and quick reference to what has gone before, and this means records. A Conference President needs a minute book with provision for details of families served, roll call and general items of information found helpful. A Council President needs this and some files for specific subjects. Suggested files include spiritual readings, formation or training, one for each special work and one for each Conference or Council attached to the Council. These records are best kept confidential in locked files.

Confidential in locked files.

Consult the National Council office for Conference supplies.

RESPONSIBILITY . .

A good administrator is not a dictator, but must be prepared to accept responsibility. A Society President is primarily responsible for his/her members, specifically that they do the tasks allotted to them and that they carry out their accepted tasks.

The strength is in his/her example in that the person's Vincentian spirit is obvious to all and this enthusiasm to help people is contagious.



The effectiveness of a Conference depends on the leadership of its President, and he/she should occasionally be asked by his/her Council President:

- Are the poor being found?
- Are they being effectively helped?
- Has the Conference sufficient members?
- Do they attend the meetings regularly?
- Is the Conference constantly looking for new, especially young, members?
- Is the Spiritual Adviser involved?
- Can the Conference see beyond local needs?
- Is there collaboration with other organizations?
- Is the work of the Conference known to others?

At the District Council level the responsibilities of the President are even more important. Presidents of District Councils that coordinate Conferences are the most responsible officers in the Society. They must:

- Conduct meetings.
- Visit Conferences.
- Install Presidents.
- Arrange formation seminars, prayer, programs.
- Collaborate with other organizations.
- Oversee special works.
- Encourage twinnings and projects.
- Make the work of the Society known.
- Be an effective unit in the National and Diocesan Councils.



SPIRITUALITY ...

As a Catholic organization, the Society is spiritually based, and the spirituality of members is yet another presidential responsibility. While not a trained theologian, the President should lead by example and remind members of the Christian basis of their work while avoiding preaching.

The distribution of good literature has always been a basic spiritual work of the Society and should be encouraged.

Our Rule calls for the participation of a Spiritual Adviser, and it is in this regard the President has the heaviest responsibility. All Conferences and Councils need Spiritual Advisers, and should be prepared to make sacrifices to maintain their support by changing time or place of meeting, etc. In addition, Spiritual Advisers should be made aware of their role and encouraged to fulfill it.

LEADERSHIP ...

Leadership in the Society differs greatly from commerce and industry because of its voluntary nature. Accordingly, members need to be led rather than pushed, and persuaded rather than told.

As the term of office of a Council President is limited to six years, those who accept the responsibility should be prepared to make sacrifices for this short period in order to provide the necessary attention.

It is suggested that Council Presidents give first priority to Council duties after those of their families and livelihood in their term of office.

PUBLICITY ...

It is necessary to publicize the works of the Society for the following reasons:

- (a) those who need help learn where to find it;
- (b) those who wish to join learn where to find it;
- (c) those who wish to help learn how; and
- (d) so that our works will bear witness to Christ.

Annual reports must be compiled by Councils for the information of the National Council and ultimately the International Council General. Regional, Diocesan and District Councils should publish annual reports so that the Church, civil authorities, the community and our benefactors know what has been achieved.

Newspapers, local and Catholic, should be informed of Society events which are taking or have taken place in the area.

Radio and TV are interested in news, and they will often help with an appeal for a special project or objective.

"Open" days for special works are a worth-while publicity venture, whether or not funds are required.

Signs and the National logo on Society buildings should identify the Society with the work, even if the name of the work does not.

Members are not authorized to make public statements on behalf of the Society. Such statements are restricted to the National Council President. Society advocacy positions are made public by the National Council President in consultation with one's Voice of the Poor Committee and consultants.

FOREIGN TWINNING ...

Conference twinings with foreign Conferences should be encouraged, and it would be ideal if every American Conference had an overseas twin. Twinned Conferences must communicate. Councils must approve the twinning of their Conferences and guarantee the financial commitment. Conferences are expected to raise their own twinning money by church collection, social function, Conference funds, etc., and Councils should encourage them to do so.

Council twinings are to assist overseas Councils in their administration. It involves an exchange of ideas, literature, etc., and a variable financial commitment.

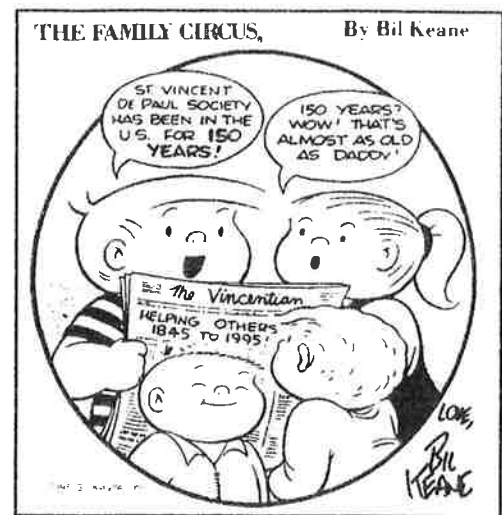
Self-Help Projects are publicized by the National Council from time to time to enable Councils to participate in various foreign projects.

The spiritual aspect of overseas relief should not be forgotten. In some of our twinned areas there is an occasional shortage of Catholic reading matter. Councils and Conferences should be encouraged to ask their twins about their needs.

SPECIAL WORKS ...

Councils are responsible for the management of special works, and special work chairpersons are appointed by Council Presidents after consultation with the Council.

Special works are developed to satisfy needs that arise in the Council area. Council Presidents should regularly consider the services provided in their area with the aim of proposing new special works to their Council should the need be there.



Contracts to buy property or build, should be carefully drawn up in accord with legal requirements and all pertinent building statutes and should have the approval of the District and Diocesan Council Boards.

Existing special works include:

- Stores for clothing, furniture, etc.
- Food Pantries
- Specialized Facilities for Alcoholics
- Criminal Justice Ministries
- Summer camps
- Sheltered workcenters
- Homes for aged; temporary shelters and housing programs
- Institutional Visitations



FINANCE ...

A Council needs a treasurer, a bank account and funds to work with. Its income is derived from dues from Conferences or Councils, income from special works, donations, collections at festival meetings and other money-raising activities.

Expenses include postage, stationery, traveling expenses of Council officers, grants to needy Conferences, Councils and special works, expenses of meetings, twinning payments, central office rent and staff services.

Where there is a store or center within a Council area, it is usual for it to be managed by a committee representing and reporting to that Council. Income resulting from the work should be transferred to the Council on a regular basis.

COOPERATION ...

The SVDP Rule requires that Councils cooperate with other organizations.

Councils should be able to provide speakers on Society works to other organizations and invite outside speakers to Society meetings.

Cooperation should not be restricted to information, but include activity, too. Vincentian Family collaboration is greatly encouraged.

FORMATION AND MEETINGS

FORMATION AND TRAINING ...

The formation and training of Presidents and members are the responsibility of Councils. Members seeking to help those who suffer must be so careful in their attitudes lest they offend. They must be conscious always of the dignity of people and conscious of the need to exercise justice and charity. We offer necessities in justice and luxuries in charity. Because these attitudes need to be learned, seminars or meetings should be held at regular intervals so that members can learn and re-learn them and the techniques of other members who are more experienced.

Presidents need training for their office and Councils should provide it.

Conference Presidents will find the section of this booklet "Congratulations, You Are a Conference President," helpful, and an annual one-day seminar for New Conference Presidents should be arranged by the higher Council.

SUGGESTED AGENDAS ...

FESTIVAL MEETING ...

- Mass
- Opening Prayers and Welcome
- Report by Council President, membership, other society works, finance, etc.
- Report on Special Work, or Formation Talk by member, or
- Guest Speaker on Social Welfare or appropriate topic
- Spiritual Address by Bishop or Spiritual Adviser
- Closing Prayers

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETINGS ...

- Opening Prayers and Spiritual Reading
- Minutes of previous meeting
- Treasurer's Report
- Welcome to new members
- Announcements of interest
- Correspondence - summarized if necessary
- Reports by Conferences and special works (These are not given at every meeting, but staggered over the year.)
or
- Discussion on a new work
- General Business (old and new)
- Address by Spiritual Adviser
- Closing Prayers

*"Let us accomplish charitable works
and in that way we receive the
blessings of the poor, which will
be the blessings of God."*

Frederic Ozanam

*Prayer For Those In
Need And For
The Cause of Ozanam*

God, our Father, you alone have the power to bestow those precious gifts of yours which we rightly call miracles.

If it be your will, be pleased to grant such a gift on behalf of

We humbly ask the you grant this favor so that Blessed Frederic Ozanam may be canonized by our Holy Mother the Church.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.

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