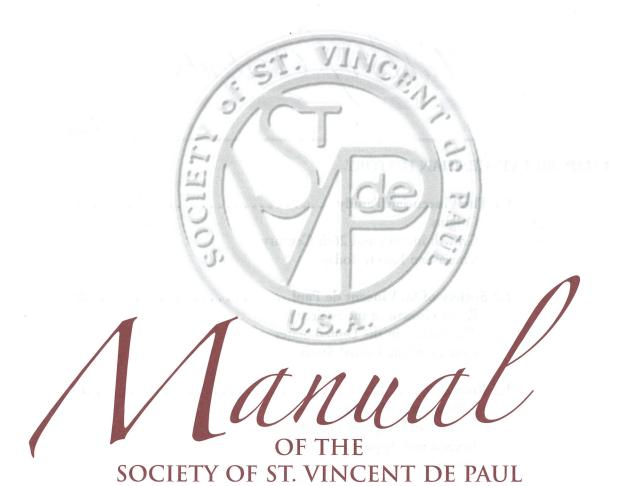


1 anual
OF THE

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Frederic Ozanam encouraged the compilation of the first edition of the Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in September 1845. This tradition has lived on, and now the 2007 edition of the Manual for the United States is offered to the members for their formation in the spirit and charism of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic. It is recommended for personal prayer as well as for reflection and sharing at Society meetings.

This Manual is a companion document to the Rule and Bylaws, and serves as the basis for the Ozanam Orientation.



IN THE UNITED STATES

National Council of the United States, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL PARIS, FRANCE

142 Countries—5 Continents—51,000 Conferences and 700,000 Members

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES ST. LOUIS, MO

64,532 Active, 26,861 Associate and 54,972 Contributing Members A total of 146,365 members in 8 Regions throughout the U.S.

(ARCH)DIOCESAN COUNCILS

47 (Arch)Diocesan Councils uniting and supporting the District Councils

DISTRICT COUNCILS

437 District Councils uniting and supporting the Conferences

CONFERENCES

4,637 Conferences, the basic unit of organization

January 2011

2.2 COUNCILS

The Mission and Governance of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are found in the Rule, Council and Conference Bylaws, and appropriate policies.

Introduction

The Society has a simple and effective structure to support its work at all levels. The Councils provide opportunities for developing community, sharing expertise, and keeping Conferences and members in touch with the Society as a whole. They also help maintain the original spirit of spirituality and friendship. (Rule: Part III, Statute 10)

- The *National Council* coordinates and facilitates the general activity of all the Conferences in the United States, which are divided into eight administrative regions.
- An (Arch) Diocesan Council unites the District Councils, providing liaison and communication links between them and the National Council.
- A *District Council* may embrace all the Conferences in an entire town, city, or county; it may conform to the deanery or vicariate boundaries of the Catholic diocese; or it may represent neighborhoods or sections of a large metropolitan area. District Councils evolved as a means to keep individual Conferences in communication with each other and united in spirit.
- Isolated Conferences are represented at the (Arch)Diocesan level by the closest District Council in the diocese. In any diocese, there may exist one or more Conferences that are not within the geographic area of a functioning District Council. The Isolated Conference relies on that District Council to convey its views to (Arch)Diocesan leaders or to receive information. The Isolated Conference can obtain the name and address of the (Arch)Diocesan Council President from the National Office. In dioceses where no Council has been organized, all functioning Conferences relate directly to the National Council or to its designated intermediary.

The geographical coverage of a Council depends upon such factors as the population of a community, the number of Catholic parishes, and the number of Conferences in the areas served. These elements, as well as future plans and prospects for the Society's expansion, usually influence decisions about the geographical control to be exercised by any newly created Council grouping.

District Council size varies by practice and geography. District Councils represent a minimum of three and ideally a maximum of twelve Conferences. Uniting Conferences within a more extended circumscription than that of a District Council requires an (Arch)Diocesan Council. Normally, three or more District Councils are to be found in every (Arch)Diocesan Council structure. For fewer than three such groupings in a given diocese, informal contacts usually suffice.

Council Functions

Councils are at the service of all Conferences under their jurisdiction. (Rule: Part I, Article 3.6) In the United States, District and (Arch)Diocesan Councils have similar responsibilities. Substantial differences between the two are usually limited to geographical coverage and membership constituency. To illustrate: District and (Arch)Diocesan Councils are both involved in extending the Society. The District Council will have as its first task the job of extension within its immediate jurisdiction. The (Arch)Diocesan Council, on the other hand, will want to push for organization in non-organized areas of the diocese; it will be only indirectly involved, by encouragement and evaluation, with the extension work for which its District Councils have immediate responsibility.

The distinction between (Arch)Diocesan and District Council responsibilities may not always be obvious, or precise. In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, the Society's work should be organized and conducted at the least complex and most proximate level of organization. (**Rule: Part I, Article 3.9-3.10**) The Conference, for example, is closest to the people served and serving in a parish. It would be inappropriate, therefore, to transfer the Conference work of home visitation to the Society's central administration.

The same principle applies to the roles of (Arch)Diocesan and District Councils. If a District Council can perform a needed neighborhood or community task, the District Council, being closer to its constituent Conferences than is the (Arch)Diocesan Council, shall be the priority instrument for that particular work. (Rule: Part III, Statute 6)

Council Responsibilities

Councils provide for the spiritual and Vincentian formation of the members, the celebration of festival meetings, and the promotion of friendship among members. Attentive to the needs of those who are poor, they strive to intensify and diversify the services offered.

Councils help in the following areas, as needed: internal and external communication; formation and education; spirituality; reports; collaboration; outreach; advocacy; management of special works; and compliance with the Rule and good governance practices.

Councils help Conferences in their ministry to the needy. For instance, when an individual Conference faces heavy demands for person-to-person financial aid, the Council offers what support it can from the common fund. *Helping* is a word that defines the Vincentian spirit, describing not only the day-to-day services of the Society but also the relationship among members, between Conferences and their District Council, between District Councils and their (Arch)Diocesan Council, and between (Arch)Diocesan Councils and their Regional Chairs and National Council.

Attending Society meetings at all levels promotes the key Vincentian values of mutuality and friendship. To their District Council, Conferences give their ideas, the benefit of their experiences, and the willingness to share responsibility for special works and to assist other Conferences in need. From their District Council, Conferences receive the knowledge and inspiration of fellow members, expanding their Vincentian horizons and developing a sense of worldwide responsibility.

Council Leadership

The founders of the Society, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, were first and fore-most friends. Following Christ's example in the spirit of Vincent and Frederic, today's Council leaders are called to be servant leaders. (Rule: Part I, Article 3.11 and Part III, Statutes 11 & 12) They base meaningful decisions on the consensus of their members, who respect and care for each other as well as the needy. The President is first their friend, and only then the implementer of the Council's responsibilities. In the Society, moreover, the office seeks the person, not vice versa.

Presidents must understand "the big picture" and take the initiative, coaching and encouraging members to understand, shape, and embrace their Council's objectives. They must be committed to the values and goals of the Society overall, and enthusiastic about them. They must study the Rule and Bylaws to understand the essential structure, operations, and functions of all levels of the Society. Most important, they must cultivate a solid familiarity with the lives and spiritual legacies of the Society's patron, St. Vincent de Paul, and its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Presidents must then help all members develop this same understanding of our ministry.

Effective Presidents engender friendships among members of the Council and Conferences and take a team approach to decision-making. Rather than give answers, they ask the right questions. They harmonize discord, heal injuries, protect rights, foster talents, and delegate wisely. They are open to new ideas and collaborate with others to accomplish the goals of the local, national, and international Councils, maintaining communication with all levels.

A District Council President visits Conferences both to teach and to learn, going as a friend rather than a superior, observing the agenda, waiting for an invitation to speak, and offering suggestions prudently.

Council Relationships

The President ensures that the Council has strong working relationships with the local Church and its agencies (e.g., Catholic Charities and Social Concerns), the wider Vincentian Family, and local agencies serving the poor. Though a Catholic lay organization with its own identity, mission, and voice, the Society is very much a part of the Church and its mission. From the beginning of the Society, Vincentians were called to be public witnesses of and for the Church. Blessed Frederic Ozanam loved the Church and worked closely with the clergy and bishops in Vincentian efforts to serve and evangelize the poor. Likewise, Blessed Frederic and his companions worked with the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and Vincentian priests and brothers (Congregation of the Mission). Today, the wider Vincentian Family includes other followers of the charism of St. Vincent de Paul. Escalating needs and limited resources call for greater collaboration among them all.

Council Special Works

Councils undertake charitable works and special projects that exceed the jurisdiction or capacity of an individual Conference. (Rule: Part III, Statute 20) The particular nature of a Council's special works is influenced by the community's socio-economic needs, the Council's resources, and the zeal, enterprise, talents, and influence of local Vincentians. Special works include thrift stores, dining rooms, food pantries, meals on wheels, free pharmacies, homeless shelters, transitional housing, summer camps for kids, indigent burial, budget and tax counseling, employment services, job training, assistance for the disabled, crime victim support, jail/prison ministry and post-release services, medical and dental clinics, eldercare, and family resource centers.

Council Meetings

To enliven and enrich those who attend, meetings must have meaningful content and spirituality. They should be interesting, informative, and decisive. Especially important is the cultivation of friendship. The President sets the tone, showing the same solicitude for the members that they do for the poor they visit.

Rather than conduct business by mail, phone, or web, Vincentians hold meetings to take advantage of the creative interaction and synergy that can occur in a group. Meetings harness the collective knowledge, experience, and wisdom of the members to create solutions that might elude the individual. When members have taken ownership of them, Council decisions can be implemented more effectively.

Meetings are the Society's most effective form of communication. Careful attention to detail and thorough preparation assure their success. The typical agenda for Council meetings can be found in the Rule: Part III, Statute 7. Well-planned meetings have these four components:

Formation. Time for prayer, faith-sharing, and spiritual formation in Vincentian ministry and service.

Planning. Development and review of a local plan based on the National Strategic Plan.

Work. The chance for everyone to be heard on discussion and decision items within a guided, timed, focused setting. Standard reports are usually mailed to members ahead of time.

Follow-up. A summation of the meeting and what was accomplished, and the preparation of an agenda for the next one. Minutes should be brief, listing the discussion/decision items with their main points, the outcomes, and next steps.

General or Special Meetings

Councils should gather their general Conference membership together several times a year on traditional Vincentian occasions. Attendance at these meetings is an essential part of our Vincentian life, and an ideal time for the following:

- providing programs on Vincentian Spiritual Formation
- renewing the motivation of members
- announcing special news from the Conferences and Councils
- communicating developments within the Society at various levels
- consulting with members and sharing ideas
- providing information pertinent to Conference work (a speaker from outside the Society may be featured)
- showing members the experience and breadth of the Vincentian family

Council/Board Membership

The Bylaws of the Society state that a District Council is composed of a duly elected President and the Presidents of affiliated Conferences; (Arch)Diocesan Council membership is composed of the Presidents of affiliated District Councils. Qualifications for membership on either Council's Board of Directors are spelled out in their bylaws.

Incorporated Councils have a board of directors, whose members should understand their responsibilities and obligations, keeping the Society on a sound legal and financial basis. Information on Council bylaws and governance is available from the National Office and on the website: www.svdpusa.org.

Council Funds and Accountability

To protect their members, the Society, and the public, Councils should have annual audits conducted according to accepted accounting practices. (Rule: Part III, Statute 27) They should also prepare annual budgets and present them to their board of directors for approval. (Rule: Part III, Statutes 22 & 23)

Sources of Council funds may include contributions from Conferences, donations, bequests, special works, and grants. Like Conferences, Councils act as custodians of funds given to the Society, understanding that they belong, ultimately, to the poor. While some Councils prefer not to accumulate funds, others make a point of setting something aside for exigencies. Operating an active Council with a reasonable bank balance is good business practice, not hoarding. A bank balance equal to the operational cost of the Council for six months may be reasonable. A balance of less than three months' operational cost may be unhealthy. Councils with inadequate balances should review the budget for ways to increase their income or reduce their expenditures. Councils with overly large balances should find ways to expend their excess funds on behalf of the poor, such as subsidizing active Conferences in poorer areas or planning needed special works.

Fundraising is conducted within the Conference or Council, and at the National Council level. If a Council or other entity wishes to participate in a fund development project on an inter-Council basis, it should present its proposal in a business plan format to the National Finance and Governance Committee. The Council of the United States has a national development plan to augment funding for its services and to assist Councils in their own fundraising efforts. The National Development Director is available to help Councils enhance their fundraising effectiveness.

Councils may receive funding requests from charitable organizations outside the Society. Funds donated to the Society, however, must be used only for works that involve the personal service of Society members. The Society does not raise or contribute money for activities, no matter how praiseworthy, in which its members are not personally and substantially involved. We must honor the intentions of our donors, who have chosen to give to the Society, rather than other organizations, with the expectation that their gifts will be used for Vincentian work and no other purpose.

Acknowledging Charitable Contributions

In accordance with the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (in effect at the date of this publication), federal income tax deductions for every contribution of \$250 or more require a written receipt from the designated charity. Responsibility for obtaining receipts rests with contributors, but charities must inform them if their contributions may not be fully deductible because of goods or services received in connection with a fundraising event.

Though no particular form is required, a receipt must:

• Show the date of the contribution.

Accurately describe the cash or property donated.

• State whether or not the contributor received any goods or services of value in return for the contribution and offer a good-faith estimate of their value.

• Confirm, if appropriate, that the contributor received only "intangible religious benefits" in return for the contribution.

Society Employees

In the beginning, the Society relied solely on volunteers to help the poor, but its rapid growth revealed a need for assistance administering and coordinating that volunteer ministry with clerical work, mailings, recordkeeping, etc. (Rule: Part III, Article 14) Later, to serve the poor better, members, in the larger Councils especially, established Special Works that required paid staff. Volunteer members and Society employees work together as partners in their ministry to the poor. Paid staff do not supplant the volunteer members; they help those members provide more effective services to people in need. Employees are welcome to participate in Vincentian works and become members of a Conference, but they cannot hold elected office at any level of the Society.

One of the most important responsibilities of larger Councils is the selection of an Executive Director, whose knowledge, skill, and leadership will, to a significant extent, determine a Council's effectiveness in carrying out its mission. Executive Directors help Council Presidents fulfill their responsibilities. They cultivate the talents of Presidents, board members, and Conference members. And they strive to keep the Councils faithful to the Society's mission and its predominantly volunteer character. With Council Presidents being term-limited, Executive Directors also provide continuity and stability.

Councils must establish expectations for the position of Executive Director (qualifications, salary, benefits, etc.) and spell them out in a position description. Sample position descriptions are available from the National Office. A special committee should be formed, composed of officers and chairpersons of other significant committees, to screen, interview, and recommend candidates to the board.

Councils must comply with all state and federal regulations for paid staff and should maintain employment practices consistent with the guidance of the Catholic Bishops and Catholic social teaching.

Legal and Financial Realities

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul must meet the legal, reporting, and financial obligations required of all nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations. Since these obligations are subject to change and may vary widely from the federal to the state level, from state to state, and even from state to locality, Councils should consult the National Office for the latest federal requirements and a local attorney for the state and local requirements.

Institution of a District or (Arch)Diocesan Council

Official recognition of a Council as a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul requires the affirmative action of the Council General, the international governing body of the Society. Application forms for the institution of Councils may be obtained from the National Office of the Council of the United States. (**Rule: Part I, Article 3.8**) Completed applications are transmitted through all ascending levels of the Society. Councils must be in operation for at least one year before applying.

A District Council applying for "institution" (official status) sends its application to the (Arch)Diocesan Council to which it is attached. The (Arch)Diocesan Council, having approved, transmits the petition to the National Council, which conveys it to the Council General for final action. Word of the Council General's action is conveyed to the applicant via the descending chain of communication.

If no (Arch)Diocesan Council exists, a new District Council should seek the approval of a priorexisting, instituted District Council. Until an (Arch)Diocesan Council is formed, the first instituted District Council represents the diocese to the National Council and qualifies as a National Council Member. Three or more District Councils should form an (Arch)Diocesan Council to better serve all the Conference members of the diocese.

Incorporation of Councils

Generally speaking, charitable groups may act as unincorporated associations, formally organized corporations, or charitable trusts. The corporate form is preferred for its convenience, familiarity of structure, and liability limitations.

Councils should incorporate and comply with the laws of their state. The National Office can offer advice on how to proceed. An incorporated Council should check periodically to confirm that its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws are properly recorded and available to succeeding Council leaders ("Statements of Continued Existence" may also be required in some states). Failure to properly maintain the necessary records can jeopardize the tax deductibility of donor gifts and result in revocation of the Society's 501c3 tax-exempt status.

Insurance guidelines for Conferences, Stores, and Councils are posted in the members section of the national website. As these guidelines recommend, Councils should contact qualified professionals for advice on coverage for all aspects of a not-for-profit organization and reevaluate their policies yearly.

Tax Laws and Financial Records

To protect the Society in the civil arena, Councils must know the federal and state tax laws that apply to them, have capable local counsel to determine what their obligations are, and assiduously meet these obligations. Under certain conditions, charitable agencies and organizations are required to file IRS Form 990. Many U.S. Councils do so. Penalties for noncompliance are cumulative and can be severe.

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) has prepared statements of accounting principles and reporting practices for nonprofit organizations. Failure to adopt recommended methods could jeopardize community support, foundation grants, and eligibility for publicly-funded programs.

For the Society to maintain good standing before the law and in the eyes of the Church, our donors, and the general public, Councils must keep adequate records and reports.

Officers or leaders of voluntary organizations must conform to all procedural requirements of state corporate law, as well as their own charters and bylaws. Strict adherence to all regulations governing recordkeeping and corporate procedures (including regular audits) helps protect the public, the Society, and Vincentian members against deceit and misuse of funds.

Record Retention

Confidentiality demands that all records on individuals and families served be kept in a secure, private place. Special care should be taken to secure electronic databases and prevent unauthorized access. Confidential material should not be transferred via email or web unless its security is assured.

Because federal, state, and local statutes of limitations vary, Councils operating special works should check with their auditor or legal counsel and develop their own record retention policy. Records with historical value should be kept permanently.

Retention Schedule:

Bank Deposits
Bank Reconciliations
Bank Statements
Cancelled Checks
Invoices Received
Case Records & Cards
General Correspondence
Meeting Minutes
Minute Books
Treasurer Statements

Conflict of Interest Policy

Along with their families, anyone serving the Society in any capacity – member, employee, board member, etc. – should be careful to avoid real, apparent, and potential conflicts of interest. If a conflict is suspected or anticipated, the Council President should be consulted immediately. The Society's official Conflict of Interest policy is intended to supplement applicable state and federal laws. A copy of this policy is available in the members section of the national website or from the National Office. Any questions concerning this policy should be addressed to the appropriate Council officer.

Speaking for the Society

Only the National President may "speak for the Society" on national issues. Presidents of (Arch)Diocesan Councils, District Councils, and Conferences may "speak for the Society" at their own levels. Individual members are welcome to engage in advocacy on their own, but should not present themselves as spokesmen for the Society.