

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



VOICE OF THE POOR GUIDE SPEAKING IN ONE VOICE FOR CHRIST'S POOR

This guide is intended to help Councils of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul speak out for the poor nationally, regionally, and locally. Advocacy activities of the Society must be carefully researched and clearly delineated. It is vital that the Council President is kept informed and up-to-date. Advocacy activities of the Society need to be reviewed by that Council's Voice of the Poor Committee, which is appointed by the Council President. It is vital that the Society speak in one clear and unified voice that is based on gospel values.

Mission Statement – National Voice of the Poor Committee

The Voice of the Poor Committee's mission is to uphold Catholic social teaching by researching, validating, documenting, advocating, and promulgating issues related to the condition of the poor and disenfranchised. (This is done in the vision of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam to help Vincentians live their faith and grow spiritually by acting knowledgeably and credibly as a unified body.)

Voice of the Poor Committee
National Committee of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul
April 2001

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Voice of the Poor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Description	Page
1.	Advocating for Christ's Poor – Our Vincentian voice can make a difference	3
2.	Vincentian Spirituality In Action	4
3.	Voice of the Poor Plan of Action - VOPNET	6
4.	Be Informed of What We Can Do	10
5.	Public Initiative Part One The legislative process	13
6.	Public Initiative Part Two How to work with elected officials	20
7.	Public Initiative Part Three Ways to work with the media	30
8.	Member Initiative Calling Vincentians to action	38
9.	Recruiting Allies in the Community	40
10.	Working Within the Church	43
11.	Reporting on Your Activities	45
12.	Resources	46

1. Advocating for Christ's Poor – Our Vincentian voice does make a difference

You

may be wondering if the Society's involvement in the political process is worth the effort. What can we really accomplish? Will phone calls, letters or visits to elected officials have an influence? We believe our Vincentian voice can make a difference.

Elected officials in Washington, D.C., in our state capitols, and in our city and county governments are there because of voters like us. Their central focus is to respond to voter concerns, and they *need* to hear from us. No input from constituents about issues that are critical to the well being of the poor, is interpreted as lack of community interest or as an issue of little consequence. On the other hand, the more interest generated by constituents, the more likely they will respond!

As members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVDP), we have a voice and an identity, and we are part of a larger faith-based community -- the Catholic Church. Members are homeowners, parents, business owners, and taxpayers who live in the neighborhoods that elected officials represent.

The National Voice of the Poor Committee is involved in identifying opportunities and challenges in legislative and regulatory activity. Nationally SVDP through our elected national president builds effective alliances with other organizations and maintains a national presence with elected officials. But these national efforts cannot begin to make the impression that thousands of Vincentians can make by speaking out together in one voice for the poor.

As Vincentians we know the power that comes from grassroots organizing. All we need to do is look to our Founder, Frederic Ozanam. That small band of students formed just over 165 years ago, today can count 875,000 members in 132 countries spanning five continents. There are 120,000 Active, Associate and Contributing members and approximately 4,464 Conferences in the United States.

Virtually every day they are in session, our elected representatives in Washington, D.C., in our state capitol, and in our city and county governments discuss legislation that affects those whom we serve. Care for the elderly, fair wages, child welfare, the sanctity of life, education, prison reform, nutrition programs, debt relief for third world countries -- all have an impact on the quality of life for many. By educating our representatives and sharing our stories, statistics, and service, we can make a critical and effective difference for those whom Christ has called us to serve.

"Lord help us seek and find the forgotten, the suffering, and the deprived so that we may bring them your love."

■ *Prayer of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul*

2. Vincentian Spirituality In Action

We are one voice and one body in Christ



we love Christ, we must love and serve His poor. Jesus asks that our love for Him extend beyond merely being affected by seeing people in wretched conditions. We are asked to act by taking steps to create positive and effective change. St. Vincent emphasized this when he said that love for the poor must be both “affective and effective.”

In Jesus’ prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are called to action to bring God’s Kingdom to earth. For Vincent and Frederic, action on behalf of justice, and participation in the transformation of the world, were integral elements in living the gospel message because the good news proclaimed by Jesus is only effective if the works of justice, love, and peace are included.

Catholic social teaching provides a framework for action that is deeply rooted in the example and teachings of Jesus. We are followers of Jesus. He is our Savior, who came to “bring glad tidings to the poor...liberty to captives...recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus identifies himself with the “least of these,” the hungry, the homeless, the stranger (Matthew 25:45).

As Jesus’ followers, we are called to act. Like Vincent and Frederic our action must be carefully organized and set on a solid foundation that is based on our Catholic faith. It is vital that we understand Catholic social teachings and the position of the Church. Documents, such as, “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” by the Second Vatican and “Economic Justice for All,” by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, articulate and clarify the position of the Church. There are numerous papal encyclicals, Conciliar documents, and Episcopal statements that we should know about in order to speak intelligently and with one unified voice. These documents are available through a variety of sources, such as, the U.S. Catholic Conference and on the web.

"The challenge is to recognize the disfigured, crucified Lord and, like Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, to raise the consciousness of others to their plight. Contemplation of the crucified Lord cannot remain merely a pious exercise; nor can it be simply meditation on a past event. The Lord lives on in his members. He is crucified in individual persons and in suffering peoples. The call is to see him and serve him there."

-- Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

At the Threshold of the Great Jubilee 2000

To the Nations of the World and All People of Good Will On Behalf of the Poor

We, the international Vincentian Family, following Jesus Christ and his disciple Vincent de Paul, share a deep concern for the suffering of those who are poor.

We recognize these facts and hold these convictions:

- ♥ Every human being possesses a fundamental dignity and deserves respect.
- ♥ Long-existing forms of poverty remain with us: ignorance, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, low wages, sickness, addiction, lack of sanitation, oppression, the ravages of war.
- ♥ New poor and new forms of poverty have arisen in our midst: AIDS, rupture of families, denial of access to technology, environmental pollution, culture of death.
- ♥ Some of these poverties, old and new, are reinforced by the structures of our society.
- ♥ Christ our savior lives and suffers today in those who are poor.
- ♥ Effective love for the poor proclaims the good news that God's kingdom is at hand.

We the international Vincentian Family, invite all people to unite in listening and responding to the cries of those in need. Together we can do what separately we cannot do. Let us open the doors of opportunity by:

- ⇒ Building a culture of solidarity, understanding, and dialog, as we grow in respect for the rights of each person.
- ⇒ Providing the resources for education to every person, regardless of status, race, or gender.
- ⇒ Assuring a living wage to all workers.
- ⇒ Easing the burden of debt for those less able to pay, whether nations or individuals.
- ⇒ Offering to the hungry the food, resources, and skills they need in order to feed themselves and their families.

Then all of us, rich and poor throughout the world, will join our hearts to celebrate the Great Jubilee and join our hands to move forward together in the third millennium.

We are the leaders of some of the principal branches of the International Vincentian Family:

Ladies of Charity, founded 1617, 260,000 members

Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul, founded 1625, 4,000 members

Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1633, 25,000 members

Federation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1734, over 4,500 members

Sisters of Charity Federation in the Vincentian-Setonian Tradition, founded 1809, 7,000 members

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1833, 930,000 members

Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1845, 300 members

Vincentian Marian Youth, founded 1847, 200,000 members

Association of the Miraculous Medal, founded 1905, over 6,000,000 registered members

Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, 27 September 1999

3. SVDP PLAN OF ACTION -- VOPNET



we are to be successful, we need an organized plan that includes: a policy initiative, a public initiative, and a member initiative. The policy initiative establishes the criteria for our action. The public initiative provides methods for effectively working in the community, which includes practical ways to interact with elected officials, other organizations, and the media. The member initiative calls Vincentians to action. Later in this guide we will provide suggestions for encouraging Catholic and community involvement. The focus of this chapter is the Society's policy initiative and action framework.

The Policy Initiative

Every Vincentian needs to understand the Society's priorities and motivation in advocating for the poor. It is important to keep the following policy statement in mind as we consider issues locally, regionally and nationally.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul seeks to maintain the dignity of every human person, most especially the poor, and to improve the quality of life of those in need according to basic gospel values.

Development of an Action Framework

The following section provides a structure for establishing a coordinated and unified Vincentian voice encompassing every Conference and Council in the United States. (A diagram of the action framework and job description is located at the back of this guidebook. While the job description is for the National Voice of the Poor Committee, it may be used as a guide for local councils in the formation of Voice of the Poor Committees.)

VOPNet-USA provides the local link.

This grassroots network links Vincentians locally, regionally and nationally. It also provides a means to link Vincentians to their elected officials, such as members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE

VOPNET-USA is designed to fit into the Society's structural framework, which comprises the National Council, regional groupings, arch/diocesan councils, district councils, and conferences. The objective is to empower Vincentians to interface effectively and provide one unified voice for Christ's poor.

- **Grassroots Involvement is Key.** It is important that each District Council and all isolated conferences form a Voice of the Poor Committee. The chairperson of this Committee is appointed by the District Council President and serves on the District Council's Board of Directors. The District Council's and/or isolated conference's executive director and spiritual advisor serve as at-large, nonvoting members of this committee. The Committee investigates issues of importance to Conferences and Council and provides recommendations to the District Council President. Under the direction of the District Council

President, the committee seeks ways to communicate stories; statistics and service related to the welfare of those in need within their District Council area and based upon targeted conference concerns. The chair of this committee works closely with the VOP Arch/diocese Committee chair. Committee members know local representatives in cities and counties and are informed of the names and contact information of state and national representatives. The committee is also familiar with local media sources in the community. The chair of the District Council's Voice of the Poor Committee serves as a member of the Arch/Diocesan Council Voice of the Poor Committee.

Arch/Diocesan Framework. The chair of each District Council Voice of the Poor Committee serves as a member on the Arch/Diocesan Voice of the Poor Committee. The chair of the Arch/Diocesan VOP Committee is called the Network Coordinator. The Network Coordinator is appointed by the Arch/Diocesan Council President. The Network Coordinator works with District Council representatives to organize Vincentians locally to bring issues related to the welfare of the poor to the attention of appropriate elected officials. Members of the Society may be mobilized for specific efforts in a variety of ways, including phone trees, fax networks or e-mail list servers. The Arch/Diocesan VOP Committee identifies members with special expertise to communicate to legislators. Network Coordinators' terms run in tandem with that of the Council President, and Network Coordinators should be on the governing board of their Council.

- The Arch/Diocesan Voice of the Poor Committee develops relationships with staff members in the home "district" office of their Members of Congress and their respective state government. These members are then in a position to inform and educate both federal and state elected officials about critical issues with specific stories, statistics, and service involving their community. The Arch/Diocesan Voice of the Poor Committee works with the Council Presidents within the Arch/Diocese to organize and mobilize SVDP members to become involved. All regional activity on behalf of the Society in the political arena is coordinated through the Network Coordinator to maximize the impact of each effort.
- Each Network Coordinator serves as their Council's liaison to the SVDP Voice of the Poor Regional Committee. The Network Coordinator is the primary information link to the Regional VOP Committee. It is the responsibility of the Network Coordinator to provide the regional representatives with his/her e-mail address so that information on relevant issues can be communicated and shared in a timely manner. It is also the responsibility of the Network Coordinator to communicate information received from the regional and national VOP committees to the members of the Arch/Diocesan Voice of the Poor Committee.
- It is necessary that each Arch/Diocesan Network Coordinator becomes familiar with other Network Coordinators within the state to which they are a part in order to effectively work for change at the state level. This relationship

can be built via the web (i.e., e-mail, intranet development and sharing within regions), organized face-to-face meetings within the state, and face-to-face meetings at regional and national meetings.

- **Voice of the Poor Regional Committee creates links within states and regions.** The focus of the regional committee is on state and regional issues. The Regional Committee is comprised of the regional representatives on the National Voice of the Poor Committee and Network Coordinators who represent Arch/Diocesan Councils. The chair of the regional committee is the Trustee appointed by the Regional Chair to serve on the Voice of the Poor National Committee. The Executive Director, appointed by the Regional Chair to serve on the National Committee, serves as the secretary of the Regional Committee. Members of the Regional Committee follow issues relevant to the Society and help mobilize members. The Trustee and the Executive Director who serve on the National Voice of the Poor Committee are responsible for keeping the Regional Chair informed of activities conducted on behalf of the Society within the region.
- **National Voice of the Poor Committee** is kept informed of areas of concern within conferences and Councils. The National Committee delineates areas for investigation, researches topics, and puts together position statements. The National Voice of the Poor Committee monitors federal and regional issues that influence public policy. The committee is dedicated to identifying issues and to assist the National President in advocating for the poor through the Society on the legislative and regulatory front. The committee also provides support and training to all Vincentians. Vincentians who are actively involved in the policy initiatives at the "grassroots" level may be asked by the National President to come to Washington D.C. to meet with targeted Members of Congress or federal regulators.
- **Voice For the Poor Award.** Politics in the US is often seen as a big money and special interest mechanism. Those politicians who stand up for the poor are typically unrecognized and neglected by the many lobbyists and political parties. The National VOP Committee will recognize those politicians for their efforts, thus showing them that they are appreciated. It will also exhibit to others that the SVDP organization is behind the poor. The National VOP committee will solicit and receive nominations from each region. An example could be a local politician (e.g. city councilman, assemblyman, member of board of supervisors, alderman...) who fought for a soup kitchen despite pressure from local government and others to do otherwise. The purpose of this award is to provide positive reinforcement to good politicians and to show them that our organization stands with them in their sometimes unpopular and often unfinancially beneficial fights against the system. The ceremony would be part of the National meeting with publicity sent to local and national media. The award recipient would be posted on the SVDP web site. Each region will be responsible for submitting one case study -- a written statement on how this politician made a difference on a specific issue. The purpose is not to

butter up the politician, but to recognize good work for the poor. The Committee seeks a socially active person who is most like a Frederic Ozanam in politics.

- ❑ **Communication** about SVDP policy initiative activities for all members is important. This communication is available to the general membership via the Ozanam News and the US Council's website, www.svdpusa.org.
- ❑ In addition to these information sources the SVDP Voice of the Poor intranet web site, www.voiceofthepoor.org operated by the National Voice of the Poor Committee contains resource materials and other relevant information for use by all Voice of the Poor Committees. A forum section allows members to ask questions, to share experiences and make suggestions. New information on key issues can be e-mailed to the site manager so that information can be posted and shared. Member alerts and position statements are posted on this Web site.

It is highly recommended that Vincentians who are part of this network have an e-mail address and access to the Internet. We need ongoing active communications. This is vital to the success of VOPNET. With such a network we can rally the troops and speak out in one voice quickly and efficiently. We want decision makers, such as elected officials, to sit up and take notice. We can do this by having a consistent, unified voice that speaks in a timely manner. We cannot wait for the mail to arrive and for someone to write, post, and return a reply. With e-mail we have access to instant power because we have the ability to speak out on an issue in mass almost instantly, if we so plan it, or at least within a 24 hour period. We cannot allow ourselves to be powerless! This is the information age and we must grab on and run with the technocrats, or we will be left in the dust. Once the system is in place, we can work to add others in the Vincentian Family to VOPNET. The potential is enormous.

By maintaining well-organized, vigorous activity within each Council that is supported and linked locally, regionally and nationally, we can succeed in making a difference that ultimately results in more effective policy on behalf of Christ's poor.

4. Be Informed of What We Can Do

We

must clearly understand what SVDP can and cannot do by law. Otherwise the 501c(3) status of the Society could be jeopardized.

When Lobbying is OK!

It is legitimate and appropriate for a 501c(3) organization to engage in lobbying activity for the passage of legislation to further its cause, if this activity does not constitute a substantial part of the organization's total activities. A sliding scale of permissible lobbying expenditures based on an exempt organization's total budget [I.R.C. §§ 501(h) (5) and 4911(f)(2)] was enacted by Congress in 1976. The exact amount considered substantial has not been quantified although a few cases suggest that what is insubstantial is somewhere between 5% and 15% of an organization's total activities as measured by time, effort, expenditure, and other relevant factors. Although the IRS does not endorse any percentage, it is safer to be at the lower end of the range. (Refer to *Murray Seasongood v. Commissioner*, 227 F 2nd 907 (6th Cir. 1955) [NOT substantial less than 5% time and effort]; *Herwell v. US*, 500 F.2d 1133 (Ct. Cl. 1974), cert. Denied, 419 US 1107 (1975) [WAS substantial 16-20% of budget].

Lobbying vs. Political Campaign Activity

Lobbying: The act of directly contacting or urging the public to contact members of a legislative body for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation or advocating the adoption or rejection of legislation. [Treas. Reg. § 1.501c(3)-1c(3)(ii)]. Legislation includes any action (1) by Congress, a state or local legislative body; or (2) by the public in a referendum, initiative, constitutional amendment or similar procedure. [Treas. Reg. § 1.501c(3)-1c(3)(iii)].

Political Campaign Activity: The act of influencing the outcome of an election. 501c(3) organizations are strictly prohibited from participation in supporting or opposing candidates [Exempt Organizations Handbook (IRM 7751) § 3(10)1(1)]. Political involvement in election campaigns may cause the organization to lose both its tax-exempt status and its ability to assure donors that their contributions are tax deductible. A candidate is an individual who offers himself or is proposed by others as a contestant for elective public office, whether national, state or local. Even individuals who have not announced an intention to seek election (and who may never become a candidate) can be considered a candidate [TAM 9130008 (April 16, 1991)].

Source: US Catholic Conference. Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations. Feb. 29, 2000.

Political campaign activity for or against a candidate –whether for federal, state, or local campaigns --is strictly prohibited.

In 1987, section 501c(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, which exempts organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul Society from federal income tax, was amended to make it clear that political activity for or against a candidate is prohibited. The IRS may levy fines in the form of excise taxes against any organization violating the “no political activity” provisions. In addition fines may be assessed against staff or volunteer leaders who knowingly made or agreed to political expenditures. The IRS is authorized to halt any violation that it considers flagrant once it notifies the organization of its intent.

If the IRS notice is unheeded, IRS may take the organization to court and immediately levy excise taxes. If in doubt as to what is or is not permitted, obtain professional legal advice. You may also wish to contact the US Catholic Conference, Office of the General Counsel, in Washington, D.C. for information on this subject.

Permitted and Prohibited Activities

The following chart provides a rough overview of some permitted and prohibited activities by a 501c(3) organization. Rules also apply to sponsoring public forums, debates and lectures in which candidates explain their views to the public; inviting candidates to speak at Society events; financial and in-kind support prohibition. The line between permitted and prohibited activities is not always clear. Councils should obtain professional legal advice before proceeding with any activities relating to political campaigns in any manner.

Action	Yes	No
Electioneering Officers, members, and employees as private citizens, not as spokespersons or representatives of SVDP may privately and personally endorse candidates.	THIS IS PERMITTED	The Society which is a 501c(3) cannot endorse, contribute to, work for, support, or oppose any candidate for office.
Educating Candidates on Issues	It is OK to inform candidates of the Society's position on issues, to urge support of your position by candidates, and to ask candidates to pledge support on the record.	
Educating Voters All voter education publications and activities should include a statement of the educational purpose and a disclaimer of any intent to endorse or oppose any candidate or political party.	It is OK to educate voters about the issues and about candidate positions on the issues in an unbiased manner. While "bias" is not defined by the code it would be considered biased action if the organization indicates or implies (1) a candidate agrees or disagrees with the organization's position, or (2) an organization agrees or disagrees with a candidate's position.	
Incumbents' Voting Records	IRS criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting record must not identify candidates for reelection. • Distribution must not be timed to coincide with any election but one of a series of regularly distributed voting records. • Distribution must not be targeted to areas where elections are being held. • Dissemination may be disseminated to only a limited group such as to members or subscribers to an organization's publication [Rev. Rule 80-282, 1980-2 C.B. 178] 	Broad distribution of voting records or other voter education materials that do not cover a wide variety of issues violates the political campaign activity prohibition. [Rev. Rul. 78-248, 1978-1 C.B. 154, Situation 4].
Use of Mailing Lists Mailing lists are considered the property of the Society and as a matter of policy should never be given or loaned to other individuals or groups.	THIS IS NOT PERMITTED	Providing mailing lists to candidates, political parties or political action committees (PAC) on a preferential basis or without charge, or lending lists to the same violates the political campaign activity prohibition.
Nonpartisan Voter Registration/Get-Out-the-Vote Drives FEC requires all materials prepared for distribution in connection with a voter registration drive include the full name of all sponsors [11 C.F.R. § 114.4 c(5)].	Catholic organizations are permitted to sponsor voter registration drives and encourage citizens to exercise their right to vote provided that there is no bias for or against any candidate or political party. Targeting disadvantaged groups should not be objectionable. [Cerry, M., Campaigns, Candidates and Charities: Guideposts for All Charitable Institutions, 19 N.Y.U. Conference on Tax Planning for 501c(3) Organizations (1991), p. 5.13-5.17; PLR 9223050 (March 10, 1992) (grants for registering homeless people to vote did not constitute political activity for private foundation)].	

Source:

US Catholic Conference. [Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organizations](#). Feb. 29, 2000.

5. PUBLIC INITIATIVE PART ONE

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

We

need to be effective in communicating with elected representatives. Step one is to learn how the U.S. Congress, your state legislature, and your city government functions.

Following is a brief overview of the workings of Congress.

There are strong similarities in structure and function for most state legislatures. To obtain information on the legislature in your state and your city and/or county government contact the reference desk at your public library. You may also call your state legislature or local city government's information office.

Congress ABCs

Congress is comprised of two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate. In the United States' two party-system, most elected representatives belong either to the Republican or Democratic parties. The "majority party" in a house of Congress is defined as the party with the most members in that chamber, while the party with fewer members is called the "minority party." The structure of Congress reflects this majority and minority status and plays a central role in the procedure of both chambers of the congress.

Congress has firmly established and detailed committees through the leadership structures. The congressional leaders chosen by their political parties in each Chamber are able to exert tremendous influence over the course of all legislation.

The Congressional session begins on January 16th, of each odd numbered year and continues for two years. This is called a Congress. The year 1789 is the date that the first Congress was convened. Each Congress since then has been numbered sequentially. For example the Congress in session from January of 1999 through December 2000 is the 106th Congress.

House of Representatives

The House has 435 voting members, four non-voting delegates, and one non-voting resident commissioner from Puerto Rico. The four non-voting delegates are from the District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. Non-voting members cannot vote on the House floor, although they can vote in the committees on which they serve. Representatives are elected for two-year terms. The entire House of Representatives is up for re-election every two years.

The **Speaker of the House** has tremendous power – both formal and informal -- presiding over all sessions, exercising considerable influence over House proceedings, voting schedules, and which Representative is recognized to speak on the floor.

The Speaker is responsible for referring bills to committee and for appointing all

members to conference committees. The Speaker chairs the majority party committee. This committee appoints party House members to all committees. It also nominates committee chairmen, who are approved by a vote of that party's members. The Speaker of the House is chosen by a political party vote, and then by a majority vote of the full House.

The **House Majority Leader** wields much influence as well, usually serving as the major spokesperson for the party's legislative agenda. The House Majority Leader works with the Speaker to develop and coordinate the party's legislative platform for that Congressional session. The minority party has an identical position and is called the **House Minority Leader**.

The responsibility of the **House Majority Whip** is to win party support and votes on the House floor for legislation supported by his or her party leadership. Working with the assistance of Deputy and Assistant Whips, the House Majority Whip conducts "head count" votes to gauge the level of support for bills before actual votes are conducted in the House. The leadership uses "head count" votes to influence members who remain undecided. The minority party has an identical position and duties and is called the **House Minority Whip**.

The **House Rules Committee** formally decides when and how bills will be allowed to come to the floor. No such committee is found in the Senate, which relies on its leadership to informally work together to determine such issues.

The Senate

The Senate has one hundred members, being two people from each state, and elected to six-year terms. Terms are staggered so that about one-third of Senators are up for election every two years. Since the terms of office are staggered both Senators from a state are never up for full term election in the same year. A person could campaign for the unfilled term of a Senate seat, but it is always for less than 6 years.

The Senate has a structured leadership. The highest position is the **President of the Senate**, which is constitutionally filled by the Vice President of the United States, who traditionally rarely presides over the Senate. The **President Pro Tempore** is the second highest position. Senators elect the President Pro Tempore, who presides in the absence of the Vice President. This is a somewhat ceremonial position. Frequently different Senators are assigned to serve as Presiding Officer over Senate sessions by the Senate Majority Leader. The members of the majority party elect the **Senate Majority Leader**, whose role is to guide the process of determining the flow of debate and voting over legislation.

The **Majority and Minority Whips** in the Senate have the same functions as their counterparts in the House. An additional function of the **Senate Minority Leader** is to work with the majority leadership to see that his or her party's interests are considered.

How Congressional Committees Function

Committee Chairs wield some of the most important powers in Congress, because it is in the committees where the specific details of the legislation are created. Committees, and their subcommittees, define the law and hear testimony. Although the House and Senate committees cover the same issues, the two chambers deal with the legislation in different manners.

Once bills are introduced, they are referred to committee. It is here that they are researched by staff and debated. In each session literally thousands of bills are introduced, with varying levels of importance. A committee has the ability to bring a bill to a vote quickly or to let it languish. While debating a specific bill, committees hold hearings. These hearings often provide opportunities for expert and public testimony. Committee staff members are responsible for conducting research to determine who are authoritative, informative, and powerful speakers to present to the committee. During these committee hearings dramatic points made can often sway opinion of the committee members.

Examples of committees involved in SVDP issues:

- ❑ House Committee on Agriculture
- ❑ House Committee on Education and the Workforce
- ❑ House Energy and Commerce Committee, and its Health and Environment Subcommittee
- ❑ House Ways and Means Committee, and its Health Subcommittee
- ❑ Senate Special Committee on Aging
- ❑ Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
- ❑ Senate Committee on Finance
- ❑ Senate Governmental Affairs Committee
- ❑ Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources

Each committee has a staff of legal and technical experts who advise legislators on issues. These staff members seek outside sources when doing research. It is important to build relationships with these staff members, particularly those staff technical experts who can understand your issue in-depth. Staff members obtain data on the economic impact of legislation from sources, such as, the U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). Having knowledge on the economic impact of any proposed legislation is essential in order to speak effectively about it.

Several Steps Required Before a Bill Becomes a Law

Step One: The Bill is Introduced. A bill is introduced either by a Member of Congress (sponsor) or a group of Members (co-sponsor). Once a bill is introduced it is assigned a number (with “HR” preceding bills introduced in the House and “S” preceding bills introduced in the Senate) and a name. Then it is referred to a committee, printed, and made available to all legislators and the public. The responsibility for guiding a bill through the legislative process rests with the original sponsor or co-sponsors of the bill. Ideas for proposed legislation and the language in bills are often developed in collaboration with constituents and organizations like SVDP.

Step Two: The Bill goes into Committee. The committee process determines whether a bill is passed, defeated, or ignored. When a committee selects a bill for consideration, the staff begins preliminary research. **This is a critical time for SVDP representatives to be in touch** with committee staff and the staff of legislators, to assist them with important sources of information and expert witnesses. If the bill is recommended for further action, public hearings to hear varying opinions about the bill are generally conducted. Once the hearings are complete, the bill is scheduled for “mark up.” This “mark up” phase in the committee is another important time for phone calls and letters to legislators. It is during this time that the committee discusses the bill, line by line, making any changes agreed upon in committee by majority vote. After the “mark up” is finished, the committee determines whether or not to “report” the bill out of committee in the Senate or House for a floor vote.

The committee issues a report on each bill that it considers. Included in the report are: an explanation of the bill, its implications, and the range of opinions expressed by the committee members about the bill. This is an important report because it is the basis for voting by other legislators not on the committee during consideration of a floor vote.

Step Three: When a Bill is On the Floor. There is a complex set of procedures when it comes to the rules for debate of a bill on the floor. The House Rules Committee determines how a bill is treated in the House. It can designate how amendments are proposed, limit the time of debate on the floor, and control the timing of the vote.

In the Senate, there is no rules committee, so the Senate Majority Leader works informally with other leaders to determine the process for floor consideration. **A good time to write or call the Senator or Representative and/or their staff members is immediately before a floor vote.**

Once a bill has been debated on the floor of the chamber, it is put to a formal vote. If the bill fails, a motion to reconsider can be made by a legislator, although most bills do not survive if they do not pass on the first vote.

Step Four: Introduction of the Bill in Both Chambers. In order for a bill to become law, it must be introduced in both chambers, reviewed by committee in both chambers, referred back to a floor vote and passed in both chambers (with the bill containing identical language) before being sent to the President for signature. This intricate and time intensive process in some cases becomes more intricate. For example, if the second chamber to review the bill passes a revised version of the bill initially passed by the first chamber, then the two passed versions must be referred to a conference committee, which includes members from both the Senate and the House. This Conference Committee then writes a compromise version of the bill for both chambers. Generally Congress votes on bills coming out of conference committees quickly, as this is the culmination of a long process of work by many colleagues. Once both chambers of Congress pass the same version of a bill, it is sent to the President for action.

Step Five: When a Bill Reaches the President's Desk.

The President has several options provided by the constitution.

- ⇒ Sign the bill into law.
- ⇒ Leave the bill unsigned for a certain number of days, after which time it becomes law automatically, without a Presidential signature.
- ⇒ Veto the bill, or certain line items of a bill. Congress can then override a veto by a two-thirds majority in both chambers of Congress.

The process continues after a bill becomes law

Once a bill is signed into law, rules and regulations of how to implement and enforce the new law are necessary – so the process continues. A newly passed bill is usually referred to a particular federal agency to write rules and regulations for enforcement. At this juncture it is very important for SVDP to stay involved as these agencies draft the rules. Public comment periods and public hearings are often held to obtain input for the most effective ways to implement a law. Even for long-standing laws, changes in regulations can have major impact on the services that the poor receive.

Legislative Staff Who's Who

Establish good relationships with all staff members when contacting the offices of elected officials. Staff members are the gatekeepers. They provide access to the elected official and have significant influence on the legislator's schedule, priorities and positions. Staff titles can vary from office to office. Try to clarify titles along with responsibilities. Following is a list of customary titles with brief explanations to help describe the types of staff members found legislative offices.

- ❑ **Chief of Staff.** The position is known as executive assistant or chief of staff. This person is often in charge of all office operations and usually is involved in most political and policy decisions.
- ❑ **Legislative Aide.** The Legislative Aide focuses on specific policy issues, such as welfare or education. Duties include educating the elected official on current developments. Legislative Aides write speeches and position papers, which are given by the elected official. Congressional Senate offices have a team of several Legislative Aids, while the Representatives' offices generally have fewer.
- ❑ **Legislative Correspondent.** The Legislative Correspondent answers letters and calls from constituents from the Senator or Representative's district.
- ❑ **Press Secretary.** This person is the elected official's chief spokesperson to the media.
- ❑ **Receptionist.** The first point of contact in a Legislative office.
- ❑ **Scheduler.** The scheduler makes appointments, and in order to gain access to a Senator or Representative, while in Congress, you will often be referred to this person.
- ❑ **Specialists.** These may include policy analysts, experts, and legal counselors, who focus on single issues, such as health care, education, or foreign policy.

In addition to legislative staff, committee staffs also have various titles and responsibilities. To determine titles, names and roles, contact each committee directly.

Practical pointers when working elected officials and their staffs

- **Patience is important.** Laws take time. The U.S. Constitution was crafted so that it is not easy to create new laws – and that is to our advantage. Creating new legislation should be a careful, deliberative process so that everyone's best interests are considered.
- **Make an effort to build relationships.** Remember the old saying, “You can win a battle but lose the war.” In every interaction with an elected official, a staff member, a potential ally, or a political adversary, that there will always be other issues and another day. In our democratic process, it's never really over. Always be helpful and constructive. Look toward the future and never burn bridges.
- **Understand their needs.** Before every contact, try to visualize what they need to hear, what their point-of-view is likely to be, what their concerns might be regarding the subject to be brought up. Consider their schedule and what else is going on at the time. This will help you prioritize your messages, relate on a personal level, and build a long-term, effective strategy for influencing their actions.
- **Votes count.** Never underestimate your power as a concerned, constituent. The entire political process was set up to serve voters, and you are exercising your right as a citizen. An elected official's term in office is limited. Each Representative must raise money and votes every two years. Each Senator must do this every six years.

The State Legislature

Most state legislatures have strong similarities to Congress, although the terminology may be different. Most have a two-chamber structure, with committees doing most of the work once a bill is introduced. The leadership structure is often similar to Congress and uses the two-party political system.

Differences occur in timing and staffing with most state legislatures having much shorter sessions than Congress. Some legislatures also meet only every other year, and most state legislators hold other full-time or part-time jobs, giving them a significantly different perspective on issues in their jurisdiction. Identifying state legislators who work in social service related fields presents a good opportunity for SVDP members to build relationships.

To find out more about your state legislature, your representatives, the committee structure, and the scheduling, call your state legislature's general information number, or visit their Web site.

6. PUBLIC INITIATIVE - PART TWO

How to work with elected officials

Remember

that elected officials are driven by their perceptions of what their voters want. These perceptions are influenced by a

number of factors, such as:

- √ letters, e-mails, and phone calls received from constituents
- √ media coverage of events and issues
- √ meetings with constituents, lobbyists, and political allies who express their concerns and/or interest
- √ what is said at public forums, such as town meetings
- √ surveys of voters and other research conducted by staff members

For elected officials the reality is that “all politics is local” because that is where their voters are. **Local examples** have more meaning than national statistics. The involvement of **local people and organizations** will get the attention of the official more effectively than a contact in Washington. **Local voters, local newspapers and local TV stations** are far more important to an elected official than party leaders or political power brokers.

This is why it is important to line up members of the Society, leaders in our faith-based community, and the leaders of business and other organizations to speak on behalf of the poor. If members are involved in other leadership positions in the community (e.g. on another Board, a member of Rotary, a PTA officer, etc.) mention that along with your affiliation with SVDP. Include local information in every communication with your elected official.

Think visually. Visual images, such as, a simple photograph showing a need, a video clip, graph, or even a picture drawn by a needy child can capture a story more vividly than a page of text. Use visual images. Attach a photo to a letter. Include graphs in a town meeting handout or in a SVDP newsletter. Post a video clip on the Internet. Identify relevant anecdotes and personal stories then go the extra step and consider how to capture these stories visually.

Maintain the credibility of the Society. Identify and coordinate advocacy efforts at the District Council or Arch/Diocesan level. Focus on specific, relevant issues. It is important that what the Society provides to elected officials and their staffs is accurate and reliable. If elected officials find that they cannot completely trust information provided by the Society, then you, and all your SVDP colleagues are suspect. Do not let passion for the subject matter lead to exaggeration. Work together to make sure that the message is consistent. If asked a question and you don't know, then say so. Promise to get back with more information promptly, and follow through with that promise.

Find out as much as possible about people you want to influence and their

personal links to the Society and the needy. Make a connection through an elected official or staff member's personal or family experience such as with poverty, family sickness, or a family member who is connected to the Society. By doing so you can make your message much more powerful and memorable. Identify these personal experiences. This can tap an emotional nerve and awaken a dormant source of strong support.

Knowledge and preparation is vital. Before making any contact with an elected official, be prepared to answer potential questions. If it relates to specific legislation, know where the bill stands (e.g. is it in committee, awaiting a floor vote, or in a conference committee). Remember that committees may meet to consider bills months before the bill is brought before open session.

Use the media to help carry the message. Daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, TV news, radio and TV talk shows -- all play an important role in convincing elected officials that a specific issue is on the public agenda. Be sure to clip letters-to-the-editor or editorials from newspapers that support your position or human-interest articles that focus on your issue. Then include these in the written information packet you leave behind after a meeting, or attach them to a letter. You can also mention a TV news story or radio talk show that examined your issue to show that it is of interest to a wide range of people. Make the point that the media coverage of the issue will help make the general voting population more interested, and that you can help them stay ahead of the issue.

Know your friends. In addition to recruiting Vincentians to get involved, it is important to establish as broad a base as possible by forming alliances with other groups on specific issues (refer to Chapter 9). Meet to identify areas of common ground and to enlist support in writing letters, making phone calls, sending e-mails and attending public meetings.

Be prepared for opposing viewpoints. Identify the organizations that can mobilize voters against your cause(s). Be prepared to refute their message points by carefully researching issues and validating information. Understand the types of factors that motivate your opposition. Point these out to legislators in a fair, open way.

Tips when telephoning your elected official

There are several reasons to call your representative's office, such as, to urge support of specific legislation, to schedule an appointment to meet, to comment on a recent public statement made regarding a specific issue, or to follow up on a request. While phone calls can be effective if an important vote is imminent, such calls do not have the staying power of a letter. Consider a phone call as a first step, that should be followed up with a more lasting means of contact. This provides guidelines that apply to most situations. (Note: Be sure to contact your Network Coordinator beforehand to ensure that you are complementing other SVDP efforts.)

Be clear about your objective. Know the purpose of your call and what exactly you wish to communicate before you begin. When making your phone call:

- ✓ Ask to speak to the staff member in charge of the specific policy/issue that you are calling about. (Try to obtain the person's name in advance of the call. That way you can ask for the person by name.)
- ✓ Briefly introduce yourself. **Make sure to identify yourself as a SVDP member, and as a voting constituent. Give your credentials and the name of your St. Vincent de Paul Council.**
- ✓ State the purpose of your call concisely. (To comment on a recent public statement, to urge support of specific legislation, to make an appointment, etc.) Be sure to have the key message points prepared in advance, which outline the issues.
- ✓ If you are not requesting an appointment, be clear about where you stand on the issue, and ask that the official support your side. Thank the person for their time. If possible and appropriate, follow up with a letter reiterating your position and thanking the official for his/her time to speak with you. Include a flyer on the work of the Society with the letter.

The following is a script that provides an example of what to say when talking with a policy staff member, once the receptionist connects you. This script is only a sample. It may be adapted to your own speaking style and situation. It is important to be brief when explaining your perspective. It is also important to determine the legislator's current position on the issue and respond accordingly. To close, provide a concise summary that asks specifically for support on the issue, or that requests a meeting.

Sample Telephone Script to Schedule a Meeting

Hello, my name is _____, and I am (a member/president/chairman of ... District or Arch/Diocesan Council from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We serve the needy in (type of setting), I am also a member of (_____) and (_____).

As an active member of the Society involved in legislative affairs, I would like the chance to talk with you about several pressing issues relating to (_____). I have some important information to provide on _____, and I would also like to update you on our service to the poor and to answer any questions you may have. I would like to come to your office and meet at your earliest convenience to introduce myself and provide a short briefing on (issue). I think about 15 minutes would be needed.

Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to meeting you and (name of elected official)

Visiting your elected official

Once your visit is scheduled, confirm the appointment (date, place, time) with a telephone call before you leave for the visit. Make sure you are registered to vote before the meeting. If you have voted for the official, let him/her know that as well. Research the elected official's background. Know in advance his/her committee assignments, voting record, past stand on issues. Prepare a list of key points you want to make during the meeting. Plan to be brief. Expect the meeting to last only about fifteen minutes.

Bring handouts that are factual, easy to read and understood. Think through the political and legislative impact of the issue and anticipate most questions. When it comes to questions you cannot answer, do not make educated guesses; instead tell the staff you do not know but will get back to them, and then get the correct answer and follow up promptly.

Be direct. Ask if they support your issue. You want a direct answer so that you can determine what you need to do to follow up. If you receive a negative response, do not argue. Rather try to determine the reason(s) for the opposition and what is needed to change their minds. Offer to be a resource of information on related issues in the future.

Elected officials represent you and want to know your concerns. Follow up the meeting with a thank you note. A sample "thank you" letter follows. You can E-mail a brief thanks immediately, and also send a written letter to create a double impression.

Sample “Thank You” Letter for Meeting with Elected Official

Dear Senator/Representative _____:

Thank you so much for the time you and (name of staff members attending) devoted to meeting with my colleagues and me. We were pleased to have the chance to inform you about (issue and its importance.)

As members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society we are committed to improving the well being of the needy in American, and we hope you will support us in that effort by supporting (brief re-statement of issue).

(Make reference to any additional information or contacts you are providing with this letter.)

If you or any member of your staff has any questions on (the issue,) please contact me.

Sincerely,

Tips for writing to elected officials

Do not underestimate the power of a letter. The written word can be a powerful influence on elected officials, and they have measurable value. Letters are tangible. Letters can be quoted. Letters last, unlike a fleeting verbal statement. Letter writing can be a strong and efficient way to be heard. In today's computer driven world, E-mail letters may be counted as well because they can be printed out and saved. Get the approval to use the letterhead of your Council or other professional stationery of the Society. Put your name, credentials, address, phone number, fax and e-mail address clearly on your letter. Be brief and to the point covering only one issue per letter. Keep a copy for yourself, and send a copy to your Network Coordinator. Use the official salutations for Senators and Representatives. Maintain respectful formality of titles in the letter.

Senator

The Honorable (Full name)

U.S. Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator (Last name):

If you are writing to state legislators, find out the correct names, salutations and addresses to use by calling your state legislature's information office.

Representative

The Honorable (Full name)

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Representative (Last name):

Remember to put the purpose for the letter at the beginning along with who you are and the bill number if appropriate. Also be sure to give your affiliation with SVDP. Be sure to thank the elected official for any previous support on important issues.

Sample Letter to Member of Congress

Dear Senator/Representative _____:

I am writing to urge you to support _____ -- not only because it could significantly improve the quality of health care your constituents receive, but also because it would _____. (Follow by a brief description.)

In our service to the needy we have found...(statistics, stories). Our members see the needs first hand and.... I've enclosed an additional information sheet that provides more detail.

As a member of The St. Vincent de Paul Society and the (parish, city), I follow closely issues involving policy related to the needy. And as a member who serves the poor, I see first hand the critical role _____ plays improving the quality of lives. The nearly 930,000 members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are committed to helping the needy live healthier lives. As you consider _____, consider the consequences that the passage of such a bill would have on so many lives.

I urge you to vote in favor of extending _____ to include _____.
The issue is not just about saving money. It is about reducing unnecessary pain and suffering to thousands of your constituents.

Thank you very much for your interest in _____.

Sincerely,

Tips for sending E-mail to your elected official

It is important to maintain a formal style in addressing your elected official, even when sending an E-mail. Use of informal style when addressing an elected official is inappropriate. Use the proper salutations. Keep the letter professional. The objective is to be heard and to be seriously considered.

Use formality in salutations, structure, and subject matter just as when you write a letter on your letterhead. Like letters, e-mails can be printed out and saved. The E-mail is easy to copy and send to your Network Coordinator and SVDP Voice of the Poor Committee regional representatives.

Follow up the E-mail, when possible with a written letter on your letterhead because that implies the official endorsement of your organization. (Be sure that the VOP Committee for your Council approves of this and that you have the approval of your Council President.)

How to invite your member of Congress to visit

The old saying that “seeing is believing” can work in your favor. Invite an elected official to see the Society at work in its own settings. Show tangible benefits of serving the poor first hand through the one-to-one work of the Society. Elected officials can be swayed into becoming supporters if they see the service in action, if they hear the stories, if they see the numbers served. These “site visits” have been effective around the country in convincing legislators to support the SVDP policy initiative. Following are some suggestions for success.

- ❑ Check with your Arch/Diocesan Council Network Coordinator to make sure no one else in your area is approaching the same legislator.
- ❑ Gain approval from the appropriate people in your Council.
- ❑ Check your Council’s schedule to determine any conflicts.
- ❑ Know the schedules of key members and supporters who will speak in support of the issue, so they can be available for the site visit.
- ❑ Plan ahead! Call your elected official’s office to invite her/him and to determine when she/he will be in your area.
- ❑ Coordinate with the appropriate staff contact and the scheduler. Aim for about one hour, but determine the length of time the legislator can commit and plan accordingly.
- ❑ If the legislator cannot attend personally, pursue a site visit with staff members. Staff can carry substantial influence.
- ❑ Follow up in writing, confirm by telephone, and offer to answer any questions in advance.
- ❑ Provide an agenda well in advance of the visit. A sample agenda follows.
- ❑ Notify all staff at your organization of the visit several days in advance, so that everyone can be prepared.
- ❑ Call the day before to confirm one last time.
- ❑ Plan to take black-and-white photographs of the visit for use in newsletters and the media.
- ❑ Be flexible! Legislators have extremely busy schedules and many last minute changes.
- ❑ After the site visit, write a follow-up letter thanking the legislator and staff for coming to your place of work.

A site visit from a Senator, U.S. Representative, or state legislator can present an opportunity for media coverage. Consider arranging for television or newspaper reporters to accompany this visit. Discuss this carefully with the Council President and others who will be involved. Obtain the appropriate SVDP approval before sending out invitations to the press. Evaluate the benefits. If it is decided that this would be appropriate, you should also obtain approval from the elected official's office before proceeding, and work closely with his or her press secretary to coordinate.

Sample Agenda for Official Site Visit to Special Works Facility

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Who Should Attend; What to Plan</u>
9:00	Welcome Greet visitors at the front door	(Council President, Exec. Director of the Society, key Vincentians, and key staff). (Proceed immediately to service to the poor areas)
9:10	Special Works Area #1	(Key staff with Vincentian committee chair lead tours; explain roles and procedures. Show how poor are served. Allow time for Q & A, speak with pre-selected poor, if possible.)
9:30	Special Works Area #2	
9:50	Special Works Area #3	
10:00	Conference Room	Wrap up, more Q & A, thank for visit.

Follow up after the visit

Once a relationship has been established it is important to stay in touch. Look for ways to become a trusted source of information related to the poor. Respond promptly to acknowledge the visit. There are many ways to follow up after a visit.

- Promptly write thank you letters for meetings and site visits.
- Acknowledge support when an elected official speaks out favorably on your issue or votes in committee or on the floor by writing, calling, or e-mailing.
- Attend a campaign fundraiser and bring along as many colleagues as possible when an elected official has been especially supportive. Make your presence known at the fundraiser.
- When new information supporting SVDP positions is available, send it and follow up with a phone call.
- If you see a letter-to-the-editor or editorial piece in your newspaper supporting the SVDP position on an issue, clip it and send it along with a letter.
- Professional studies from respected sources can be used effectively. If you see a reliable and valid study -- that supports an issue, send it to the elected official along with a brief letter in which you explain the implications. Use personal, local examples to illustrate the point.
- Be creative! Look for opportunities to stay in touch.

Get SVDP members involved

Every contact does count. Every letter, every phone call, every contact creates a stronger perception that the Society is a force to be reckoned with. At key times in the legislative process, such as when a bill is initiated or when a committee will vote, or final passage is at hand, it is necessary to involve the general membership. This is a tangible way for members to voice their concern for a specific issue and to stand up and be counted with the poor.

Getting members involved at key junctures helps to multiply impact. When the staff of an elected official receives several letters or calls on a topic, they take note. When they receive hundreds or thousands, they know it has become an issue they must confront. In these cases quantity does matter.

A notification procedure, e.g. phone tree, e-mail tree, handouts, or meetings, should be established which will alert each Conference member that group action is now required to support or oppose relevant issues effecting the poor. Information should be provided which informs the members about the key elements of the issue, what action is desired that they take, and the time frame that action is required. Postal or e-mail addresses for the appropriate legislators, or easily obtainable references or e-mail links, should be given to those requested to take action. A "sample: letter or statement in support/opposition to a specific piece of legislation is also helpful. Note: Form letters should not be copied verbatim by everyone or it may be considered a group pressure tactic and will probably be ignored – use your own words. Follow up to the membership with personal phone calls and contact to encourage participation and to express the importance of taking individual action.

Remember that the goal is to influence legislators that the public is concerned. Dissemination of this information by approved methods, to others in the parish/community, may result in many others also taking up the cause.

Sample Alert

This is a special SVDP legislative alert for Monday, January 29, 2001

Congress is back in session, and the Senate is likely to take up floor action this week on S1234, the FY 2002 Food for the Poor Act.

Sen. Joe Smith's staff confirmed to us this morning that Sen. Smith will offer a floor amendment to append his dairy supplement bill (S3001) in its entirety to the Food for the Poor Act.

S3001 would provide all state Medicaid recipients with supplemental dairy products.

Sen. Smith proposes to fund this initiative by using the rising budget surplus, which could subject the amendment to a budget point of order requiring 60 votes for approval. Thus, there could be two separate votes concerning his amendment: one to waive a budget point of order that may be raised against funding it from the surplus, and (if that passes with 60 votes) the second would be on the amendment itself.

Please contact your state's two senators and urge them to:

1. Vote to waive any budget point of order concerning Sen. Smith's amendment, and
2. Vote FOR the Smith dairy supplement amendment of the Food for the Poor Act (S1234)

Because of the short notice, it is important to phone or e-mail your senators as soon as possible. This could be one of the most critical food supplement issue votes this year, and we urge you to have your spouses, children, relatives and friends participate as well. If you are a Council or Conference officer, please help get the word out to each of your members.

You can find Senate e-mail addresses at www.senate.gov/contacting/index.cfm.

To phone, you may use the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask the operator to connect you with your senator's office. A suggested message for your senator is provided below.

Suggested message for senators (If writing, please use your own words.)

The FY 2003 Food for the Poor Act (S1234) will come to the Senate floor soon, and Senator Smith will offer an amendment to ensure that the government provides supplemental dairy products to Medicaid recipients. His amendment would pay for this care from the growing government surplus, and this may require waiving a budget point of order. I want my senator to vote FOR the Smith dairy supplement amendment and to vote to WAIVE any budget point of order concerning the Smith amendment.

7. PUBLIC INITIATIVE PART THREE

Ways to work with the media

The

media is important because it is the primary means of disseminating information to the community at large. Work through your local print and television media to promulgate SVDP positions. Through the media you can promote SVDP positions with on a variety of issues to voters in your area. Obtain local coverage on issues related to the poor to influence elected officials, sway public opinion, and highlight the work of the Society

The objective of public relations is to win public opinion so that the public sees things the same way you do. When an important issue relating to the poor comes up, an effective public relations program gives you a head start on winning support for your viewpoint and makes it easier for opinion leaders and the public to side with you.

Media Relation Guidelines

Be brief. Get to the point quickly when approaching journalists on the telephone. Don't expect a relaxed, friendly conversation. Many journalists may appear abrupt when they are on a tight deadline, but once you build a relationship, future conversations will be more comfortable. Avoid deadline time; ask if it is a convenient time to talk and offer to call back if not.

Know whom to contact. Most large newspapers and television markets have reporters who are assigned to cover specific beats, while the smaller markets have general reporters who cover a number of issues. At television stations, often a producer of a particular news show is the person to contact, or sometimes an assignment editor. Call each media outlet to determine who is most appropriate. Check, with your local library to see if they carry the latest media directories in their reference section. Such directories will give you contact names and areas of specialty. You can also ask your Diocese press office, local Catholic newspaper, or nearby non-profit organization to share a media list with you.

Do your homework. Do not contact a reporter or producer until you are familiar with the subject matter he or she covers, the context, and other related stories that have been done recently. Invest the time in getting to know the media you are approaching. Many publications are now available via the Internet and have their own pages with search engines of articles recently published. Fish around and see what you can find. Local libraries also have the publications in hardcopy as well as online. Use the library's computers to do a search of what is new, who has published what, and topics recently covered by the publication. Generally the librarian is more than happy to show you how. Television stations also have web pages and may also have summaries of the latest news reported.

One spokesperson. A Council President or designate is the only person authorized to speak for a Council. Having one contact point also makes it easier

for reporters to know whom to contact and insures the Society's views are consistently represented. However, if the Council President is not current on the topic to be covered, he or she should seek the immediate assistance of someone who is. A reporter will quickly pick-up on uncertainty or lack of knowledge and considerably discount your information or not use it at all.

Know what is newsworthy. Watch the local news, read the daily paper and listen to local radio to see what kind of stories are covered. Generally, they are very strong human-interest stories, issues that impact many people, or involving the downfall of a local official. The media thrives on conflict and animosity, not on "nice" stories. Attend a "media day" in your city. These are seminars in which reporters discuss the kinds of stories they are interested in. They can be very enlightening.

Respect a reporter's expertise and limitations. Reporters cannot be experts on everything, that's why they are talking to you. They are good at gathering information, synthesizing it and presenting it in reasonable form. Most try very hard to get the facts straight, but deadline demands can mean ideas are not presented with all the clarity you may have. If a reporter does make a factual error, send a letter to the editor -- most reporters will welcome the correction if done in a respectful manner.

Establish relationships with individual journalists. Let them know you are a source of information on issues related to the poor in the community. Give examples of issues, which affect the poor locally with some statistics. Create angles of interest to the reporter.

Enlist the support of "third-party" supporters in your community to assist with media relations to show that interest in the issue is broad based. For example, ask someone that has been helped by the Society if they would be willing to tell their story to a reporter (Always ask in advance and allow the person to say no without any pressure.. Do not force anyone to speak out if they do not feel comfortable doing so.) Another option is to write a letter-to-the-editor in support of your position on a specific issue.

There are many ways that you can encourage media to cover key issues. Send out a news release with a newsworthy local story. Write a letter "pitching" a story to a TV station, newspaper, or local magazine, including background information. Publicize a visit to a Special Work from an elected official. Write a letter-to-the-editor. Write an "op-ed" (opinion-editorial) piece to a newspaper. Visit an editorial board meeting, many newspapers have formalized programs for you to do this.. Arrange for a media visit to a Special Works Facility. Listen to call-in radio shows that cover current news, and call in to voice your opinion.

The benefits of issuing a news release

Well-written news releases can generate significant benefits in convincing reporters or television producers to cover stories. Look for opportunities to issue

news releases. For example, major holidays are a good time to show the Society in action and to explain that the Society serves the poor all year and not just during the holidays. When Vincentian representatives visit a legislator or a legislator visits a special works facility, this provides an opportunity for the media to report on concerns affecting the local community and to tell the SVDP side of the story. There are also human-interest angles, which emerge from Vincentian activities (e.g. youths serving the needy, shelter services, food distribution). Keep the following tips in mind when writing a news release.

- √ **Write a gripping headline.** In the first paragraph answer the questions: who, what, why, when, where and how. Keep your lead (first) paragraph to no more than 40 words.
- √ **Write in the third person; keep it brief and to the point,** usually one to two pages in length.
- √ **Make the opening statement strong.** Get the attention of the journalist.
- √ **Include important quotes** in the second or third paragraph to tie the story quickly to individuals who live in your area.
- √ **List a contact name and telephone number.** See if they will accept news releases via e-mail.
- √ Include extra information in an accompanying **fact sheet or backgrounder.** Keep the background brief.
- √ Make sure that your **media list is up to date** with specific names. (Call each media outlet at least once per year to update all your information. Reporters, editors and others appreciate the effort you make to get their names spelled correctly, know who to contact with what kind of story, etc.)

How to write a journalist

Begin with a simple letter with accompanying background materials to introduce VOP to the media. Put the issue in context. Describe the Society, who is served. Establish yourself as a source of information related to the poor. Offer any human-interest angle you can create. (Remember that we always maintain the dignity of those we serve. We do not invade individual privacy. We do not give our names, addresses, of those whom we are helping. Before including anyone in any media event, it is important to obtain approval in advance.)

Sample Introduction Letter to the Media

Dear _____:

While the Housing Commission on _____ is examining the housing crisis for limited income parents with children, Congress is considering legislation in the current session that will have an immediate effect on their ability to stay housed.

In our service to the needy we visit _____ families. Last year that totaled _____ children. What our members are finding is _____.

As a (local area) member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, I work to provide emergency assistance. Emergency assistance is the service a Vincentian provides. We begin by visiting with a family one-on-one, listening and assessing the needs, followed by seeking ways to serve. A member may consider a range of factors including age of the children, economic condition of the family, health situation, other specific needs. The home visit plays a major role in determining how a family can be helped.

Members care about their neighbors in need and are often the last line of hope open to families in desperate situations. They dedicate on average xx hours a month to service. Last year members visited xx families in xx city. They have a pulse on the needy. They know who they are and they know the concerns.

Unfortunately, there is no consistent pattern of being able to serve families in crisis because each family has their own special situation. In a home visit, services are generally based on the ability of the local group (or conference) to assist. If the need is rent assistance, often the conference does not have the resources to help. However, in establishing a rent assistance program area wide, the members are better able to assist families. When families are forced out of their homes, everyone loses.

As the _____ debate heats up, I am sure that your (readers/viewers) are interested in knowing about this important issue. I have enclosed several background pieces that may be helpful. As you cover the progress, I would be happy to provide you with more information, to connect you with others who can provide additional points-of-view, and to invite you to see the situation first hand.

I will contact you shortly to discuss this important topic. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me at (phone number).

Sincerely,
 (Name, Society of St. Vincent de Paul
 (Affiliation))

Generating Publicity about an Event

Use the following basic steps as a guide when publicizing events, such as, an on-site visit by an elected official, or Vincentians receiving recognition in the community, issue a media alert (also known in some parts of the country as a Note to Editors).

- ✓ Fax the alert at least one week before the event.
- ✓ Re-fax the day before the event.
- ✓ Follow up with a phone call the day prior to your event (or early on the morning of your event) to ask if the alert was received and if they plan to cover it. This serves as a reminder as they are scheduling on-the-spot assignments.
- ✓ Highlight the names of newsworthy people who will be attending.
- ✓ Explain why the event would make a great story or photo opportunity.
- ✓ Include contact name, phone number and directions to the event if necessary.

After the event, draft a short news release that outlines when and where the meeting took place, attendees, and what was discussed. Send a photo with caption if possible.

Sample Format for a Media Alert

Affiliation/organization

Address

Date
MEDIA ALERT

Contact name

Phone number

Subject: (Describe event in a brief paragraph)

Date:

Time:

Place:

Individuals available for interviews

(List the names & affiliations of newsworthy people who will be in attendance)

Consider: (Make a key statement regarding the event — something that will grab their attention)

How to write a letter-to-the-editor or an editorial piece

The key to editorial pieces is that they need to be timely. Immediate response to events such as an article that appeared in the newspaper, remarks made by an elected official at a public event, or activities on Capitol Hill or in the state capital is required if you hope to get your opinion printed. An editorial or letter-to-the-editor expresses a call to action or cites an issue or situation that needs attention or change.

- ✓ Look at the editorial section of the publication before writing an editorial piece. See what types of topics are covered, how similar pieces are written, and the average length of letters that are printed.
- ✓ Contact the publication. Ask about specific guidelines for letters-to-the-editor or editorial pieces.
- ✓ Develop a strong news angle or a local angle, with examples of real people who are affected.
- ✓ Include your name, title and affiliation if you are authorized to write on behalf of your Council — speaking for a group carries more weight. (A Council President or his/her designated appointee is the only one authorized to speak for the Council.)

Sample Letter-to-the Editor

Dear (Editor's name):

Everyone agrees that the future of _____ is in jeopardy, while very few agree on how to fix it. While the _____ Commission on _____ and leaders in Congress investigate ways to fix the system, it makes sense to focus on solutions that save money over the long run and also improve the quality of life of the poor.

_____ is one solution. The annual report of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, shows that _____ (families, children, adults) requested _____ assistance. If people who need help can get access regularly without having to worry about how they will pay for it, they can become self sufficient.

It's time to look at all possible solutions that more families can be assisted and Americans—rich and poor – have a decent quality of life. _____ is a solution that will bring us closer to this goal.

(name)

Society of St. Vincent de Paul (Council)

What is an editorial board meeting

An editorial board meeting provides the Society with an opportunity to meet face-to-face with editors, and to personally provide detailed information and to explain a position on an issue. This is an opportunity to specifically request that an editorial be written about a specific issue of concern. Call ahead to learn the procedure for requesting an editorial board meeting. Contact the editor or deputy editor directly to schedule a meeting. Prepare clear and concise background materials to distribute at the meeting. Schedule only one meeting per newspaper.

How to request an editorial board meeting

Before making the contact, review other editorials by the publication to get a sense of the publication's style and viewpoints. Get a perspective of their position on related issues. Try to mention another related editorial you have seen in their newspaper.

- ✓ Choose your timing carefully to try to encourage coverage of your topic of interest. For example, tie it to a hearing or vote on Capitol Hill, and convey a sense of urgency to the editor.
- ✓ Be prepared to provide additional names of third parties and their affiliations that would ideally attend the meeting, such as other Vincentians and key staff members.
- ✓ Brush up on your "talking points" before your call so that you are prepared to answer questions and to express clearly why such a meeting would be beneficial for the publication to hold.

If the board indicates interest in meeting with you, contact the Network Coordinator in your area and the Regional VOP Representatives so that they can assist you with additional information.

How to conduct the editorial board meeting

1. Begin with an opening statement that strongly states your position.
2. Back up the statement with supporting facts — be brief and to the point. Make sure that what you say is correct. Be assured that journalists love to check facts!
3. Be open and invite questions.
4. Give a concise closing summary explaining why you are seeking the publication's support. This should highlight the impact that a specific issue can have on their readers and why they should take a stand on it.
5. Prepare a brief handout, which highlights the key points you are making.

Rapid response to media coverage is needed

Take advantage of opportunities to establish a relationship with the media. Respond to recent media coverage on issues related to the well being of the poor. Any time you see or hear a news item on TV, radio or in print, contact the reporter to complement them on the stronger aspects of the story and to suggest follow up ideas, provide additional information, and offer yourself as a resource. This can cover the gamut of SVDP policy issues, including: any change in what is commonly thought of as the "welfare system," including WIC, food stamps, and other programs or issues relating to the needs of children, families, or older Americans. This is a simple and effective way to build rapport with journalists. Contacts made now can be helpful when it may be needed later.

More media tips

Keep in mind that the various media have their own styles, rules, and terminology. Before making contact, consider these general rules:

TV producers want visual impact, drama, good human interest stories that portray personal triumphs and tragedies. Children, families, and older Americans are helpful in getting television coverage of an issue. Television journalists are generally more interested in the personal, human-interest side of a story than in the policy issue or the broad, societal impact. But for more in-depth discussion on issues, remember that many TV stations have public affairs talk shows in addition to the daily news programs. Watch these shows to understand their format, and then call the producer to suggest a potential line of discussion and experts to appear on the show.

Local talk radio shows may be interested in issues relating to the poor. Consider pitching a prison ministry issue, along with selected experts, to a local radio station talk show host producer. Local radio news reports usually focus on major, breaking news of the day that can be summarized in 15 seconds or less; they are not always good targets for complex issue stories.

Newspapers and magazines are excellent for covering the complex issues that the poor face. Make it your business to be familiar with the key editors and reporters for your newspaper, and keep track of what and how they report so that you can respond accordingly. Magazines such as a city or state lifestyle magazine may be an option for you, but most magazines of this type are monthly and have long lead times. Plan months ahead if you hope to obtain magazine coverage. In addition, it may be helpful to point out to the appropriate editor any controversy in your issue, and personal, human-interest stories as well.

"The question which is agitating the world today is neither one of the form of government nor of persons; it is a social question. It is struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much; it is the violent clash of opulence and poverty, which is shaking the ground under our feet. Our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between those two camps in order to help to accomplish through Charity what Justice alone cannot do."

-- Frederic Ozanam

8. MEMBER INITIATIVE

Calling fellow Vincentians to action



a SVDP VOP committee member you are in a perfect position to recruit others to become involved. Here are several things *you* can do to get others mobilized to support important issues relating to the well being and dignity of the poor:

- ❑ **Talk to conference members about important issues** and explain how the outcome of these issues will ultimately affect the well being of the poor.
- ❑ **Attend meetings of your local SVDP Voice of the Poor Committee** and ensure that everyone attending is apprised of the issues. Approach people in the group and individually to take a specific action. Ask them to ask Vincentians who are not present to do so, as well. Keep involved.
- ❑ **Ask Vincentians to participate in a phone tree, fax tree, or an e-mail list** to hear about, and act upon specific opportunities.
- ❑ **Ask Vincentians what *they* would like to do to participate.** Let them match their own skills and interest with SVDP grassroots activity. Does he like to write? Ask the member to draft monthly grassroots activity updates, or letters to SVDP members encouraging support. Is she a news hound who can identify every local news anchor and format? Have this member compile and update media lists and make media contacts. Let each person gravitate toward a task that they find appealing.
- ❑ **Through the VOP committee create brief flyers and post them using Vincentian publications, web sites, etc.** The flyers can explain an issue, announce a meeting, or urge Vincentians to write letters or make phone calls.
- ❑ **Keep other Vincentians interested once they have agreed to get involved!** Provide frequent updates via e-mail or fax, citing the importance of their phone calls and letters. If possible, tabulate the number of phone calls, letters, and other contacts that have been made and include it in your updates. Consider setting numerical goals for numbers of letters, and challenge your colleagues to help reach the goal. Be sure to thank everyone for their efforts at every opportunity, and ask for more ideas.

If Vincentians believe that influencing public policy is unrealistic, remind them that every elected official responds to voters, and that organized, vocal voters have the best chance of influencing policy. Reassure Vincentians that it is easy become involved. Anyone can make a phone call, write a letter, or send e-mail.

Ten simple ways Vincentians can become involved

1. Educate yourself on the issues and the Church's social teachings on the issue, so you can talk intelligently to a wide range of people.
2. Make sure you clearly understand the Society's position on the matter so that Vincentians speak out in one unified voice.
3. As a concerned individual, personally call your elected officials. Write a letter to your elected officials.
4. Offer to serve on your Council's Voice of the Poor Committee. Work with the Committee to arrange or attend a meeting with your elected officials or staff.
5. Assist your Council's Voice of the Poor Committee in arranging for an elected official to visit your Council to see Vincentians at work first hand.
6. As an interested individual personally attend a fundraiser for a candidate.
7. Write a letter-to-the-editor or an op-ed piece for the newspaper.
8. Work in cooperation with your Council's Voice of the Poor Committee to enlist allied individuals and organizations in working together on specific issues affecting the poor.
9. Attend SVDP special sessions at the Annual Meeting and special workshops.
10. Enlist other Vincentians to get involved.

9. RECRUITING ALLIES IN THE COMMUNITY

The more

community support we garner in our position, the better our chances of winning legislative support. Potential allies will vary depending on the specific topic, but consider contacting local affiliates of the following categories of organizations:

- Professional associations and service providers in the community, such as local food banks, crisis centers, immigration services, homeless groups may have positions on certain issues that complement SVDP positions. Within these organizations, consider specialty groups if they are appropriate to your issue.
- Advocacy groups for the poor such as the US Catholic Conference, Catholic Charities U.S.A., Catholic Relief Services, etc.
- Consumer groups, such as American Association of Retired Persons, National Consumers League, and Families USA

The best approach is to work through your own members and contacts, who may be members of these groups – they can take the issue to their governing body to endorse getting involved in your effort. Be specific in your request, so that they can respond on a timely basis. Ask them to take one or more of the following actions:

- Have an SVDP member, perhaps the Network Coordinator or a Council VOP committee representative in your area, make a brief talk at one of their regularly scheduled meetings to outline the issue and why they should be concerned.
- Have the organization write a letter representing their entire organization to targeted elected officials, or have members write individual letters. The most important thing to remember is that the most effective advocacy messages are simple and personalized.
- Have the organization write a letter of support to SVDP expressing their endorsement of the SVDP position on the issue.
- Make phone calls during a specified time frame to elected officials to support your position.
- If appropriate, have a leader of an allied organization participate in a meeting with an elected official set up by a member.
- Encourage members of the organization to attend selected candidate forums to support our position. It is important to build relationships and rapport with legislators.

- Help build the Society's network by introducing colleagues within other organizations who may be potential allies.

If you do not have a personal contact at a targeted organization, begin by making a phone call or writing a letter. Introduce yourself, your credentials and affiliations, then layout the issue briefly and explain its importance to the targeted organization. Ask to make a brief talk at an upcoming meeting to address their members.

Sample outline for a presentation to a potential ally organization

Introduction: Who are you. What are your credentials, affiliations, area of service, membership in SVDP. Provide any other relevant information about yourself. Provide a brief explanation of the Society.	1-3 minutes
The issue: Explain the current status of the issue, potential changes and what impact they would have, what the desired policy outcome should be, how we can achieve that, the timeframe	5-7 minutes
What they can do: Tell them what they can do to help. Give options for how they can become involved and ask for specific actions.	2 minutes
Conclusion: Refer to handouts for more detailed information. Question and answer period. Thank them for the opportunity.	2-3 minutes
TOTAL	10-15 minutes

Take extreme care in choosing whom to partner with

While it is important to work with others, at the same time we must be careful what we advocate for, who we advocate with, and how the Society's name is used. First and foremost, it is vital that the activities of the Society are in sync with the social teachings of the Church. We are a Catholic lay organization. Our Founder, Frederic Ozanam, was a defender of the faith. We cannot separate our Catholic beliefs from our actions. They must be one and the same.

Emphasis must be placed on the sensitivity of joint advocacy (support by two or more organizations) vs. Individual advocacy (support by a single organization). Individual advocacy on issues is always acceptable because the SVDP name is never combined with other organizations. Joint advocacy requires compatibility on both issues and values, and there are some organizations with whom it would not be in the best interest of the Society to partner with under any circumstance. It is essential that we be thorough and deliberate in choosing joint advocacy partners.

When working in joint advocacy, support must be based on an issue-by-issue basis. We cannot permit our name to be given or used without knowing what it is specifically used for. There are many good groups with whom we can find common ground, but remember there are also values that we cannot bend on. For example, we may work together in advocating for improved health care for the needy but we cannot advocate abortion or euthanasia, which other organizations might consider OK. It is important to be very issue specific.

We absolutely cannot permit the SVDP name to be given, used, or published

without our full knowledge and understanding of what is entailed. It is recommended that Councils establish specific, carefully thought-out guidelines and an approval process be established with checks and balances related to the use or release of the SVDP name.

Also be wary of outside groups who seek permission to distribute their “voter education” materials through the Society as the issues covered in these materials may not illustrate the range of issues of importance to the Church. Furthermore when it comes to “voter education” materials, the content, format and presentation may not satisfy the requirements of section 501c(3) that are applicable to Catholic organizations as the organizations who prepare these voter education materials may not be section 501c(3) organizations and not subject to its political activity prohibition. Your Council may wish to consider adopting a policy against distribution of any voter education materials that have not been approved and made fully available by the National Council. Otherwise, it is recommended that you consult with your Council’s attorney before agreeing to distribute any voter education materials prepared by outside organizations.

The Society has a long history and our name has value. We cannot permit anyone to dilute what we stand for or place ourselves in a situation where our motives and actions become questionable. We know who we are (children of God). We know what we stand for (life, dignity, fairness, honesty, truth). We know who our example is (Jesus). We must be impelled to action based on His love. There can be no other motive.

Ask those we serve for support

In addition to asking organized groups for support, consider approaching individuals whom you serve who you believe will be motivated to become involved. The poor can be very strong advocates, creating dramatic, vivid images of the real meaning of the policy under discussion. Naturally, approaching someone whom we serve to come forward publicly must be carefully considered on a situation-by-situation basis and must be treated with sensitivity. Recognizing the confidential nature of the relationship, each SVDP member must individually decide whether or not it is appropriate to ask others to assume this role and carefully make sure that the dignity and value of the individual is always maintained.

Keep allies involved

Once you have recruited an organization or individuals, keep them informed. Consider putting them on a phone tree, fax tree, or e-mail as you would SVDP members. Let them know the results of their efforts, and thank them at every opportunity. Think of the relationship as a long-term one, and look for chances to support their issues as well.

10. WORKING WITHIN THE CHURCH

While

the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is lay society within the Church, it readily does not fit into the usual structures of a (arch)diocese. However from its foundation its goal was to be a public witness of and for the Church and called itself to collaboration and cooperation with the Church and bishops. In fulfillment of that goal and call, the public activity of the Society must always be in rhythm with the Church. This is especially true of the Society's activity for the Voice of the Poor initiative and advocacy.

The tragic way for the Church to waste or weaken its prophetic voice is to have one or more elements in the Church speaking a divergent message or a divided theme. Therefore Vincentians are required to know the structures, means and the goals of the Church's public positions in advocating for the poor. The Church, through its structures, is active at the local, state, and national level as well as international.

Some helpful hints:

- ◆ The president of the conference and each subsequent council is the internal structure of the Society that must be followed in promulgating the Voice of the Poor program.
- ◆ The conference and or council must be aware of and work with the local bishop in exercising the Voice of the Poor. The bishop usually delegates this day-to-day responsibility to the State Catholic Conference, Office for Peace and Justice, Catholic Charities, The Campaign for Human Development or similar office or agency. It is paramount that the conference and or council, as well as individual Vincentians, establish proactive, productive, and resourceful relationships with these entities if The Society and the Church, but especially the poor are to benefit from this activity.
- ◆ There is a rich resource of materials that are available from the NCCB/USCC in Washington DC, at 202 541 3000. It is highly recommended that the conference or council subscribe to the monthly publication service of the NCCB/USCC. This will furnish the members with ample guidelines and materials for reflection as well as organizing its Voice of the Poor activity. Local State Catholic Conference can also supply materials.
- ◆ Many dioceses offer training in the area of civic responsibility, advocacy, and public policy. Colleges and other institutions also can be tapped for this training. Vincentians can afford themselves of these services or the service can be made part of the Ozanam School curriculum.
- ◆ The Voice of the Poor activity and advocacy obviously must flow from the reflective and prayerful preparation of the Vincentian and his/her conference or council Vincentian structure.

11. REPORTING ON YOUR ACTIVITIES

Team work

means working together. We need ongoing communications. The duplication of effort wastes

valuable resources and time to reinvent the wheel. If you have recruited a community group as an ally, report it so that we may use that information in our work with the Society leadership at the regional, state or national level. If you have written a letter or made a phone call to an elected official, stand up and be counted. Share your experiences about what worked most effectively and what points seemed to be most convincing. Your ideas may be used to inspire other SVDP members around the country.

To report on your efforts, use the "VOP Activity Report" form on the following page. Send the completed information to your regional representative at the e-mail /fax contact address printed on the form. We hope to hear from you often!

The SVDP Voice of the Poor Committee is eager to help you get involved. A wealth of resources and experience is available. The well being of Christ's poor depends on our involvement.



VOP Activity Report

Return this form to your Regional Representative. If you do not know who your regional representative is, please return this form to the National SVDP office:

National Council SVDP, Attn. VOP National Committee
58 Progress Parkway, St. Louis, MO 63043-3706
ph. 314-576-3993, fax 314-576-6755
E-mail usacouncil@svdpusa.org

Contact Name: _____ Council: _____

Address: _____

Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail: _____

Description of Activity: _____

Date of Activity: _____

If you contacted an elected representative and/or his/her staff, please name and describe.

Senator: _____

-or-

Representative: _____

Check all that apply and attach additional information (who, what, when where, how, why):

- Wrote letter (attach copy)
- Placed phone call (describe – topic, date, who spoke with, etc.)
- Attended town hall meeting (describe)
- Set-up site visit (describe)
- Met with Member only (who was it and when did this take place)
- Met with Member and Staff (who was it and when did this take place)
- Met with Staff only (who was in attendance and what was discussed)
- Other activity – explain: _____

Please identify any Congressional Staff:

Name: _____ Position: _____

Results/Comments: _____

12. RESOURCES*

Papal, Conciliar, and Synodal Documents

1. Catechism of the Catholic Church.

2. **Centesimus Annus. (On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum) 1991. No. 436-8, 116 pp.** Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope John Paul II addresses the state of economic systems throughout the world, commenting on capitalism and the demise of communism.

3. **Evangelium Vitae. (The Gospel of Life -- On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life) 1995. English: No. 316-7, 196 pp.; Spanish: No. 317-5, 196 pp.** Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Reaffirming the "greatness and inestimable value of human life," Pope John Paul II discusses in this encyclical letter the present-day legal, ethical, and moral threats to life.

4. **Ex Corde Ecclesiae (On Catholic Universities) 1990. No. 399-X, 56 pp.** Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution focuses on the role and duties of Catholic higher education today and addresses the identity and mission of the Catholic University.

5. **Familiaris Consortio. (On the Family) 1981. No. 833-9, 93 pp.** Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation addresses the role of the family in society as a believing and evangelizing community, in dialogue with God and at the service of all.

6. **Gaudium et Spes (Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) 1965. No. 015-X, 138 pp.** Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Document from the Second Vatican Council examines the role of the People of God in their personal lives and in how they relate to humankind, the Church's impact on today's society, the development of culture, and the concerns present in both contemporary economic and social life.

7. **Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) 1981. No. 825-8, 62 pp.** Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope John Paul II focuses on "the dignity and rights of those who work." Drawing on biblical teaching and Catholic social thought he discusses just remuneration for work, the rights of labor unions, the rights and responsibilities of management, roles of women, multinational corporations, disabled workers, and other labor questions.

8. Mater et Magistra (On Christianity and Social Progress)

9. Octogesima Adveniens (On the Occasion of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum)

10. **Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth) 1963. No. 342-6, 53 pp.** Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope John XXIII's landmark encyclical letter promotes universal peace in truth, justice, charity, and liberty.

*** We gratefully acknowledge the US Catholic Conference for the descriptions used in this resource list. Many documents are available through the US Catholic Conference.**

11. Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples) 1967. No. 260-8, 50 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope Paul VI addresses the Church's efforts to free all people from the hardships of hunger, poverty, endemic disease, and ignorance.

12. Quadragesimo Anno (On Reconstructing the Social Order)

13. Redemptor Hominis (Redeemer of Man) 1979. No. 003-6, 100 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope John Paul II's first encyclical explores the relationship between the mystery of redemption in Jesus Christ and human dignity.

14. Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Workers)

15. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern) 1987. No. 205-5, 104 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter commemorates the twentieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's Populorum Progressio and reaffirms the continuity of the Church's teaching on social doctrine.

U.S. Episcopal Documents

1. A Century of Social Teaching. A Common Heritage, A Continuing Challenge. 1991. No. 379-5, 16 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

The U.S. bishops commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of Rerum Novarum with this brief statement, popular in tone and intended for use in parishes, schools, organizations, and small-group settings.

2. Called to Global Solidarity. International Challenges for U.S. Parishes. 1998. English: No. 5-118, 48 pp. Spanish: No. 5-119, 56 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Resource manual designed for parishes and other organizations in the Catholic community that seek to live out the Holy Father's call to solidarity with our brothers and sisters throughout the world. It contains the statement of the U.S. bishops Called to Global Solidarity, plus suggestions for implementation.

3. Tenth Anniversary Edition of "Economic Justice for All" Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy 1997. English: No. 5-135, 160 pp. Spanish: No. 5-136, 176 p. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Includes the follow-up document A Decade After Economic Justice for All as well as A Catholic Framework for Economic Life approved by the U.S. bishops in November 1996. The U.S. bishops urge individuals and institutions to work for a greater justice based on Scripture, church teaching, and ethical norms.

4. The Challenge of Peace. God's Promise and Our Response. 1983. No. 863-0, 142 p. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

The powerful, thought-provoking pastoral of the U.S. Catholic bishops on nuclear weapons and the arms race.

5. Communities of Salt and Light. Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish. 1994. English: No. 701-4, 24 pp. Spanish: No. 724-3, 24 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

U.S. bishops' statement presents seven elements of the social mission of parishes as a framework for planning and assessing that ministry.

6. Communities of Salt and Light: Parish Resource Manual. 1994. No. 702-2, 52 pp.

Practical, hands-on resource for acting on the bishops' statement provides the text, assessment tools, model, and a variety of resources for parishes to integrate Catholic social teaching into every aspect of parish life. Developed by the U.S. bishops' Department of Social Development and World Peace.

7. Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching. 1991. No. 401-5, 120 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Compendium contains Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Workers) and the two documents that have rephrased that message over the last century, Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (On Reconstructing the Social Order) and the U.S. bishops' *A Century of Social Teaching*. 1991.

8. Economic Justice for All

The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace. A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of "The Challenge of Peace" 1994. English: No. 705-7, 28 pp. Spanish: No. 706-5, 28 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

The U.S. bishops confront the trend to isolationism in U.S. foreign policy and acknowledge the importance of nonviolence. The document addresses the just-war theory, humanitarian intervention, deterrence, conscientious objection, and the development of peoples.

9. Program of Social Reconstruction

10. Putting Children and Families First. A Challenge for Our Church, Nation, and World. 1992. No. 469-4, 24 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

The U.S. bishops stress the need for national policy decisions that address protecting the lives of children, economic help for families, helping families at work, families and discrimination, meeting children's basic needs, divorce and child support, and broader cultural forces.

11. Renewing the Earth . An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching. 1992. No. 468-6, 20 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

The U.S. bishops call on Catholics to reflect on and to discuss environmental problems, including global warming; depletion of the ozone layer; deforestation; and toxic and nuclear waste.

12. Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions. Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. 1998. No. 5-281, 36 pp. Spanish edition anticipated. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

Includes the Summary Report of the Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education. The U.S. bishops stress the importance of incorporating Catholic social teaching into Catholic educational programs. Exploring how the Catholic community can better share the Church's social justice tradition, the document highlights the major themes of Catholic social teaching and provides recommendations for incorporating it in all forms of Catholic education and formation.

13. To Teach as Jesus Did A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education. 1972. No. 063-X, 58 pp. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

The U.S. bishops discuss educational ministry to people of all ages and encourage planning and collaboration in developing educational programs. The publication includes study questions.

Video Resources

1. Global Solidarity (Videotape). A Framework for Parishes. Video: No. 5-272, 14 minutes, 1998. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

A compelling and concise video version of the bishops' statement *Called to Global Solidarity*, designed for use by parish councils, social concerns committees, education programs, and other groups wishing to explore church teaching on global solidarity.

2. Salt and Light (Videotape) 1993. Video: No. 703-0, 14 minutes. Available from the US Catholic Conference, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194.

A valuable resource for parish social ministry, outlining the challenges of the bishops' statement on the social mission of the parish and ways parishes can respond. From the U.S. bishops' Department of Social Development and World Peace.

Vincentian Resources

Council of the United States. *United States Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul*. Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul. 58 Progress Parkway, St. Louis, MO 63043-3706 (314-576-3993) (FAX 314-576-8755). Aug/ 1995.

Dirvin, Joseph L. *Frederic Ozanam A Life in Letters*. Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul. 58 Progress Parkway, St. Louis, MO 63043-3706 (314-576-3993) (FAX 314-576-8755). Aug/ 1995.

Association International des Charites de St. Vincent de Paul. *Against All Forms of Poverty, Acting Together* (Basic Document) AIC, rue d'Alsace Lorraine 38 -1050 Bruxelles, Belgique.

Web Resources

ORGANIZATION	WEB SITE
Hunger, Nutrition and Agriculture	
Food Research Action Center	www.frac.org
Use the click of a mouse to donate food and link to an extensive list of some of the larger hunger and relief organizations.	www.thehungerside.com
The Worldwatch Institute is an interdisciplinary research organization. It works on global environmental issues.	www.worldwatch.org
The U.S. Department of Agriculture has information on agriculture, nutrition and health.	www.usda.gov
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has information on food safety.	www.fda.gov
This is the site for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Find "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 1999" and results of the World Food Summit on this web site.	www.fao.org
International information can be found on the United Nations web site.	www.un.org
Migration and Refugee Services	
Migration and Refugee Services US Catholic Conference	www.nccbuscc.org/mrs/mrp.htm
Catholic Documents and Information on Catholic Social Teaching	
Carrie – A Full-Text Electronic Library On Vatican and Other Catholic Documents	http://kuhttp.cc.ukans.edu/carrie/docs/docs_catholic.html
EWTN News – Global Catholic Network	http://www.ewtn.com/new_library/index.htm
Catholic Social Teachings – Notable quotations from the Office of Social Justice (St. Paul, Minneapolis)	http://www.osjspm.org/cst/quotes.htm
Catholic Social Teachings – Major Documents from the Office of Social Justice (St. Paul, Minneapolis)	http://www.osjspm.org/cst/doclist.htm
Christian Social Justice on the Web (English and Spanish)	http://www.acusd.edu/theo/justice/
Salt of the Earth – Your online resource for social justice (published by the Claretians)	http://salt.claretianpubs.org/
Congressional and Lobbying Information	
Thomas – Legislative information on the internet	http://thomas.loc.gov/
The Electronic Activist - Service of the Institute for First Amendment Studies, a 501(c)(3) research and educational organization focusing on the separation of church and state. Contains a database of contact information for U.S. senators and representatives, governors, and some state legislatures.	http://www.berkshire.net/%7Eifas/activist/ www.ifas.org
National Catholic Social Justice Lobby	http://www.networklobby.org/index.htm

NATIONAL VOICE OF THE POOR COMMITTEE JOB DESCRIPTION

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. Vincentian help can include any person-to-person assistance that promotes human dignity and integrity. The Society is concerned not only with relieving need but also with redressing the situations that cause it.

Part I of the Rule, Charter I

Vincentians seek through prayer, meditation on the scriptures, the teaching of the Church, through their daily lives and in their relationship with those in need, to bear witness to the love of Christ.

Part II of the Rule, Charter II

Definition:

In the spirit of Christian love and justice, the Voice of the Poor Committee upholds Catholic values by researching, validating, documenting, advocating, and promulgating issues related to the condition of the poor and disenfranchised for the purpose of helping Vincentians to live their faith by acting knowledgeably and credibly as a unified body speaking with one voice for the purpose of building up the Kingdom of God.

Responsibilities:

1. **Support the Society's Mission and Vincentian Charism** by helping Vincentians to better understand the social teachings and values of the Catholic Church.
2. **Make Recommendations.** Investigate and recommend social justice/advocacy issues. (1)
Draft National position papers on key issues to educate and encourage Vincentian action.
3. **Act as a Resource.** Provide reliable and valid background information that the National Council may use as the basis for advocacy. (2)
4. **Educate Vincentians.** Assist and support the National President and National Council in educating Vincentians on subjects with national, regional and local implications so that Vincentians are better equipped to effectively respond to issues that affect the poor.

Duties:

1. Provide resource information on the social teachings of the Church such as papal encyclicals, conciliar documents, and episcopal statements that explore, express and confirm the responsibility of every Vincentian in the work of love, justice and the care of the poor.
 2. Provide resource information based on the writings of Frederic Ozanam, St. Vincent de Paul, and Louise de Marillac.
 3. Keep up-to-date on relevant legislation.
 4. Guide the National Council in selecting advocacy issues for the Society by making recommendations to the National President. Assist the National President in developing an approval process.
 5. Work with the National President to help local Councils develop action steps related to advocacy issues that are approved by the National Trustees.
 6. Educate the National President on matters affecting advocacy for the poor and disenfranchised.
 7. Gather information from regions and report to the National President on social justice issues experienced in their Vincentian work.
 8. Investigate cooperative advocacy opportunities between the Society and other organizations whose issues and goals are complementary to the work of the Society, and make recommendations to the National President.
 9. Other duties as required.
-
1. The Society's advocacy focus is on issues related to the condition of the poor. The Society does not support individual political campaigns. Doing so may jeopardize the Society's tax status.
 2. The National President, alone, is the official National spokesperson for the Society.

Qualifications:

1. Willing to share time, talent and love.
2. Acknowledge that God’s plan should supersede personal aspirations and hopes.
3. Recognize the importance of intelligently speaking out on behalf of the poor.
4. Desire to seek the truth and to carefully document information to validate conditions of need.
5. Ability to use communications tools (such as e-mail, fax, internet) to facilitate committee work.
6. Exhibit flexibility and willingness to analyze, discuss and communicate facets of social concerns by working in the spirit of Vincentian friendship. Exhibit openness to others and their opinions.
7. Understand the duty of the Voice of the Poor Committee in upholding the Rule and mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
8. Catholic, who upholds gospel values, with a desire to serve Jesus by the examples of St. Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam.
9. Familiarity with the structure and purpose of the National Council of the Society.

Experience:

1. Active membership in a Conference and/or Council of the Society and/or thorough knowledge of the Society and Conferences as foundation of the Society.
2. Members also serve on their Council’s Voice of the Poor Committee.
3. Vibrant and practical Vincentian spirit.
4. Service to God through service to the poor.

Note: Pre-approval by the local council (i.e., Council President) to serve on this committee is needed as the local Council is required to pick up meeting/travel expenses for elected/appointed individuals that serve on this committee.

National Voice of the Poor Committee Membership

Types of Members

Elected Regional Representatives

One Trustee from each region

(Also serves as the Chairperson for his/her region’s VOP Committee)

Appointed Representatives (one from each region)

Or may be a Vincentian or an Executive Director. (National President approved.)

(Also serves as the Secretary for his/her region’s VOP Committee)

National Presidential Appointees

Youth representative

Chairperson(s)

Appointed by National President

Trustee

Elected by Trustees

One per Region

Vincentian or Executive Director

Appointed, one per Region

National President Approved

Ex Officio - National President

Appointees of National President

VOPNET Linking Vincentians Together In One Mind, Heart, and Spirit

NATIONAL PRESIDENT
Official Spokesperson for the Society

NATIONAL VOICE OF THE POOR COMMITTEE (NVOP)

Identifies and acts on issues of importance to the Society. Representatives, elected/appointed from each region include the Trustee and one appointed representative (AR), who may be a Vincentian or an Executive Director of the Society. The National President, an ex-officio member, appoints the chair and other members. NVOP communicates key issues and provides resource information via the VOP intranet. NVOP also provides training.

Region #1
Trustee/AR

Region #2
Trustee/AR

Region #3
Trustee/AR

Region #4
Trustee/AR

Region #5
Trustee/AR

Region #6
Trustee/AR

Region #7
Trustee/AR

Region #8
Trustee/AR

REGIONAL VOP COMMITTEE (RVOP)

Each region has a Voice of the Poor Regional Committee. The National Trustee (NT) to the National VOP chairs the regional committee. The representative to the National VOP committee is secretary of the regional committee. His/her job is to ensure that information and minutes are properly noted and communicated back to the National VOP committee, particularly issues that are timely and which may require immediate action. The NT and AR are responsible for promoting and ensuring inter-region communications. The regional committee is also comprised of Network Coordinators from Arch/diocesan Councils and the region's spiritual advisor. Members of the committee follow issues relevant to the Society and help mobilize members to action.

ARCH/DIOCESAN VOP (NETWORK) COMMITTEE

Each Arch/diocese should have a VOP committee. The VOP committee chair, or Network Coordinator, is appointed by the Arch/Diocesan Council President in consultation with the Council. Appointed representatives by the District Council Presidents also serve. The committee works to organize and mobilize local membership to become involved in public policy issues. The committee establishes relationships with elected officials and their staffs. Any important issue that the committee believes that the Society should speak out for in the greater Arch/diocese requires the pre-approval of the District Council Presidents and the Archdiocesan Council President. The committee keeps the presidents apprised of activities and status. The Arch/diocesan Council President is an ex-officio member of the committee. The Arch/diocesan Council's Executive Director (ED) and Spiritual Advisor serve on this committee.

DISTRICT COUNCIL VOP (GRASSROOTS) COMMITTEE

Each District Council should have a VOP committee. The chair is appointed by the District Council President and serves on the District Council Board of Directors and on the Arch/diocesan Committee. This grassroots committee is informed of local, state, and congressional representatives. The committee serves as the grassroots liaison between the local conferences, the district council, and the Archdiocesan Council. The committee keeps informed of Vincentian concerns, makes recommendations to the District Council President, and takes action steps to gain Vincentian involvement for change such as establishing a call network, e-mailing letters, coordination of meetings with elected officials. The District Council President brings key issues to the attention of the Conference Presidents for discussion/approval at District Council meetings. The ED serves as a member on this committee. The Council's Spiritual Advisor also serves as a member on this committee.