

# Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Toronto Central Council

## Revitalizing Our 5 Guiding Principles of Vincentian Service In support of all Toronto Central Council Members



## High Five

Our 5 Guiding Principles  
*To Serve*  
Our Neighbours in Need

'High Five' is a gesture of greeting, and in 2014 we are welcoming the chance to meet and greet all Toronto Central Vincentians at their Conference, to share a consistent message about ***Our 5 Guiding Principles of Service to our Neighbours in Need.***

The aim of the information and support session is to reaffirm our Vincentian commitment and invite Members to revitalize their understanding by:

- Increasing our awareness of the 5 Guiding Principles
- Build conviction to follow the 5 Guiding Principles
- Provide learning materials to help with the delivery of the 5 Guiding Principles
- Celebrate and encourage the Vincentian vocation

# **Society of Saint Vincent de Paul**

## **Toronto Central Council**

### **5 Guiding Principles for Conferences**

#### **1.) Home Visits Are Important**

Visiting Neighbours in Need in their homes is the primary and preferred form of meaningful, person-to-person service by Vincentians in each conference.

#### **2.) Equity of Service**

Neighbours in Need in similar circumstances and with similar needs receive similar levels of service across the GTA.

#### **3.) Continuous Learning**

Since we strive to serve our Neighbours in Need by helping them to meet some of their immediate needs, as well as by assisting them in their efforts to move forward, Vincentians strive to continue to grow in the knowledge and skills required to achieve these goals.

#### **4.) Renewal**

In order to appropriately and effectively serve Neighbours in Need, the conference needs to be spiritual, active, committed and creative. Such a conference is difficult to maintain without a sufficient number of active Members and without the addition of new Members.

#### **5.) Sharing**

Since a fundamental principle of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is that funds are moved within the Society to where they are most needed, conferences send excess funds up, normally keeping a balance in their account of no more than three months reserve (i.e. the average amount that they would spend in three months).

# **Table of Contents**

## **Quick Reference Guides:**

<b>Home Visitation</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Safety and Home Visitation</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
<b>For Conferences for the Provision of Material Assistance</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>For Long Term Neighbours in Need</b>	<b>Page 12</b>

# Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

## Toronto Central Council

### Quick Reference Guide: Home Visitation

Each home visit is intended to help the Neighbor 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 Neighbor in Need's message from the parish secretary or, hopefully, a conference voice mailbox.
- Your first contact is a return call to organize an appointment. This call will help you assess the nature and urgency of the request and confirm 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 client.
- ii) Set an appointment**– Set a clear time and date with the neighbor (since it obviously would not be respectful to simply drop in on them). Stress that it is very important that they call and cancel if they are unable to keep the appointment.
- iii) Pre-plan with your partner** – If you've visited with this person before, you probably have a good sense of how they relate to those who have called. 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.
- iv) Ask for God's help** – One experienced Vincentian says a short prayer prior to every visit. "God, please don't let me mess up." God will know what you mean.
- v) Get emotionally ready** – If you are too tired, or angry, or there is something about the neighbour 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 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.
- vi) 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. It is best to be prepared with an amount that relates to their need as perceived on the return call plus a bit extra if new facts emerge during the visit; it is not appropriate to be counting out food vouchers in front of the neighbor in need, so prepare this in advance as much as possible. If the neighbour'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.
- vii) Check file** – If other Vincentians have visited, there should be a record which you can review to see the assistance rendered by other Vincentians in the conference. Knowing a bit about the neighbor in need will let them know you cared enough to check and that there is a consistent response to assistance, reducing the potential for contradictory information.

### 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 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 person you are visiting will help. However, it can be easy for conversations to wander, so get down to their needs fairly quickly – that is why they called and why you came.
- **Explain who we are** – Don't assume that the neighbor calling 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 and that we are not government funded. Explain that our money comes from the donations of parishioners and it is our responsibility to provide assistance to the most needy.
- **"How can we help you today?"** – A question such as this will start the neighbour 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**– It is not considerate of the Neighbours in Need dignity for the visitors to be completing forms or recording information, but you will need to record some key information on a standard form, which is usually best done immediately after the visit. In the first couple of visits you really only need:
  - i) The neighbour's name, address and contact info
  - ii) Number and ages of children or other dependents
  - iii) Total income source and major expenses
  - iv) A bit about their life situation through a respectful dialogue – this should come out in the conversation you have with the neighbour in need.
- **Record keeping 2** – The Call 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'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 realistic and honest about what you can, or cannot do for the Neighbour in Need. Your genuine honesty demonstrates that you care and have respect for them.

## 2) Follow-up

- **File** – complete the record sheet and place in conference binder or file. Ensure that it is **secure**. Remember that this is someone’s personal information. **(Note 1)**
- **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, compare impressions and struggle with challenges. Vincentians in a spiritual, healthy, active conference nourish, guide and 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.
- **At the conference level**, review the ‘callers’ list on an annual basis to assess particular needs and make plans for the future.

**Final thought: The ‘voucher/material’ support is only one (and not the most important) thing we bring to a neighbour’s home. We bring hope, compassion, respect and Christian love. We give the gift of our presence and our attention and our efforts to assist. These are much greater gifts but often much more difficult to give and to give consistently. We must always bear in mind that poverty is about injustice, unequal opportunities/advantages and about rights denied.**

### **(Note 1)**

**The Society has a policy for all members and staff regarding Privacy (Policy 6-06) and Confidentiality (policy 12-05) found under the Members Area of the website.**

**<http://svdptoronto.org/members-area/policies/>**

# **Society of Saint Vincent de Paul**

## **Toronto Central Council**

### **Quick Reference Guide: Safety and Home Visitation**

Member safety is a top priority of the Society. In a typical year the Conferences in Toronto make 65,000 home visits. Since the first SSVP Conference was formed in 1850 at St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto, there have been no incidents of unsafe home visitations reported by Vincentians in the Toronto area. This represents a clean record of over 160 years.

Vincentians should postpone or terminate a visit if they feel their health or safety is at risk (dogs, the neighbour in need is sick, suspicion of illegal activity).

#### **Safety advice to follow in making home visits includes:**

- Always visit in pairs
- Know the community you are visiting. Check out the physical landscape, walk ways, pedestrian and vehicular traffic patterns prior to making your visit. Simply be aware and attuned to your surroundings
- Make a point of knowing the characteristics of the community you are visiting including what agencies and services are available in the area. If concerned about safety in a particular area, talk with these agencies and the Community Liaison Officer of the local police who will advise on safety issues in their respective Divisions
- If required, visit during the daylight hours
- Park in legal and well-lit areas
- Avoid using stairwells in apartment buildings
- Asking the neighbour in need to put their dog in a separate room
- Do not carry a purse or large sums of money when visiting. Leave valuables at home. Locking your purse in your car is not recommended since someone may observe where you have put your valuable
- Sharing your experiences in the community you are serving to ensure safety and service for all

If concern still exists, discussions should take place at the Conference, Particular Council and if necessary at the Central Council level to determine if further action is required. Where there is an identified and confirmed serious safety issue, an alternate visiting location should be provided, with the understanding that all the characteristics of a good home visit should remain as the guiding principles of our interaction with our Neighbours in Need.

# Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

## Toronto Central Council

### Quick Reference Guide: For Conferences for the Provision of Material Assistance

#### Preamble:

Seeking material assistance is often the basis of the first call from a neighbour in need that a conference receives. Understanding that we have an obligation to provide ***similar levels of service*** through our network of ***sharing*** will allow us to best serve those who call on us in their time of need while being good stewards of the funds entrusted to us by donors.

#### **Similar levels of service:**

Neighbours in similar circumstances and with similar needs should receive similar levels of service at the conference level across the GTA. Response to calls for assistance should be made within 48 hours; and a home visitation should be arranged within one week.

#### **Sharing:**

Sharing means that funds are moved within the Society to where they are most needed. Providing more than reasonable assistance to one neighbour because the conference can afford it or providing less than reasonable assistance to another neighbour because that conference cannot afford it contradicts our values and guiding principles.

Conference members ***decide how much to give*** and this is dependent on ***how the funds flow***:

#### **Deciding How Much to Give:**

Conferences and members bring their compassion, judgement and experience to bear when making the decision on how much assistance to provide. Nevertheless, an attempt should be made to bring consistency and equity across the conferences in terms of amounts of assistance being given.

When deciding what to give, some criteria to consider:

- The family/persons needs and circumstances (including whether the circumstances are exceptional)
- Current source and level of financial/ material support, if any;
- An immediate need and if the need is food – how much is required to relieve the emergency
- How many people are in the family and their approximate age?
- The other services available in the area (contact 211 for a listing of social services available)
- Previous assistance given and frequency of calls
- How has the family coped in the past?
- Is there any relief in sight for the crisis?



### **How the funds flow:**

Conferences are expected to raise funds in order to carry out their work. The number one method of collecting funds is through the Poor Box. If your conference has tried every method of raising funds (i.e.: holding the poor boxes at every mass, asking the parish priest to remind parishioners to help the poor, placing notices and bulletin items reminding parishioners of the work of the Society, annual or semi-annual activity and financial updates, fund raising events, etc.) and you are still unable to assist due to lack of funds, then the conference can reach out to the Particular Council for advice and if required financial assistance. If the Particular Council is unable to assist due to lack of funds, then it will reach out Toronto Central Council for help.

Conferences are expected to create an annual cash flow budget and the general rule is that no more than 3 months operating reserve is kept in their accounts. Funds beyond a three month forecasted needs are to be passed on to the Particular Councils for re-distribution. Hoarding of funds is contradictory to the Rule of the Society and may put the charitable status of a conference in jeopardy.

### **Types of Material Assistance:**

#### **1. Food Vouchers:**

In most cases, the main reason for the call for assistance is for help with food. The amount given in food vouchers provided to families or single people should be based on the assessed level of need as well as an understanding of what other services and resources are available locally.

- the cost of a nutritious food basket for an adult and teenagers over age 13 is ~ \$7.00 per day/\$8.00 for males; children under the age of 13, the cost is ~\$5.00 per day. Source : [www.toronto.ca/health/nutrition/food\\_basket.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/health/nutrition/food_basket.htm)
- using this rate, Vincentians can determine the amount of the food voucher to be provided based on the circumstances unique to each call
- generally food assistance is provided for 3 to 5 days up to a maximum of one week except in unusual circumstances
- frequency of assistance is to be provided on an assessed need; helping the same family or individual one or two months in a row is not unusual however Vincentians have a responsibility to help neighbours in need to reduce the number of times that they have to call for assistance
- for guidance on the challenges of serving longer term neighbours in need refer to the “[Quick Reference Guide, Serving Those in Need Over The Longer Term](#)” and “[Serving Longer Term Neighbours in Need](#)” available on our website: [www.ssvptoronto.ca](http://www.ssvptoronto.ca) under the Members section.
- Important note: food vouchers need to be tracked, accounted for and reported with the same care and diligence that conferences use to manage donations.

**Assistance provided following the public health guidelines:**

	Adults	Children	Per Day	3 – 5 days help
Example 1	Single Mom	2 youngsters	\$17.00	\$50 - \$80.00
Example 2	Couple	1 teenager	\$23.00	\$70 - \$115.00

**2. Stores Vouchers:**

The store vouchers are issued to those in need who require clothing, household goods or furniture items. Different vouchers are issued for our different stores and partners: Society stores, Goodwill and Salvation Army. Payment for these vouchers comes from the issuing conference through their Particular Council. Conferences can order vouchers from the head office.

- Vouchers carry a maximum of \$50.00; more than one voucher can be issued to a family if required. Voucher customers are not given change so it may be best to issue vouchers in lesser dollar amounts in case items are out of stock in the stores, voucher recipients can then try again when new stock arrives.
- Store voucher assistance should be in direct relation to the assessed need, the number of family members and the frequency of requests. Keep in mind, there is an actual cost associated with the collection and distribution of goods which is why conferences are charged back for the value redeemed.

**3. New Beds, Tables and Chairs:**

The determination for ordering new beds, tables and chairs must come after a home visit has taken place so that the need can be verified. An authorized member of the conference can place an order for the items by calling the Distribution Centre at 416 364-5577 ext. 252 or by emailing the request to [stores.svdptor@bellnet.ca](mailto:stores.svdptor@bellnet.ca).

- Beds, tables and chairs are sold at cost. Conferences are responsible for ensuring that they or their Particular Council have adequate funds to cover the cost of purchase and delivery
- Infestation of bed bugs is the number one reason for requests to replace furniture. Evidence that some action has been taken to eradicate the bugs should be determined up to requesting confirmation from the building superintendent that spraying (usually 2 sprayings are required) and other controls are in place.
- Covers will be supplied with the beds and there is an expectation that the covers be used.
- Discretion must be used when re-issuing furniture to the same family on a repeated basis.

#### 4. Other Financial Assistance:

There are circumstances that require other levels of assistance or different forms of support. In **some very special circumstances** a conference may provide assistance to cover costs such as utilities, rent or other payments.

**The following are guidelines regarding this type of assistance:**

- The circumstances and the decision taken need to be carefully discussed among the Conference members or Executive. The Particular Council or Toronto Central Council should be looked to for advice as needed.
- There needs to be reasonable assurance that the expenditure is actually in the person's long-term interests (and not just a short delay of the inevitable).
- There should be a limited time frame involved and an understanding that the 'special assistance' is temporary. ( Example – paying a month's rent to avoid eviction until the neighbour receives their first paycheque, or realizes a higher monthly income due to a new level of social assistance.)
- The Conference should explore other agencies and resources that specialize in specific types of assistance (i.e. - rent, utilities, and mobility equipment). This info can be accessed by dialling `211` in City of Toronto, Durham, Peel and York Regions.
- Funds must never be given directly to the neighbour in need. Rent or other payment cheques must be given to the landlord / property manager and utility cheques to the appropriate utility company and receipts must be made out to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul for audit purposes.

#### 5. Christmas

Calls for help at this time of year tend to increase significantly. Thankfully the generosity of our parishioners also increases at Christmas and in most cases conferences are able to meet the needs of all those who reach out for assistance. However, it is important not to overemphasize Christmas assistance to the detriment of our other services. The Society is not a Christmas Funding Organization. There are many Christmas Funding Organizations (especially in Toronto – dial "211" for more information) that provide funding specifically for this time of year.

- Conferences that choose to help at Christmas with hampers or toys must never lose sight of our Society's main focus which is **year round Home Visits**. Conferences, at Christmas time and other seasons of high demand and high stress, must continue to receive and respond to calls for help as they do all year.
- In addition to maintaining their regular level of service during the Christmas season, Conferences providing special Christmas help must make sure that this does not exhaust both conference members and conference funds.
- Many Conferences develop partnerships with parishioners, schools and businesses to provide extra Christmas help. This is both an efficient use of our funds and an excellent way to engage others in helping our neighbours in need.

# Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

## Toronto Central Council

### Quick Reference Guide: For Long Term Neighbours in Need

Each home visit is intended to help the neighbour get through a particular difficulty **and** to move forward in some way that is 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.

**With this in mind it is important to try to discern why the Neighbour in Need is calling every month for help. Here are some questions to consider:**

- Has Income Tax been filed?
- If they have a new baby, have they filed for Canada Child Tax Benefit?
- Have they a bank account or are they cashing their cheques at PAY DAY LOANS?
- Do they owe creditors?
- Are they working with a budget?

**Brainstorm as a conference to come up with a plan to move the Neighbour in Need forward. This should be done in consultation with the neighbour. Help is offered as you would to a friend or to family, always sensitive to their needs as well as to their feelings.**

**Examples:**

- Do research to connect the neighbour to resources available in the neighbourhood
- Offer to accompany them to acquire proper documentation or open a bank account
- Try to help them set up a budget
- Set small goals to work on **life skills** such as cleaning up a room
- Encourage making a meal rather than buying prepared food

We are not a government agency. We bring hope, compassion, respect and Christian love. We give the gift of our presence and attention and our efforts to assist those longer term Neighbours in Need who seem to call on the same day each month, financial assistance may not be the real reason for their call. It may be the need for that hope, respect, compassion and love that we bring, the chance to connect and share a visit (the hallmark of our work) and there may not be a time limit on this need.

If however, we feel that there are real ways in which the neighbour can move forward and they choose not to take these steps then perhaps it is their choice not to accept our help.

For the full document on Serving Longer-Term Neighbours in Need, visit our website at:

<http://svdptoronto.org/members-area/materials/>