

Conferences... (A Discussion Paper)

Shouldn't ...	Might...	Should...
Lose the spiritual foundation and focus that defines and guides our work.	Invite speakers to your meetings – perhaps a Vincentian from another conference, perhaps the Director of one of our homes, the conferences spiritual director – anyone you feel can help to focus the members on who we really are and what our work is really about.	Make the prayer and spiritual reflection an important, meaningful part of each meeting (and not just a habit or routine)
Allow members who are racist, judgmental or uncharitable in their behaviour toward clients to remain in your conference.	Try to recruit members from different ethnic/racial groups. Challenge members who make inappropriate comments, even if “joking” Get a speaker or material on the harmfulness of generalizing and stereotyping.	Set a high standard of behavior, both in word in action. Your conference and the clients are better off without a member who does not treat clients (even the “repeaters”) in a compassionate, respectful manner.
Allow a We-They mentality to creep into the language or behavior of Vincentians towards clients.	Take some time in your conference to discuss, “Is it possible to practice Christian humility and still consider myself better than ‘them’ (those I serve)?”	Help your members to think and act inclusively . When we see clients as “ they-them ”, we are putting ourselves separate and above them, proudly believing that we would never allow ourselves to be in “their situation” or convinced that we would quickly get out of it.
Allow your conference to stagnate, because of no new members or no change of leadership.	Look at the Recruitment Chapter (available through Central Office or on our web site – svdptoronto.org) and do the two self-rating inventories, “Do we need new members?” & “Are we ready for new members?” There are potential members and potential leaders out there. Are you ready to break out of the known and the comfortable. It has been suggested that conferences that don't have or	Commit to bringing in at least one or two new members a year and to helping develop members into leaders. Conferences that haven't had any new members for a few years or where the same person has been president for ten years obviously aren't interested in growth or change.

	aren't prepared to get a minimum of 6 members should close down or join with a neighboring conference. What do you think??	
Facilitate clients becoming dependent on Society support by simply regularly giving vouchers and failing to help them (through whatever creative means available) to make some move toward greater self sufficiency	Use excerpts from Schema I of the Rule as the spiritual reading in order to remind the members what Christ is calling us to and what Ozanam is challenging us to do. If it becomes only about handing out vouchers, it may be time to close shop.	Gear most meetings toward helping your members to be more skilled, creative and determined in helping their clients to become less dependent on Society assistance. Regularly remind each other that the vouchers are a means, not an end.
Allow your members to burn out because there are too few trying to do too much.	Take the clients served over the past month or two and ask the conference to prioritize them, in terms of some criteria. The discussion resulting from attempting to develop criteria and prioritize the clients will be very productive. If some clients are going to be underserved or delayed, try to make sure it's not the higher priority ones.	Get more members through a well planned recruitment campaign (resource booklet available through Central) and set priorities. If there aren't enough members and too many clients, determine which clients are a priority, based on some criteria that the conference has set.
Allow meetings to become long, predictable, or that members seek to avoid		Meetings should be spiritual, interesting, informative, enjoyable and fraternal. Vincentians should leave meetings feeling a little more motivated, inspired, knowledgeable, skilled or committed. Plan your meeting to help accomplish this.
Allow a mentality of "what ours is ours" to creep into decisions about whether to send up funds that aren't really required in the conference.	If the parish priest does not permit funds collected in the parish to be sent up, try to explain to him the importance within the Society of sharing funds and moving them to where the need is greatest. You may wish to seek the assistance of the Particular Council in this regard.	Assist your clients in a way that is reasonable and in keeping with what other conferences across TCC are doing and send the excess funds up, so they can be used to assist in other areas. Ozanam developed this structure very wisely and carefully. It helps level the playing field for poorer conferences.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul