

**Society of Saint Vincent de Paul  
Toronto Central Council**



**Particular Council President's  
Handbook**

**June, 2010**

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## Introduction

The particular council president (generally a former conference president) will strive to ensure that the goals of the particular council are achieved, that is:

- animating and coordinating the activities of conferences in their ministry;
- serving the conferences by furthering charitable activities;
- making sure the conferences do not do anything to jeopardize the Society. (The Rule, 2007, 2.3.2).

Along with the other executive members, the president works to ensure that the conferences are healthy, active, and serving in an appropriate manner.

*Note: Although reference will be made to the Rule and some of its key sections quoted here, this booklet will not attempt to replace the section of the Rule dealing with particular councils. A pc president should be very familiar with all aspects of the Rule but especially those sections dealing with the role, responsibilities, structure and operation of a particular council (section 2.3)*

Ideally, a member accepts the role of pc president because they see it as a call to leadership and are convinced that an effective particular council can help the conferences to be more effective in their service to neighbours in need. They also feel that they have the commitment and skills that, combined with those of a strong executive, can effectively carry out the responsibilities of a particular council.

*Note: The particular council president, by virtue of election/acclamation to that position, becomes a member of the Board of Toronto Central Council unless he/she chooses to have another member be elected/acclaimed to sit on the Board as a Representative on Board. See Appendix 2 for the position description of a member of the Board of TCC.*

### 1. Election and Succession Planning

- ❖ The Rule (2.6.3) provides the process for electing the president. Ideally the current president begins in the first years of their term to think about who might become the next president or executive member. The president will then, on a regular basis, delegate various tasks and responsibilities to those members that have the potential to lead and will provide some mentoring, thus giving those members the opportunity to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes they will need to move into a leadership role later. Some members will, of course, have to be reassured that they do have what it takes to take on leadership roles. **All of this cannot, of course, be accomplished on the day the president's term comes due. Asking at that time for someone to volunteer to be president is never appropriate and seldom productive.**
- ❖ The duties of the president are described in 2.3.8. The term is 4 years, with the option of being renewed (with an appropriate vote) for an additional 2 year term.

## 2. Selection of an Executive (see process and duties, 2.3.9)

- ❖ The new president often has a daunting task in establishing an effective executive. Many of the members may feel they do not have the time and/or ability to effectively fulfill the role of an executive member. They may need to be convinced that they will get lots of support and assistance. They may even prefer to only agree to serve on an interim fashion.
- ❖ The president may select up to three vice-presidents and is advised, whenever possible, to do so, since this will spread the work among more members and help develop the leadership skills of more members. The secretary and treasurer positions are generally a little easier to fill.
- ❖ It will obviously be easier to draw executive members around a new president that has a passion and a vision for the work of the particular council and a deep commitment to responding to Christ's call to serve our neighbours in need.

## 3. Particular Council Meetings

- ❖ New presidents, less experienced with running effective meetings, will likely find the Meetings booklet very helpful ( [www.ssvptoronto.ca](http://www.ssvptoronto.ca) Materials Available, Meetings Chapter).
- ❖ Since the purpose of a particular council is to animate & coordinate, help further charitable activities, and help conferences avoid inappropriate actions, it is important that the meetings be designed to accomplish these goals. Hopefully, every pc meeting will allow for:
  - Prayer & reflection (*see Reflections Booklet*)
  - Learning
  - Sharing
  - Problem solving
  - Fellowship
  - Provision of relevant information from other councils
  - Laughter
- ❖ To accomplish all of this in the 1 ½ hours or so may mean that, instead of each conference giving an oral report of its activity each month, they submit a written report. Perhaps then only one conference each month reports on any unusual or interesting activity.
- ❖ In setting an agenda and planning how much time will be devoted to each agenda item, perhaps ask – which of the above components does the item address. Ideally, some items will address more than one – e.g. where a member shares a challenge they are dealing with and other members share their related experience and ideas.

- ❖ Presidents should be aware that only certain members of the particular council have a right to vote. While on many routine matters the president might permit all present to vote, care should be taken on critical votes related to elections and finances. In such cases the president would be advised to ensure only members with voting privileges (see Art. 2.3.5) vote.
- ❖ All conference members should be encouraged to attend particular council meetings and the meetings should be sufficiently productive and interesting that they will want to attend.

#### **4. Spirituality and Modeling**

- ❖ The particular council should radiate the spiritual testimony of St. Vincent and Blessed. Frederic; that is: love of God, each other and those we serve.
- ❖ The particular council can and should be a model for conference presidents in terms of the way in which our neighbours in need are viewed and spoken of,, how the needs of members are heard and addressed, how members are supported and helped to grow, and how meetings are planned and run.
- ❖ This responsibility to model for conferences is especially important in the area of spirituality. The conference presidents and members need to know and to see that the faith, beliefs and commitment of the president and executive are reflected in what they say and do. The pc will, hopefully, model the appropriate use of the Spiritual Reflections booklet at each meeting.

#### **5. Visits to Conferences**

- ❖ To meet the goals of the particular council, the president needs to have a good sense of the realities and challenges facing each of the conferences and to develop a good working relationship with each of the conference presidents. This can be accomplished, in part, by visits to the conferences. Through such visits, the presidents of particular councils will inform and be informed, teach and learn. The president goes as a friend and a Vincentian and not as a superior. He/she follows the agenda and speaks only when invited to. The president should try to praise as much if not more than criticize so that the spirit of brotherhood within the Society prospers. He/she must understand that there exists many ways of doing things and that his/her way is not always the best.

#### **6. Member Development**

- ❖ Through the monthly meetings and visits to the conferences the president will soon develop a good feel for what the members need in terms of development in the areas of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

- ❖ One of the responsibilities of the particular council is to “organize training and formation sessions about the Vincentian ministry and spirituality for potential and current members, volunteers and staff.” (the Rule, 2.3.2)
- ❖ In many cases this goal will be met in the regular meetings where a particular aspect of service is addressed (e.g. serving neighbours in need suffering from mental health or addiction issues), perhaps with the assistance of a guest resource person. In other cases a special session might be arranged to address the specific topic.

## **7. Finance**

The particular council has a responsibility, like the conferences, to move money to where it is most needed. In some cases this may mean the pc sending funds down to conferences that require additional support. On a regular basis it will mean sending surplus funds up to Central Council to support Special Works, Central Council operations, and higher councils.

## **8. Reporting & Accountability**

- ❖ For the purposes of reporting to Central Council, meeting CRA requirements, or for the smooth functioning of the particular council, various records and materials will need to be managed. If an efficient system for collecting, organizing and storing such materials does not exist in the particular council, the incoming president and executive would do well to spend some time early in their term putting a system in place. Putting a good system in place takes less time than working with a poor system. A neighbouring pc president or Central Office can be helpful in this regard.

## **9. Two-way Communication**

- ❖ Conference members can become so focused on their service to neighbours in need that they lose touch with the larger Society and with issues/challenges beyond their conference. One of the key responsibilities of the pc is to ensure that information flows – between the conferences to Central and Central to the conferences.
  - The members need to be fully aware of the other ways that the Society serves people in need (Special Works). They need to appreciate the challenges and opportunities being addressed by Central Council. They should be aware of the resources and support available through Central Council
  - Central Council needs to know what additional support and assistance the conferences/members need/want. They need their input on an ongoing basis and to specific issues or initiatives. They need the involvement of members on standing committees.
- ❖ In some ways, pc presidents might be seen to be in a conflict of interests. They are elected by the members of the pc to lead them in their service to neighbours in need. The pc president is likely to feel that their first loyalty is to the conferences/members of their pc. At the same time they sit on the Board of Central Council and are required by law

(the Corporations Act) to make decisions that are in the best interests of the corporation. Issues may arise where the best interests of the pc seem to be different or in conflict with the best interests of the Society. Perhaps the question the pc president in these circumstances need to answer for themselves is – what is in the best interests of all those we serve and all the members of TCC.

## **In Closing**

Returning to the three goals/responsibilities of the particular council:

- “animating and coordinating the activities of conferences in their ministry;
- serving the conferences by furthering charitable activities;
- making sure the conferences do not do anything to jeopardize the Society.”

In addition, the particular council:

- “encourages the creation of new conferences;
- promotes Special Works;
- re-activates dormant or defunct conferences;
- organizes training and formation sessions about the Vincentian ministry and spirituality for potential and current members, volunteers and staff.”

The pc president, in conjunction with the members of the executive, needs to regularly consider:

- How do our pc meetings help to achieve these goals and responsibilities?
- What other opportunities do we create or take advantage of to help achieve these goals and responsibilities?
- What assistance/support do we need from other councils?

One of the great strengths of the Society is that the conference and its members is the foundation and *raison d'être* of the Society and that they have a great deal of autonomy in deciding how to best meet the needs of their neighbours in need. One of the possible weaknesses of the Society is that the conferences have a great deal of autonomy in deciding how to best meet the needs of their neighbours in need and may, without appropriate guidance and support, stray from the mission and values of the Society. The role of the particular council, in this regard, is clear.

# Appendix 1

## 2.3 PARTICULAR COUNCIL (as per the Rule, 2007)

### 2.3.1 Definition

Historically, the need for a Particular Council manifested itself as soon as the Society began to grow out of its "one only" Conference composition in 1835 and started to become a multi-celled organization.

A Particular Council is usually composed of 4 to 12 conferences in the same vicinity, for example, a town, a rural region, a diocese or, in the case of a large metropolitan area, a neighbourhood or district. It is the first level of councils within the Society. However, its size may vary depending on local practices and geography. The name of the council should reflect the area that it coordinates.

Particular Councils report to either:

- the Central Council to which they belong; or
- the Regional Council, if they do not belong to a Central Council.

### 2.3.2 Role and Responsibilities of Particular Councils

The Particular Council:

- animates and coordinates the activities of conferences in their ministry;
- serves the conferences by furthering charitable activities;
- makes sure that the conferences do not do anything to jeopardize the society.

The Particular Council keeps conferences informed about:

- changing social conditions;
- new issues and programs;
- modification of, or additions to internal policies and procedures as well as changes in the Operations Manual;
- major events .

The Particular Council provides conference members with the opportunity to:

- benefit from the knowledge and inspiration of other Vincentians;
- expand their Vincentian horizons and sense of worldwide responsibility.

The Particular Council:

- encourages the creation of new conferences;
- promotes Special Works;

- re-activates dormant or defunct conferences;
- organizes training and formation sessions about the Vincentian ministry and spirituality for potential and current members, volunteers and staff.

In order to ensure adequate service to the poor, and to demonstrate solidarity and the will to share with the poor, the Particular Council may provide the conferences with:

- financial assistance if they are in need of it;
- other pertinent forms of support.

The Particular Council may, when engaging in charitable activities and Special Works which are beyond the capacity of a conference or which have community-wide implications:

- work with the support of conferences in its jurisdiction;
- collaborate when necessary with outside organizations;

The Particular Council reviews applications for aggregation by affiliated conferences and recommends them to the next higher council.

The Particular Council should solicit financial support from the conferences for the Particular Council as stated in the Rule<sup>1</sup> and in keeping with the internal policies.

The Particular Council must provide an annual activity and financial report to the next higher council.

- If there are two candidates, the one who obtains the most votes wins the election. In the event of a tie, a second secret ballot must be held at the same meeting.
- If there were more than two candidates and no one obtains 50% + one of the votes on the first ballot, a second secret ballot will be held at the same meeting with the names of the two candidates who obtained the greatest number of votes on the first ballot.
- After the votes have been counted, the Chair announces the results.

### 2.3.7 Term of Office

The president of the Particular Council is elected for a term of office of four years. This term of office may be renewed once only for a term of two years maximum.

The term of office of the retiring executive officers ends only when the newly elected president appoints the new executive officers<sup>8</sup>. It is the duty and obligation of the retiring officers to promptly turn over to the new officers all books of minutes, financial records, accounts, and other relevant documents.

### 2.3.8 Duties of the President

The president of the Particular Council shall endeavour to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the Council as described in 2.3.2. fu president, he or she is a voting member of his or her Particular Council<sup>9</sup>, and of the Central, Regional and National Councils.

In addition to the duties described in 2.3.2, the president should also visit conferences in the

council's jurisdiction. The president makes such visits in order to:

- share information received from the higher councils and from other conferences;
- provide encouragement, and assistance if required;
- learn from the experiences and works of the Vincentians visited.

In order to protect the credibility of the Society and avoid all conflict of interest, it is recommended that the officers designated by the president of a council not be his or her close relatives.

See 2.3.16 for information about the president's vote at Particular Council meetings. As servant leader of the Council, the president shall:

- take a comprehensive, active interest in the welfare of the members;
- support them in their Vincentian actions, helping and assisting them as circumstances require.

The president ensures that in the area where the council has jurisdiction:

- good communication is developed and maintained between the council and the conferences;
- good working relations are developed and maintained with neighbouring Councils;
- good working relations are developed and maintained with local civil and religious authorities;
- the Society and its achievements are promoted.

The president of the council should not hold two presidential offices. If a conference president is elected to the presidency of the council, the conference must elect a new president.

*Commentary: It is important for the president and officers to belong to a conference and to visit those in need as often as possible. This ensures that all the members are operating at the grass-roots level and keeping their feet on the ground. Accepting the authority of the conference president in the allocation of the work to be done is also an expression of humility.*

## Appendix 2

### Position Description

#### Member of Board of Directors

#### Toronto Central Council

##### **Overview:**

As a member of Toronto Central Council (the “Board”) of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (an incorporated organization), you share responsibility for providing the organization with the leadership, oversight and decision making necessary to ensure appropriate, effective, and efficient operation of the works of the Society. These responsibilities are carried out through the regular monthly meetings, the work of Standing and Special Committees, liaison with the community, and the work required to adequately prepare for and follow up from Board and Committee meetings.

More specifically, **the major responsibilities of Toronto Central Council** are:

1. Determine the organization’s mission and purpose;
2. Ensure effective organizational planning;
3. Determine and monitor the organization’s programs and services;
4. Ensure adequate resources;
5. Manage resources effectively;
6. Enhance the organization’s public image;
7. Select the Executive Director;
8. Support the Executive Director and evaluate performance;
9. Serve as a court of appeal;
10. Assess its own performance and do succession planning.

##### **Duties and Expectations of All Individual Toronto Central Council Members:**

1. Take Board meeting attendance very seriously, attending as many Board meetings as possible. Give advance regrets if unable to attend. There are 6 Board meetings in an average year.
2. Chair or actively participate on a committee or task force, and/or hold an officer position, at least every other year of Board service.
3. Place the organization within top three personal giving priorities, and make a significant annual gift appropriate to personal circumstances.
4. Help to ensure that all funds received or collected by the Council are used exclusively for the normal pursuit of the Society’s aims and objectives. The member will further help ensure that

any surplus, beyond a reasonable reserve fund, is shared with the Council at the next higher level for the maintenance and expansion of the Society.

5. Become familiar with all of the Society's Special Works, and with the mandate of each Standing Committee.
6. Participate in advance discussions and review of materials to facilitate Board decisions, noting that e-mail is the primary form of inter-active communication between meetings.
7. Participate actively and constructively in group decision making.
8. Prepare proposals, policies and other documents for Board review, from time to time.
9. Help ensure that the work and actions of the Society, including its employees, the Vincentians and general volunteers, is within all relevant legislation, codes and agreements.
10. Attend the Annual General Meeting whenever possible, and make reports to the members if appropriate.
11. Avoid conflicts of interest where possible. Declare any that arise immediately, and fully withdraw from all related discussions and decisions.
12. Accept no compensation from the organization for time spent in Board, officer or Board-related service, except as otherwise approved.
13. Actively represent the organization in the community, striving to enhance its image.
14. Actively support resource generation by identifying prospective volunteers, donors, sponsors, members, partners and other resources for the organization.
15. Act with probity and prudence in the management of the organization's resources and reputation.
16. Resign promptly if unable to fulfil requirements and obligations.
17. By virtue of the by-laws of VincentPaul Family Homes Corporation, Toronto Central Council Board members are also voting Members of that corporation during their term, unless otherwise specified..

### **Qualifications:**

1. Board members will gain a position on Board because they currently hold the position of Particular Council President or have been elected as a Particular Council Representative on the Board or have been appointed as a result of their position as a specified Board Officer.
2. They will have exhibited a passion for service to those in need and for the various works of the staff and members of the Society;

### **Skills, Qualities and Personal Traits:**

1. A commitment to the Mission, Vision, and Values of Toronto Central Council;
2. An appreciation for the life and mission of the Society of Saint Vincent De Paul;
3. Knowledge and skills sufficient to be a contributing member of the Board, with orientation and training;
4. A willingness and ability to function effectively as a member of a team;
5. Willingness to make sufficient time available for Board meetings, duties and related work.

**Orientation and Training:**

1. When taking office, each Board Member will receive an Orientation Manual.

**Length of Appointment:**

1. Board membership runs concurrent with the term of the Particular Council president. In the case of Officers, their term ends when their position as an Officer ends.

**Benefits:**

Board Members have the privilege of serving the poor and others in need through the caring, thoughtful oversight and leadership of Toronto Central Council. The decisions of the Board have a direct impact on the work of staff in the Special Works and on the members and conferences. Caring and responsible leadership will result in better service to those in need.

**Screening Measures:**

Members of Board are screened as members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Toronto Central Council (see Screening and Risk Management Policy).