



Manual

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.*

CHAPTER 1

Vincentian History



1.1 THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

The Vincentian Family is a worldwide, living reality. Countless persons live and breathe the spirit, tradition, and spirituality of “the Apostle of Charity and Father of the Poor,” Saint Vincent de Paul. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is one branch of a colossal Vincentian Family Tree. The Vincentian Family consists of men and women, young and old, rich and poor, educated and unlettered, Eastern and Western. Family members speak common languages and obscure dialects; they live in large cities and on small islands; they are married and single, priests, deacons, and religious; they are CEOs and manual laborers. Who they are does not matter; what they have in common does: their call to follow in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul, their love for him, and their desire to keep his Mission alive.

Origins

St. Vincent founded three organizations, the first in 1617: the **Confraternities of Charity**, known in the United States as the Ladies of Charity. Under its current title as the International Association of Charities (AIC), it continues its mission of serving the poor.

In 1625 St. Vincent founded the **Congregation of the Mission**, usually referred to as the CMs or Vincentian priests, a community of priests and brothers whose special purpose was to evangelize the poor in rural areas and help in the formation and education of priests.

St. Louise de Marillac and St. Vincent de Paul co-founded the third organization, the **Daughters of Charity**, in 1633. Its primary purpose was to honor Christ by serving him corporally and spiritually in the persons of the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the young, and others in need.

These three groups have weathered periods of growth, decline, persecution, and renewal, but all three have survived and are very much alive!

Growth in the 19th and 20th Century

After St. Vincent, the Vincentian Family continued to grow, the Daughters of Charity becoming the largest community of religious women in the Church. In 1830, in the Chapel of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Sister Catherine Labouré, a novice in the Community. From this apparition, the Miraculous Medal was struck and devotion to this sacramental quickly spread throughout the world. The Vincentian Family branch known today as the **Miraculous Medal Association** owes its origin to St. Catherine's vision.

In 1833, less than three years later, in walking distance of the Chapel of the Daughters of Charity, Frederic Ozanam established the **Society of St. Vincent de Paul**. It also spread quickly. Blessed Frederic saw the Society established in many countries, including the United States, Canada and Mexico. Members of the Society, Vincentians, went two by two to the homes of the poor to respond to their needs.

Fourteen years later, another request made by the Blessed Mother in her apparition to St. Catherine Labouré was fulfilled. "The Most Holy Virgin wants you to found an association of **Children of Mary**," Catherine told her spiritual director. This association came into existence in 1847 and rapidly spread.

Following the French Revolution, 103 different religious communities were founded in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, among them the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, started by former members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the Chapel of St. Vincent in Paris.

Elizabeth Ann Seton founded the **Sisters of Charity** in 1809 at Emmitsburg, Maryland, patterning her Rule after that of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris. From Emmitsburg, several other communities of Sisters of Charity sprang up in North America and eventually formed a Federation.

In 1983, the **Vincentian Service Corps** began in New York City. This is a program designed for young adults to volunteer a year of service to the poor and marginalized, to learn and live Vincentian spirituality, and to live in community. The Daughters of Charity sponsor the VSC in St. Louis and in California. The Vincentian priests sponsor the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers in Denver and the Gateway Vincentian Volunteers in St. Louis.

MISEVI, a Vincentian Lay Missionaries program established in 1999, assists young lay women and men who want to spend several years of their lives in a foreign mission, offering them a pastoral and community setting, a financial stipend, and spiritual support.

The Vincentian Family Today

The amazing growth of the Vincentian Family is due to the attractiveness of the charisms of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, Bl. Frederic Ozanam, and Bl. Rosalie Rendu, whose spirit and spirituality appeal to the human heart.

- The International Association of Charities (AIC) or Ladies of Charity consists of 260,000 members in 49 countries.
- The Congregation of the Mission has 4,000 members in 80 countries.
- The Daughters of Charity have 24,000 members in 87 countries.
- Vincentian Marian Youth groups number 240,000 members in 45 countries.
- The Society of St. Vincent de Paul includes 690,000 active members in 142 countries.
- The Sisters of Charity Federation counts 7,000 members.
- The Association of the Miraculous Medal boasts 5-10 million members in 15 countries.

Recognizing that there is strength in unity and numbers, the international leaders have challenged the Vincentian Family to collaborate more effectively to meet the escalating needs of the world's poor. **(Rule: Part I, Article 4.3)** St. Vincent de Paul was a master of collaboration and organization. His vision of service entailed connections, relationships, and teamwork. "We should assist the poor in every way, and do it by ourselves and by enlisting the help of others," Vincent advised. "To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works." Through collaboration, the Vincentian Family can, more quickly and more efficiently, fulfill Blessed Frederic Ozanam's dream of embracing the world in a network of charity.

The international leadership urge the various branches of the Vincentian Family to use the excellent resources available to them to do spiritual formation in common. Each branch of the Family has much to offer the others in the field of spirituality, and each can benefit from the sharing of the collective wisdom and grace of the others. Eager to strengthen its relationship with the worldwide Vincentian Family, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States recommends the following websites to its members as excellent resources for formation and education: www.famvin.org, www.ozanet.org, and www.svdpusa.org.

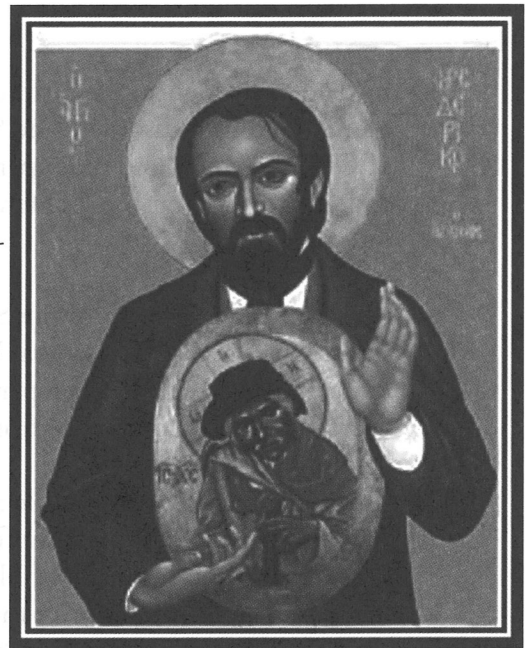
1.2 THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

*Our little Society of St. Vincent de Paul
has grown large enough
to be considered a providential fact. . . .*

– Blessed Frederic Ozanam

On November 1, 1830, Antoine Frederic Ozanam left his home in Lyon to enroll at the Sorbonne, the University of Paris, to pursue a law degree. Not long after his arrival in Paris, Ozanam became acquainted with Emmanuel Bailly, publisher of *La Tribune Catholique* newspaper. Bailly had founded a student organization called The Conference of History; Ozanam

joined the group. They met on Saturdays to discuss a wide range of subjects except politics. The conference attracted a variety of individuals with differing opinions and beliefs. One Saturday, during a heated verbal exchange, Jean Broët, a student and follower of the doctrine of Saint-Simonism, challenged Ozanam and his friends: "We agree that at one time your Church was a great Church and was a great source of good. But what is your Church doing now? What is she doing for the poor? Show us your works and we will believe you." Ozanam accepted the challenge. He and several of his friends agreed to meet and discuss what they might do.



On April 23, 1833, Frederic Ozanam's twentieth birthday, the six students (Auguste Le Taillandier, Paul Lamache, Francois Lallier, Jules Deveaux, Felix Clavé, and Frederic) gathered in Bailly's newspaper office. **(Rule: Part I, Article 1.1)** Ozanam's words moved all present: "We must do what is agreeable to God. Therefore, we must do what our Lord Jesus Christ did when preaching the gospel. Let us go to the poor!" And so, in the Providence of God, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was born.

The charter Vincentians then sought out Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, for her assistance and suggestions in ministering to God's poor. Sr. Rosalie guided and mentored the founding members in the spirit and charism of St. Vincent, teaching them how to minister to the suffering poor with gentleness and kindness and to respect their God-given dignity.

The students selected Emmanuel Bailly as President, a position he would hold for eleven years. At first, they referred to themselves as The Conference of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul to parallel their Conference of History; the latter was their social and study group, the former their service group. In a short time, they changed their name to The Society of St. Vincent de Paul. They retained the term Conference to refer to the individual unit which was usually parish-based.



In a Conference, members of the Society gather together as brothers and sisters in the name of Jesus and in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, their patron. Ozanam and the others chose St. Vincent de Paul as their patron because his name was almost synonymous with charity. The Church has called him "The Apostle of Charity" and "Father of the Poor." People outside and within the Society commonly refer to members of the Society as Vincentians, after its patron.

In God's Providence, the birth of the Society came at the right time in a country ravaged by revolution and civil disorder. The Society's purposes harmonized with the ideals of a large number of Catholic youth and older persons. Consequently, the Conference developed rapidly. By the end of the first year the Conference in Paris had grown to the point where it needed to divide into two groups.

The continuing growth of the Society in and outside of Paris necessitated a Rule. This was formulated in 1835. The General Principles were authored by President Emmanuel Bailly; the Articles of the Rule were prepared by Francois Lallier, one of Ozanam's closest friends and Secretary of the Conference from 1837-1839.

According to the original Rule and the Society's tradition, Vincentians celebrate "Festival Meetings," gathering together for Mass and a meeting. Today, the Society meets on one or more of the following: the Feast of Blessed Rosalie Rendu (February 7th), Ozanam Sunday (the last Sunday of April, in honor of the April 23rd birthday of Frederic Ozanam), the Feast of Blessed Frederic Ozanam (September 9th), the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul (September 27th), the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8th), and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12th). **(Rule: Part III, Statute 9)**

Rapid Growth of the Society

Between 1833 and 1860 the Society mushroomed. Catholics of every age and class were eager to join the Society. After spreading throughout France, the Society reached Rome in 1842; England in 1844; Belgium, Scotland and the United States in 1845; Germany, Holland, Greece, Turkey and Mexico in 1846; Canada and Switzerland in 1847; and Austria and Spain in 1850.

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

Twenty-seven years after its foundation, the Society throughout the world was comprised of about 2,500 Conferences with a membership of 50,000. The Annual Report showed almost four million francs given out to the poor. The period from 1860 to 1870 was a critical one for the Society, especially in France. On the one hand, the parallel progress of luxury and materialism caused a hardening of the heart in many individuals. On the other, the public authorities—in particular the French Empire, and later the Spanish Republic—took measures against the Society, whose members they wrongly accused as dissenters. With the dissolution by force of law of the Council General in Paris, many French Conferences disappeared. Nevertheless, growth continued elsewhere, chiefly in North and South America.

After 1870, the Council General resumed its activity and devoted itself to repairing the losses in France and to renewing the links with other countries. The fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Society was solemnly celebrated in 1883.

In spite of the breaking off of diplomatic relations between France and the Vatican, and on the brink of World War I, Pope St. Pius X arranged to be represented in Paris by a Papal Legate, Cardinal Vincent Vannutelli, on the occasion of the centenary of Frederic Ozanam's birth. In the Annual Report of that year, 1913, the statistics showed 8,000 Conferences, 133,000 members, and fifteen million francs distributed to the poor.

Members of the Society displayed care and concern both to civilian casualties and to prisoners during World War I (1914-1918). By war's end, the principal areas of military operations had suffered great destruction. In its efforts to restore things, the Society in Europe strove to adapt its program and methods to the new social conditions and to penetrate into places where it was previously unknown: China, Japan, Malaysia, Indochina, Burma, India, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, and East Africa saw Conferences established or multiplied.

Thirty-three nations were represented at the centenary celebrations of the Society in 1933. Cardinal Jean Verdier, the Archbishop of Paris designated as the Papal Legate for Pope Pius XI, was greeted on this occasion by civil authorities. In 1950, there were about 20,000 Conferences with an active membership of 250,000 worldwide.

In September 1953, the Society solemnly commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the death of its founder, Frederic Ozanam. Cardinal Maurice Feltin, Archbishop of Paris and Papal Legate for Pope Pius XII, and Vincentian delegates from around the world attended the ceremonies. Festive occasions such as these have strengthened the bonds of friendship and commonality between members of the Society from the various countries of the world. The Society moves ever closer in fulfilling the vision of its founder, Frederic Ozanam: "To embrace the world in a network of charity."

In fulfilling a resolution of the International Meeting of National Presidents of the Society in Paris in 1960, the Council General embarked on an extension and development program throughout the world. The idea of adopting Conferences (Twinning) between nations was initiated. This later led to self-help projects, assistance in times of national disaster, and, finally, Council-to-Council adoptions. International Congresses were convened in Europe, South America and Southeast Asia in order to develop a closer liaison and knowledge of the Society between members in many countries. The International Meeting of 1960 was followed by similar meetings in Paris (1963 and 1967), Dublin (1973), Paris (1979), Montreal (1986), Paris (1992) and Fatima (1999).

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul continues to expand throughout the world and, as of 2006, was established on five continents, in 142 countries, with approximately 700,000 members in 51,000 Conferences.

The Society in the United States

While historians differ on how the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was introduced into the United States, all agree that it was established at the “Old Cathedral” (the Church of St. Louis of France), St. Louis, Missouri, in 1845. Both laity and clergy played important roles in its foundation.

Father John Timon, CM, an American Vincentian priest, later Bishop of Buffalo, New York, brought the Society’s Rule in English from Ireland; he, in turn, gave a copy to Bishop Peter Richard Kenrick. Bishop Kenrick asked Father Ambrose Heim, one of his diocesan priests stationed at the Old Cathedral, to establish a Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Father Heim was known by the people of St. Louis for his extraordinary zeal and ministry with the poor.

The first official meeting of the Society in the United States was held on November 20, 1845. Dr. Moses Linton, a prominent physician and convert to the faith, was elected president of the nascent group. Bryan Mullanphy, widely known for his philanthropy, served as vice president. Application for affiliation with the Society in Paris followed quickly, and the American Conference was aggregated by the Council General on February 2, 1846.

Just as the Society had spread throughout France with such rapidity, so did it spread throughout the United States. The chief promoters of the Society were the American bishops, many of whom personally established the Society in their dioceses.

Early foundations included New York City and Buffalo, 1847; Milwaukee, 1849; Philadelphia, 1851; Pittsburgh, 1852; Louisville, 1853; Brooklyn, 1855; St. Paul, 1856; Chicago and Washington DC, 1857; New Orleans, 1858; Dubuque, 1859; San Francisco, 1860; Boston, 1861; Baltimore, 1864; Cleveland, 1865; Cincinnati and Portland, Oregon, 1869; San Antonio, 1871; and Detroit, 1884. New York City organized the first District Council in the United States in March 1857.

Council of the United States

After 1860, several major Society centers developed and reported directly to the international headquarters in Paris. From time to time, General Assemblies of the Society were convened. The first took place in New York in 1864. In 1915, the seven major independent jurisdictions – New York, St. Louis, New Orleans, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn – agreed to form a single national body. The Superior Council of the United States was officially instituted by Paris on June 7, 1915.

Formal inauguration ceremonies took place at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., on November 21, 1915. Thomas Mulry, “the American Ozanam,” served as the Council’s first President. He died the following year and was succeeded by George Gillespie, who held the position for almost thirty-six years and under whom the Society experienced notable growth.

Each of the succeeding National Presidents of the Council of the United States has been associated with a particular phase of Vincentian organization or activity, as well as its expansion. The story of the Society in the United States constitutes a significant chapter in Catholic social action and the Catholic Charities movement. In the beginning, Vincentian efforts were largely parish-based. These contacts, however, acquainted membership with the broader needs and problems of immigrants and others. Solicitude for immigrants impelled Vincentians to investigate and try to change conditions in public life that were prejudicial to the faith of Catholics. The Society founded or helped to establish such institutions as the Catholic Protectory in New York, the Industrial School for Boys in Chicago, and St. Vincent's Home for Boys in New Orleans. The Society founded boys' clubs, libraries, and home-finding bureaus; they worked with juvenile officers to provide rehabilitation rather than punitive care for errant youngsters.

Just as the Society was first to challenge public child-care policies hostile to the rights of Catholic children, so also was the Society among the first to recognize the many genuine contributions of non-Catholics and secular organizations and to establish sound and cordial working relationships with such groups.

The late Msgr. John O'Grady, a significant leader of Catholic Charities in the United States, credits the Society with being a prime originator and sustaining force in developing among Catholics a consciousness of national socio-religious problems and the need for a national response. The Society is continuing this commitment to social justice through its national committee Voice of the Poor. Vincentians became, in fact, the backbone of the National Conference of Catholic Charities when it was first established in 1910. The two organizations have maintained strong ties throughout their separate but closely associated histories.

1.3 THE RULE

The founding members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul immediately realized that the growth of the Society from a single Conference into an organization of many Conferences necessitated regulations that would help preserve the objectives and spirit of the original foundation. In 1835, two years after founding, the Society formulated its Rule, a series of Articles based upon the practical experiences of the first Vincentians. They emulated their patron, St. Vincent de Paul, who also had waited before he wrote the Rule for his priests and brothers and the Rule of the Daughters of Charity, thereby basing the Rule upon their lived-out experiences. The Rule of the Society has continued as the guide and blueprint for the Society for more than 170 years. This, alone, is a tribute to its efficacy and to the Spirit who inspired it.

All groups require rules for effective operation. Our Rule is internationally approved and drawn from the lives and experience of all Vincentians throughout the world. It describes the elements that are needed to maintain the unity of the Society. In truth, the Rule has kept us bound together in solidarity with Vincentians locally, nationally, and internationally.

Adherence to the Rule

The Rule applies to every member of the Society. The International Council General's position on compliance with the Rule is as follows:

“Our Society is a free and fraternal association. No one can be compelled to remain in it against one's will. Therefore, a member, Council, or Conference choosing to belong to the Society must be in accord with the Rule in every respect, in particular to:

- Give evidence of spiritual and moral adhesion to the mission, vision, and values of our Vincentian vocation.
- Attend the meetings of the Society.
- Produce regular reports on the various activities.
- Contribute, in a spirit of solidarity, to the expenses of the next higher Council which, in turn, will fulfill its duties.”

The Rule is not restrictive but liberating and life-giving. It expresses who we are, what we are, where we have been, and who we want to be. The Rule should neither be ignored nor worshipped, but rather held up as an expression of oneness with Vincentians worldwide. It should be the rallying point for our celebrations and thanksgiving.

The Rule is stable but not static. Additions were made in 1839. When the Society's growth made clear the need for national structure, a section on Superior Councils was added to the Rule in 1850. Articles with respect to Central or (Arch)Diocesan Councils were formulated in 1856. When Vincentian experience revealed the need for clarification or reinterpretation, Commentaries to the individual Articles of the original Rule were introduced. On several occasions – in 1935, for example, and again in 1953 – a thorough reworking of Rule and Commentaries was undertaken by the Council General in Paris. Substance was not affected. One can readily discern the Rule of the 1870s in the Society's Rule and Commentaries of the 1950s, the 1970s, and now, in the new millennium, in the Rule approved in 2003.

The Rule – Revised and Approved in 1973

New influences surfaced in the 1960s. The President General of the Society, Pierre Chouard (1955-69), put before the Society a challenging program of “renewal” based on considerations of spirituality, universality, extension, youth, training, adaptation, and cooperation. The Society throughout the world responded enthusiastically to the challenge of the renewal program. The directives of the Second Vatican Council (1963-65) brought about a further intensification of effort. This renewal was eventually translated into a rethinking of the Society's Rule. Following worldwide Vincentian study, the Council General in 1968 adopted a five-year experimental Rule. This revision formalized certain changes that had been taking place in Vincentian thinking and practice. For example, provision was made for the admission of women and for fixed periods of presidential office. The notion of the Vincentian Family – the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul – embracing those serving and those served was promulgated.

In 1973, at the International Assembly in Dublin, Ireland, the findings of the International Commission on the Rule were reviewed and debated. The move from experimentation to articulation of a modern Rule was then approved.

At its National Meeting in Cincinnati, September 1975, the Council of the United States adopted the General Council's working model for Conferences and Councils and decided to create Commentaries to accompany it. A committee chaired by former National President T. Raber Taylor presented the proposed Commentaries at the National Meeting in Atlanta in September 1978. Revised and then adopted in Chicago at the Midyear Meeting in April 1979, this version of the Rule and Commentaries guided the Society until 2003.

The Rule – Revised and Approved in 2003

At the beginning of the new millennium, an International Committee once again was assigned to study and renew the Rule. Since the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is called to carry on a ministry in the Church, it is held accountable for the grace that has been handed down since 1833. The wisdom of the Church mandates the establishment of the mission, spirituality, accountability, and governance of all Church organizations. The Rule and Statutes define the policies and procedures by which the mission and ethos of the Society are translated into everyday operations, providing a framework for every Vincentian in the world.

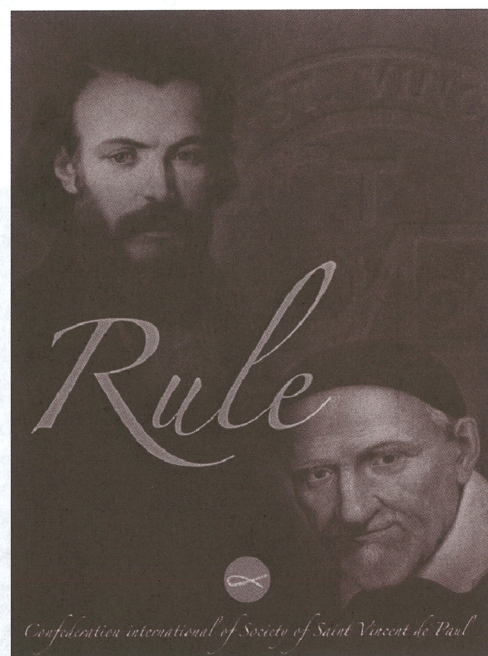
The **Rule**, approved in 2003, consists of three parts:

Part I: The Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Part II: Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Part III: Statutes of the National Council of the United States, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.

The Rule has been designed and written in such a way as to ensure that the basic spirituality and principles contained in Part I of the document remain the same, but the Statutes in Part II and III can be updated when needed. Part I and Part II can be changed only by the International Council; Part III can be changed by the National Council of the United States with approval from the International Council. The entire Rule and Statutes in their three Parts must be treated as a single legal document; however, the first part, entitled "Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul," takes precedence over the other two.



Bylaws

Bylaws are significant written rules by which an organization is governed. Bylaws determine how the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is structured and, along with state law, determine the rights of participants in the structure.

At the National Meeting in Chicago, September 2005, the Board of Trustees approved Bylaws for Conferences, District and (Arch)Diocesan Councils, and the National Council. Membership in the National Council of the United States, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc. requires that every organizational unit (Conference and Council) have Bylaws.

The Rule is the paramount authority of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Should any bylaw, rule, or regulation adopted by a Conference or Council conflict with the Rule and regulations of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as now promulgated or hereafter adopted by the International Council General or the National Council of the United States, such bylaw, rule, or regulation shall be void and of no effect.

To remain in good standing, Conferences and Councils must maintain their Bylaws (including any and all amended articles) in updated and amended form. The Conference or Council must keep a copy of their Bylaws together with the document of the Rule.

