

Each home visit is intended to help the neighbour in need get through a particular difficulty **and** to move forward in some way that's meaningful to them. The first few visits will generally focus almost exclusively on the first objective. After a number of visits, the focus will generally move much more to the second objective.

### 1) Receiving the call

- Get the neighbour in need's message from the parish secretary or, hopefully, a conference voice mailbox.
- The information and tone of voice may tell you a good deal about the needs.
- Carefully note all the contact info and other details

### 2) Preparing for the visit

- i) **Get a partner** – Vincentians **never** visit on their own. A male/female pair is ideal but not always possible. Two males should not visit a lone female neighbour in need.
- ii) **Pre-plan with your partner** – If you've visited with this person before, you probably have a good sense of how they relate to neighbours in need. If not, you would do well to chat with them about how they approach a home visit. You want to match your styles and to work to each other's strengths.
- iii) **Ask for God's help** – One experienced Vincentian says this short prayer prior to every visit. "God, please help we do what's best." God will know what you mean.
- iv) **Get emotionally ready** – If you are too tired, or angry, or there is something about the neighbour in need that annoys you, can you be as compassionate, and caring and non-judgmental as you want to be? If you can't get yourself into the proper frame of mind, it may be best for the neighbour in need and you that you ask another Vincentian to do the call. God will give you all the help you need but you've got to work with Him.
- v) **Get materially ready** – You will generally have a couple of food and clothing vouchers with you so that you can respond to the needs as you see them. If the neighbour in need's call indicates other needs (e.g. information about a gov't service that might be able to help them with a particular problem), you will come prepared with the information or with written material.
- vi) **Check file** – If other Vincentian have visited, there should be a file. Knowing a bit about the neighbour in need let's them know you cared enough to check and also reduces the likelihood of contradictory information.
- vii) **Set an appointment** – Set a clear time and date with the neighbour in need (since it obviously would not be respectful to simply drop in on them) and get all details re. location. Stress that it's very important that they call and cancel if something comes up.

### 3) The visit

- **Remember** – if you are there for the right reasons (i.e. you want to act on your faith, to serve others, and to help make a difference), you will say and do the right things. **Be yourself. Trust God and trust yourself.**
- **Ice breaker** – especially if the neighbour in need seems a little embarrassed, uncomfortable, or even antagonistic (since it's hard to admit you need help), take a few moments to get everyone comfortable. Commenting on an interesting photo, asking the cat's name, or focusing in on something that would seem to be of interest to the neighbour in need will help. However, get down to their needs fairly quickly – that's why they called and why you came.
- **Explain who we are** – Don't assume the neighbour in need knows what the Society is and where the money comes from. Explain that you are a **volunteer** member of a Catholic organization that works in the **local Catholic church** to help people of all denominations in the community. Explain that the money comes from the **donations of parishioners** and it is your responsibility to provide assistance to the **most needy**.

- **“How can we help you today?”** – A question such as this will start the neighbour in need talking about their current situation and what they hope you can do for them. Especially on the first few visits, **listen, listen, listen**. Listen to the words. Listen to the tone. Listen to the unfinished sentences. You want to respond to their request but you also want to find ways that you might be able to help them move forward in some way meaningful to them. This requires that you listen with your mind and heart.
- **Record keeping 1**– You will record some key information on a standard form. In the first couple of visits you really only need:
  - i) Neighbour in need’s name, address and contact info
  - ii) Number, names and ages of children
 If the neighbour in need continues to call for assistance, you will need more information, likely including:
  - i) Total income and expenses.
  - ii) Other information that could help you to assess the situation and to offer appropriate assistance.
 Note: We don’t require neighbour in needs to give us personal information. However, if we believe we require certain information in order to be able to appropriately serve them and they aren’t willing to provide it, it may mean that we can no longer serve them (see the Serving Longer-Term Neighbour in needs booklet).
- **Record keeping 2** – The neighbour in need record sheet will have room for comments and observations. However, only factual information (name, address, etc.) should be recorded during the visit. In most cases you and your partner will fill in the information after you leave the neighbour in need’s residence. While you are there you are listening and conversing and listening. Sitting there with a clipboard and pen sets up a very different relationship and dynamic.
- **Promises** – be honest and realistic in what you say you can and will do. Don’t make promises you can’t or likely won’t keep. The neighbour in need needs to know that you care enough to do what you say you will and have enough respect for them to be honest about what you can’t or won’t do.

## 2) Follow-up

- **File** – complete the record sheet and place in conference binder or file (ensuring it’s secure)
- **Follow through on promises** – while it’s still fresh, do what you said you would do,
- **Discuss at conference** – The conference members do not need to discuss every case at every meeting, but the conference meeting is an excellent opportunity to share experiences and insights and to struggle with challenges. Vincentians in a spiritual, healthy, active conference nourish each other, guide each other, educate each other, and contribute to each other’s spiritual and emotional growth. If your conference doesn’t do this, work with the president, the other members, and the spiritual adviser (generally the pastor) to bring it about.

**Final thought: Vincentians who become judgmental and critical of neighbours in need have probably forgotten that the voucher/material support is only one (and not the most important) thing we bring to their home. We bring hope, compassion, respect, and Christian love. We give the gift of our presence and attention and our efforts to assist. Those who much greater (but often more difficult to give consistently) gifts. They have also perhaps forgotten that poverty is about injustice, unequal opportunities/advantages, and rights denied.**

*A "vocation" is, in the wide sense, a call of the conscience enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. To find oneself one day wanting to make the effort to become a "brother" (or "sister") of St. Vincent de Paul, or a "Vincentian" (however it is put according to place and language) is to translate into action a consequence of our Christian faith. It is not just the absolutely universal call of Christ to the spirit of charity. The specific characteristic of this call is the intimate desire personally and directly to participate in the service of the poor, by a contract between man and man, by a personal gift of the heart and friendship, and to do this in a brotherly community of lay people inspired by the same vocation. (from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Rule)*