

Home Visitation – Frequently Asked Questions?

I am confused, I hear from discussions at our Particular Council that we are supposed to serve people more often than we used to, now I hear that we should not be serving the same people over and over again? What is the message?

Those messages are confusing. The simple message is we serve people who are in need and have asked for help. We serve people we have visited and understand their need. We use discernment to judge when our help is needed and when we can provide assistance.

It is not about how often we visit. It is about the need and the personal relationship you have with the Neighbour requesting help. We are our own worst enemy when we set up expectations of how often we will respond to a Neighbours call for help. It doesn't matter whether we say we visit every month, every 2 months, every 3 months or twice a year because as soon as we state those parameters we have set up expectations and we will get calls on the basis our terms of reference. Those arbitrary terms of reference are set up by us for our reasons and are no longer the basis of the Neighbours actual needs, our knowledge of their situation or how we can help them move forward to better outcomes.

Vincentian's cannot support everyone, and should not create a dependency. Hard conversations need to take place; we need to follow the principles of stewardship and properly fulfil our Vincentian vocation. Mailing a gift card because someone asks for one is not aligned with the Society's outreach, does not permit relationship building, and provides a false expectation to the Neighbour who is calling.

Do we have to stay within our boundaries when a Neighbour calls, can't we just respond?

Most conferences have firm boundaries, particularly if they border on another Conference. If there is no Conference in the area, callers will be directed to contact 211 for other services. If a Conference has agreed to serve an area, or building, outside of their area, please be sure the office knows, and please be sure surrounding Conferences are aware. The primary goal is to not confuse the person calling for help, and to not have multiple Conferences serving one area.

How do we prepare for a Home Visit?

Each neighbour is unique, each home visit is unique, as is the first visit, second, third, or a long term Neighbour we know well. Each Home Visit deserves a plan discussed with your Vincentian partner to move the conversation to a deeper understanding of the need, and to determine next steps to better outcomes. A prayer for God's guidance and support in each visit is essential. A longer Vincentian prayer for Home Visitation, follows this Chapter.

What do we do if we have 6 members and over 100 Neighbours in Need who keep calling?

Delivering food vouchers without doing a Home Visit as many had to do during the pandemic was necessary at the time. Unfortunately, this morphed into some Conferences continuing to mail out cards which is very efficient; it is also meaningless and unsustainable, no matter the size of your Conference or the number of calls for help. If you are in this mode of delivery, you are violating the basic vision of the Society which is to be in personal contact with those living in poverty. The Vincentian mission is **relational** not transactional. We are not a cheque or a food stamp in the mail delivered to a door. If you are in this mode, your mission is doomed and the simple solution is to stop. Forward your callers to 211 and say you are no longer able to serve. The Society cannot feed every soul who says I am hungry and in need. Take the time to reassess how your Conference will return to the Home Visitation principle of building understanding and trust in relationships with your Neighbours, and serving those as best we can in their situation.

Take some time to assess the human and financial capacity of your Conference and determine how you will manage within the SSVP values and the Rule. Really understand that you, the Conference, are assisting when the usual avenues for assistance are not enough. Understand your Neighbours situation, their sources of income, whether they are in market rent or subsidized housing, ask what led them to call, and let them know that you are there for them in their time of need, not on a scheduled basis.

How do we go about changing how we serve our Neighbours. We just help the same people over and over again, we have created something we cannot sustain, how do we stop?

Stop. Tell your Neighbours you are restructuring and won't be helping for a while and give them 211 for other resources. Take the time to reassess all your Neighbours who are calling to your Conference. Decide what your financial and human resources can manage. Where appropriate, have the difficult conversation, be open, honest, direct and ask your Neighbour to respond and understand. Assess the rebuttal if it comes. Make clear we are still here when they really need help, but that we are no longer able to provide help on a scheduled basis, the Society cannot be a subsidy. Conferences who need assistance in revising their outreach can reach out to their Particular Councils, or the Membership Development team for help.

We are thinking of replacing Home Visits with a food bank, what do you think of this?

Foodbanks can fill a short term need, but are not the way a Conference should routinely respond. If a Foodbank is needed to fill a gap in services in a certain area, it is not the Conference's responsibility to create one. Some Conferences have a pantry to assist people who truly find themselves in dire straights, that members can access while a Home Visit is being set up. Foodbanks require a lot of resources that a typical Conference is generally unable to sustain on a long term basis. Please speak with your Particular Council or the Membership Development team if you wish to explore this further.

How do we judge need when we are on a visit?

Ask what has changed, what has led them to call? How were they managing before, and how can the Society help in the short term? For calls where the voucher is secondary to the human connection, consider an offshoot of your Conference where a Vincentian team calls to chat, check-in or visit, but with no material aid provided. Sometimes, that is the greatest gift we can offer, a friendly face, an interested voice; loneliness is the hardest thing to endure.

For Conferences where language is a barrier, consider using Google Translate to get to the basics. If you are not able to access translation apps, email the office, we can offer some technical assistance.

Is it okay to give our Neighbour my cell phone number because they won't answer blocked calls?

No, do not cross this boundary. Solutions shared by persons on the panel discussion call:

- use the Conference line at the parish to schedule visits,
- provide your Neighbour a timeframe in which you will be calling,
- use a Conference cell phone that gets passed from visitation team to team*,
- be sure to block your number *67 for land lines, #31# for cell phones.

*Further to the session: We have had positive experience with Freedom Mobile, \$99 for 6 months, no Wi-Fi, calls only, one of the least expensive, dependable phone plans we have found.

Serving Neighbours who live in Shelters and Sponsored Housing Programs

A reminder that Conferences should refer Neighbours who are in, or who are leaving shelters, back to their service provider. Shelters are funded to provide a full range of services; the Society should not be subsidizing other agencies. If in doubt, please ask our office for advice.

Additionally, some Conferences serve Neighbours who live in subsidized housing operated by other service providers. This type of housing is generally heavily subsidized, meaning rent is far less than market and sometimes substantially so, and residents also often have access to support workers; these Neighbours should also be referred back to their sponsoring agency. Service providers are contracted to provide a multitude of funded services, but sometimes it is just easier to call the Society. If you are unsure, please reach out to our office and we will assist you.

The Visitation Prayer

O God, someone in this house needs me. I don't know how I will be received, but I go as your ambassador, however unworthy and weak I am myself.

Give me Your power to help in the best way possible, offering what is needed, giving the proper advice, saying the right thing.

I am Your servant and the servant of anyone who needs me.

I am weak - You can make me strong.

I am tongue-tied - You can supply my words.

I lack courage - You can reinforce me.

I am perplexed - You can give the answer.

I am useless - You can make me useful.

Above all, let me recognize you in these people, and seeing You, let me love them as I love you. They need Your love. They need my love. Let's love them together.

I'll do my best. Be with me in what is Your work and mine. Kind, gentle, understanding Saint Vincent de Paul, inspire me in all my dealings with the needy whom you knew, understood and loved so much.