

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Greater Toronto Central Council

Learning Module 3

Five Guiding Principles

Home Visitation

Equity of Service

Sharing

Continuous Learning

Renewal

Guiding Principle 1: Home Visitation

Principle:

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

From the very beginning and throughout the Society's 180+ years of existence around the world, home visitations have been at the core and heart of the work of Vincentians. Although Ozanam, our founder, was open to all forms of charity and the Society has responded to new and changing needs by establishing Special Works, home visitations continue to be the way that Vincentians make person-to-person contact with those in need.

Section 1: Why the Home Visit?

Section 2: A Guide to Home Visitation

Section 3: Meaningful Home Visitation and Summary

Guiding Principle 1: Home Visitation

Section 1: Why the Home Visit?

Home Visitation as described in the Rule:

A. Fundamental Principles

“Vincentians, through person-to-person contact:

- serve in a spirit of love, humility, respect, and discretion.
- are ready to serve when needed.
- make home visits.

From Article 1.1

B. The spirit of charity, service and sharing,

“The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is founded on the principle of serving persons in need. ... Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They offer their goods, talents and wealth in the service of their neighbours, persons in need, primarily by conducting home visits.”

From Article 1.3.1.1

C. Role and Responsibilities of a Conference:

Role

The main role of a conference is to group together Christians desirous of pursuing the Society’s mission. A conference is a gathering of people similarly motivated to serve Christ by serving persons in need. Working within the conference, members can nourish and renew their faith, and sustain each other through prayer so that each member will grow closer to God. There are 114 Conferences in the Greater Toronto Central Council.

Within a conference, an environment should be created that will enable members to develop a sense of Vincentian spirituality, friendship, and solidarity in their charitable activities.

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of conference members are varied. The most important one is to bring comfort and aid to persons in need.

The fundamental activity is the person-to-person encounter with persons in need through home visits, carried out by pairs of Vincentians. Home visitation demands the highest respect for the dignity of persons in need. Vincentians are the guests of the persons being visited, as those they visit are the hosts.” *From Article 2.2.1.1*

The Purpose of a Home Visit is to:

- Listen to our neighbours needs
- Be a friendly face to our neighbours
- Offer referrals to other agencies and forms of assistance that are available
- Provide material assistance
- Offer spirituality and hope

Why the Home Visit?

- The home is a safe and comfortable place for the person who has requested assistance. It is difficult and indeed could be uncomfortable for a person to admit they need help and reach out to ask for it.
- Vincentians meet their neighbours in their home in part to help put our neighbour at ease and comfortable. We are invited guest in their home and this approach hopefully will contribute to a friendly and meaningful conversation taking place.
- The neighbour as the host is more able to give something of themselves to us and we will be more open to their gifts and their challenges.

- Vincentians believe the home visit is the first step in bringing the love of Jesus into our neighbour’s home. It shows our respect, love, and openness to serve our neighbour in need.

At a practical level, visiting in a neighbour’s home allows Vincentians to:

- engage with the neighbour in their personal space and more easily identify conversation points (kid’s pictures, pets, hobbies, family activities) that contribute to the building of friendship and trust.
- build a better understanding of the neighbour’s needs and what we, as Vincentians can provide to help.

Why We Go to Our Neighbours’ home to Visit

If Our Neighbour Visits Us at the Church	If We Visit Our Neighbour in their Home
We are in the position of the host and as a result are in a power position in relation to our neighbour.	We are their guest and more likely to visit with the spirit of humility and warm acceptance and cordiality.
Our neighbour is put in the position of wondering if they will “qualify” for help. Depending on their self-confidence and past experience seeking help they may not feel comfortable to come to the church to visit us.	Neighbour may be more comfortable asking for help and they may feel more like we are offering help
Our neighbour may be concerned with the loss of privacy by coming to the public space of our church.	Provides a more confidential and private environment to discuss their needs and challenges
The neighbour has to spend precious time and money (bus fare, etc.) to get to us.	Neighbour has more time for work, chores, being with children, etc. and saved money on transportation
Some neighbours may not be able to come, so they are excluded from receiving help.	Neighbours with limited mobility or caring for dependents can still be assisted
We have made a minimal commitment of time and our neighbour has done all the effort.	We have taken time to arrange for the visit and by coming to their home we show our willingness to serve and engage in a friendly and respectful visit.

Why Do Vincentians Visit in Pairs?

“Home visitation is a fundamental activity of the Society, and has been carried out in pairs since the beginning of the Society in the 1830’s. This traditional activity shall continue to be carried out by two members, preferably a man and a woman. The Society has a moral and a legal responsibility to exercise due care and diligence for the protection of the visitors and of those being served. Visiting in pairs constitutes a reasonable and necessary obligation. That kind of visit gives the two Vincentians the opportunity to see different aspects of a problem and other possibilities for solving it. It also helps foster friendship between members, which is so important to the Society and follows the example of Our Lord who sent out his disciples in pairs for mutual support and inspiration.”

- *The Rule: Article 3.17*

Screened and Registered Vincentians:

All Vincentians who are members of a Conference, Particular Council or the Greater Toronto Central Council, must complete the full screening package provided by the Greater Toronto Central Council. Additionally, Vincentians are required to sign a Vulnerable Sector Declaration and Covenant Form, from time to time. Vincentians who complete these documents are registered in our data base and are covered by the Society’s insurance policy for members.

Guiding Principle 1: Home Visitation

Section 2: A Guide to Home Visitation:

A home visit is initiated by a neighbour requesting help. We must be aware that the call for help is difficult to make and our response is to make the neighbour feel comfortable and respected. Most initial home visit requests are for food assistance and our response is intended to help the neighbour in need get through that difficulty. The first visit will generally focus almost exclusively on this objective. After several visits that have built a relationship and a level of trust with our neighbour, the focus of the visit will shift to helping the neighbour move forward and improve their situation in some way that is meaningful to them.

1. Receiving the Call:

- Get the Neighbor in Need's message from the parish secretary or 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:

- 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.
- Set an appointment- Set a clear time and date with the neighbour (since it obviously would not be respectful to simply drop in on them). Stress that it is important that they call and cancel if they are unable to keep the appointment.
- Pre-plan with your partner – If you have 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.

Get Spiritually Ready:

“Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for the peace and joy of Christ.” *The Rule: Article 1.7*
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.

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 nonjudgmental as you want to be? If you cannot 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 have got to work with Him.

Get Materially Ready:

You will generally have food and clothing cards 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 government service that might be able to help them with a particular problem), you will come prepared with the information or with written material.

Check the file

If other Vincentians have visited, there will be a record which you can review to see the assistance rendered by other Vincentians in the conference. Knowing 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 yourself.

- Ice breaker – if the neighbour seems a little embarrassed, uncomfortable, or even antagonistic (since it is 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 quickly – that is why they called and why you came.
- Explain who we are – Do not assume that the neighbor calling knows what the Society is and where the money comes from. Explain that you are a volunteer member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul which is a Catholic organization that works in your parish 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 mission to aid those in most need ...

“The Society serves those in need regardless of
creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender,
or political opinions.”

The Rule: Article 1.4

“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 needs, 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.

- It is important that you communicate with your Neighbour in Need, let them know we can help, we will respond when they call, but we may not be able to assist with a voucher every month. Let your neighbour know that they can reach out and you will let them know what you can do to offer support. The basis of the relationship should not be based on the provision of a food voucher.

Promotion of Self Sufficiency

“Vincetians endeavour to help the persons in need to help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community.” *The Rule: Article 1.10*

4. Record Keeping

Part 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 only need:

- The neighbour’s name, address, and contact info
- Number and ages of children or other dependents
- Income source and major expenses (the source of the need for assistance?) An initial understanding of their life situation through a respectful dialogue – this should come out in the conversation you have with the neighbour in need.

Part 2:

The Call record sheet will have room for comments and observations. However, only information (name, address, etc.) should be placed in the record. In most cases you and your partner will fill in the information after you leave the neighbour’s home. While you are there you are listening and conversing and listening. Sitting there with a clipboard and pen sets up a different relationship and dynamic and does not encourage developing a relationship of friendship and trust.

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.

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 is still fresh, do what you said you would do.

5. Discuss Your Visit at Your Conference Meetings:

Conference members do not need to discuss every neighbour in need at every meeting, but the conference meeting is an excellent opportunity to share experiences and insights, compare impressions and work to problem solve on challenges. Vincentians in a spiritual, healthy, active conference nourish, guide, and educate each other, and contribute to each other’s spiritual and emotional growth.

At the conference level, review the Neighbours in Need list on an ongoing basis to identify needs and issues and make plans.

Final thoughts: The ‘food or clothing 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 bring our respectful presence, our attention, and our efforts to assist. These are much greater gifts. And are often much more difficult to give and to give consistently. We must always bear in mind that poverty is not a fault of the individual. Poverty is an outcome of many factors, including injustice, unequal opportunities and rights denied.

Striving to change attitudes:

“Vincentians oppose discrimination of all kinds and work to change the attitudes of those who view the weak or those who are different with prejudice, fear or scorn, attitudes which gravely wound the dignity of others.”

The Rule: Article 7.7

Guiding Principle 1: Home Visitation

Section 3: Meaningful Home Visitation and Summary:

- Takes place in the home of the neighbour in need. This acknowledges our roles as invited guests looking to maximize the level of comfort and convenience on behalf of our hosts. In exceptional cases the visit might take place elsewhere, but in an environment where privacy and meaningful person to person contact can be maintained.
- Takes place in a timely manner (usually 24 – 48 hours) by a minimum of two Vincentians.
- Vincentians engage in a respectful, meaningful dialogue. The goal is to discover the need and to address it in as appropriate a manner as possible, not to cast judgement or lecture. Vincentians should do most of the listening and encourage our neighbour to do most of the talking.
- Vincentians are knowledgeable about the resources and services available in the community. They are familiar with the basic benefits provided by social assistance.
- Vincentians are familiar with the neighbour's situation through careful record keeping concerning past visits and assistance rendered. They will have attended regular conference meetings and heard the discussion regarding past calls. They are keenly aware of the importance of maintaining confidentiality regarding our Neighbours in Need.
- Vincentians explain who we are and what we can do as an organization. This sets up an understanding of mutual expectations if the relationship grows beyond the initial visit.

Guiding Principle 1: Home Visitation

In Summary:

- Vincentians will bear in mind their mission as emissaries of Christ and this knowledge will influence them in all that they do or say during the home visit.
- We help to address immediate need through material assistance most often with food
- We bring love, hope, compassion, and respect
- We bring the gift of ourselves as our neighbors' friend
- We work to build a relationship of trust and respect
- We see Christ in persons in need persons, affirming their dignity and celebrating their independence.
- We listen, listen, listen for ways to help them move forward in ways that are meaningful to them
- Gratitude to those we visit

Vincentians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognize that the fruit of their labour springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the persons in need they serve. *Rule 1.12*

(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://ssvptoronto.ca/members-area/policies/>

Guiding Principle 2: Equity of Service

Principle:

Neighbours in Need in similar circumstances and with similar needs, receive similar levels of service across the Greater Toronto Central Council.

Equity in:

- our fundraising efforts and the material assistance given.
- our response time to calls.
- our availability to serve with person-to-person contact.
- bringing our presence and the gift of our love, respect, justice, and joy.
- the information and resources we share.

Equity of service is founded on the principle that we are all equal in God's eyes.

**“So, there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.”
[Paul, Galatians 3:38]**

Equity has many dimensions:

- The time we take to respond to calls for assistance.
- The friendliness of our visit.
- Our presence in love, respect, justice, joy, and hope.
- Listening, trusting, and responding authentically to our neighbour's needs.
- The value of the assistance we can provide.
- Listening and willingness to assist with more than the food card if requested and other needs are identified.
- Referrals to other agencies or programs with the resources and expertise to assist our neighbour.

We meet people where they are and respect their beliefs. We do not have to treat each person the same, but as we are identifying the needs, we should go through the same process so that each person is treated with respect and fairness. Similar needs are to be dealt with in a similar manner.

Seeking material assistance is often the basis of the first call from a neighbour in need. 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.

Similar levels of service:

- Conferences maintain an active help phone line year-round.
- Requests for assistance are retrieved daily.
- Acknowledgement and response to calls for assistance are made within 48 hours.
- A home visitation is arranged within 4-5 days after the acknowledgment of the call and more quickly depending on the need.
- The interval between visits to the same household requesting assistance is at most every 6-8 weeks and more often if in the judgement of the conference the need is warranted.
- Conferences assess the need using a financial information worksheet similar to the one available on the TCC Website ([NEW-NIN-Information-Form-1.pdf](#) (svdptoronto.org)).

Sharing:

Our principle of sharing (see Guiding Principle 5 Sharing) requires that funds be moved within the Society to where they are most needed. Providing more than reasonable assistance to a neighbour because the conference can afford it or providing less than reasonable assistance to another neighbour because that conference cannot afford it contradicts our Vincentian values and guiding principles.

Conference members decide how much to give, and our service to those in need is dependent on how the funds flow and are shared across the Greater Toronto Central Council.

How the funds flow:

Conferences raise funds in order to carry out their work. The primary method of collecting funds is through the Persons in need Box Collections. If your conference has tried every method of raising funds (i.e.: holding the persons in need boxes at every mass, asking the parish priest to remind parishioners to help the persons in need, placing notices and bulletin items reminding parishioners of the work of the Society, annual or semi-annual activity and financial updates, fund raising events) and you are unable to assist your neighbours due to lack of funds, then the conference is expected to reach out to Scarborough West Particular Council for advice and financial assistance.

Conferences are to create an annual cash flow budget and the general rule is that no more than 3-6months operating reserve is kept in their account. Funds beyond a 3-6 month forecasted are to be passed up to the Particular Council for re-distribution to conferences that require help to meet the needs in their conference and the commitment to this equity of service guideline.

If the Particular Council is unable to assist due to lack of funds, then it will reach out to Toronto Central Council for help to meet the needs

Deciding How Much to Give:

Vincentians have to thoughtfully decide how much support to provide. Conferences and members bring their compassion, judgement, and experience when making decisions on how much assistance to provide.

The unique circumstances of the neighbour in need will always be the core determination for the financial assistance they receive.

There should be flexibility in the amount we offer to recognize special circumstances, particularly if there are one-time or infrequent events. The intent is to bring together our experience and compassion with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to decide on how much assistance to provide.

Removing Bias from our Decision-Making Process:

Vincentians endeavor to exclude bias from the decision-making process. The goal is to treat each individual fairly and ensure that similar needs are treated in a similar manner. We do not give less (or exclude someone from our help entirely) because of their race, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, political views, employment status or what has happened in their past and what may be beyond their ability to change.

Some considerations are:

- The family/persons needs and circumstances (including whether the circumstances are exceptional).
- Current sources of financial/material support.
- If the need is food – how much is required to relieve the situation?
- How has the neighbour coped in the past when there was need?
- Is the situation temporary or potentially longer term?
- Has previous assistance been given and if so, what was the frequency and amount given?

Types of Material Assistance Provided

1. Food Vouchers/Cards

In most cases, the main reason for the call for assistance is for help with food. The amount given in food vouchers provided to individuals or families are based on an understanding of the level of need.

- the cost of a nutritious food basket is:
 - \$10 per day for an adult male or teenager over age of 13.
 - \$7 per day for an adult female or teenage over age 13.
 - \$6 per day for children under the age of 13.

Source: www.toronto.ca/health/nutrition/food_basket.htm

Examples of assistance provided following these public health food costs:

Family Size	Persons over age 13	Persons under age 13	Cost per day	3 – 5 days help
Example 1	Single Parent	Two	\$19.00	\$57.00 - \$95.00
Example 2	Couple plus Two Teenagers		\$34.00	\$100 - \$170.00

- using this information, Vincentians can determine the amount of the food vouchers/cards to be provided based on the circumstances unique to each neighbour.
- food assistance is provided for 3 to 5 days up to a maximum of one week depending on the need. There may be exceptional need circumstances that require an exceptional response to this general guideline.
- frequency of assistance is provided on an understanding of the identified need.

Conferences using their best judgment provide food assistance to last between 4 to 7 days for the NIN and their family. The following table provides suggested minimums and maximums

Family Size	Minimum	Maximum
1	\$ 40	\$ 60
2	\$ 60	\$ 100
3	\$ 100	\$ 125
4	\$ 120	\$ 150
5 and above	\$ 140	\$ 180

2. Clothing Assistance

Assistance with clothing is provided by conferences and as with food it is based on the understanding of the need, the number of family members and the frequency of the requests. Gift cards are issued for different thrift stores such as Salvation Army, Value Village, or the local used clothing stores that may serve the neighbourhood. Winners, Walmart, and Joe Fresh are also options used by some conferences.

- Important note: food and clothing vouchers/cards are to be tracked, accounted for, and reported with the same care and diligence that conferences use to manage donations.

3. New Beds, Tables, Chairs, Dressers provided by the Stores Division

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 at stores@ssvptoronto.ca

- Beds, tables, chairs, and dressers are sold at cost. Conferences are responsible for the cost of purchase and delivery.
 - Infestation of bed bugs is the number one reason for requests to replace beds. Evidence that some action has been taken to eradicate the bed bugs should be determined including a request of confirmation from the building superintendent that spraying (usually 2 sprayings are required) and other controls are in place.
- Bed bug covers at cost can be supplied with the beds.

4. Other Financial Assistance:

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

Government and other agencies do provide financial assistance to low-income individuals and families for some of these needs. For example

[Ontario Energy Board - Ontario Electricity Support Program](#)

Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP). See www.oeb.ca/rates-and-your-bill/help-low-income-consumers/low-income-energy-assistance-program/.

The following are guidelines regarding this type of assistance:

- The Conference should always 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 dialing `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.
- The circumstances and the decision taken need to be carefully discussed among the Conference members or officers.
- Your Particular Council or Toronto Central Council can be looked to for advice as needed.
- There needs to be reasonable assurance that the “special” 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.

5. Christmas

Calls for help at this time of year tend to increase significantly. Thankfully, the generosity of our donors 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 allow Christmas assistance to curtail our core home visitation service to those in need.

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 at this time of year.

- Conferences that choose to help at Christmas with hampers or toys should not 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, are expected to 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.

Guiding Principle 3: Sharing

Principle:

Since a fundamental principle of the Society of Saint 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 3 to 6 months' reserve, that is the average amount that they would spend in 3 to 6 months.

Section 1: International Organization

Section 2: Conferences with Surplus Funds

Section 3: Sharing of Your Time and Talents

Guiding Principle 3: Sharing

Section 1: International Organization

The principle of Sharing is based in part by the example of the early Christians as described in Acts 4:32:

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.” (NRSV)

Just as the early Christians shared their possessions with others as needed, so are we called to share what we have collected under the name of the Society with the entire Society.

In the Rule, this principle extends beyond the local conference, councils whether central, regional, or national to the entire world. Consider this quote from José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha, XIV President General, in the preface to the International Rule:

“... the phenomenon known as "globalization" must make us feel responsible for any type of poverty all over the world. We are called upon to fight against any kind of poverty we may encounter, we must feel and be responsible wherever it manifests itself, whomever it affects, and as far away as it may be. In reality, it should remind us that we must feel called upon to fight against suffering, and that the work of brothers (*Vincentians*) in other regions is also our work”

The Society expects us to work together with other Vincentians in our conferences. The Society also considers the world-wide Vincentian movement as one family, our brothers, and sisters in Christ, serving the world-wide community of persons in need persons. Therefore, it is natural to expect that we would share our resources with the rest of the family.

When we joined our local conference, we became part of this International Society. The traditions of the Society have served it well in becoming an international organization in 153 countries with over 800,000 Vincentians. One key to the Society’s success is that we are all following the same principles. This has served to protect those we help, and to attract volunteers and donors. Donors can have confidence that their donations will be used prudently. We take care to:

- Properly record the receipt and distribution of funds
- Be equitable in distributing funds to those in need across regions
- Keep expenses low
- Protect the privacy of the people assisted
- Make public the financial statements
- Pass on surplus funds to higher councils (avoid hoarding of unused funds)
- Pass down funds to conferences/councils who need funds to serve their Neighbours in Need.

Guiding Principle 3: Sharing

Section 2: Conferences with Surplus Funds:

There are conferences where there are many people needing help and insufficient donated funds to meet their needs. There are also conferences where there are fewer people needing help and more than enough funds to meet their needs. The Vincentian Principle of Sharing We therefore need to share funds from the well-off conferences with the conferences that have insufficient funds. This sharing of financial aid from wealthy conferences to conferences with less is a key principle of the Society (the Guiding Principle of Sharing).

Since there are many conferences that need more funds than they collect themselves, the Society is dependent on the conferences with surplus funds. A conference may have surplus funds because they:

- are very effective at fund raising (willing to ask for more funds than they need themselves)
- have few people needing assistance in their area
- have received a large one-time donation
- provide equitable assistance and are careful in helping with one-time expenses

The guideline is to pass on funds in excess of 3 months of projected expenses. When coming up to summer months, maybe 5 months of expenses can be kept if your donations usually drop off significantly in the summer. Note that the “funds” includes what is in the bank account and gift cards that have been purchased less any vouchers that have been distributed but not yet paid for.

Reasons not to hoard money:

- Other conferences need that money
- It discourages donations (why would I donate if the conference already has excess funds?)
- It discourages fund raising (why would I try to seek more donations if the conference already has excess funds?)
- It shows a lack of trust in God’s providence (that donations will come in when needed)
- It encourages helping some neighbours disproportionately (e.g., with rent payments) compared to others (because we have the funds)

- It encourages giving our Neighbours in Need more than what is equitable when compared to other conferences
- It encourages inappropriate use of funds (e.g., less control on expenses)
- If a conference needs money later, your Particular Council is available to help.
- The conference's charitable status may be revoked by the CRA

A conference should not seek to avoid passing on funds by inappropriately spending. Conference funds should only go towards:

- helping your Neighbours in Need
- for reasonable administrative expenses
- an officially twinned conference
- to the next Council or Special Works of Councils (e.g., Camps, Supportive Housing)

Conference funds must not go to non-SSVP charities or charitable works. It is important that Vincentians work with the persons in need directly and not indirectly by helping other charities.

When passing funds to a Council it is preferred to send the funds without strings attached. The Council will know best where the funds are most needed. By designating how the funds are to be spent, you are presuming to know better where the funds are most needed. If there were no restrictions on the money when the funds were received, there should be no restrictions when the funds are passed on the Council.

Guiding Principle 3: Sharing

Section 3: Sharing of Your Talents and Time:

In addition to the financial resources, each conference has the talents and time of its members. A typical conference will require a significant amount of time from each member:

- For home visits
- For conference meetings
- For conference projects (e.g., bundle collections, fund raising, Christmas project, etc.)
- For training and education
- For a conference executive role (or supporting role)

However, hopefully there are some members who still have extra time to support the Society at the Council level. The Council executive and committee members are regular conference members (perhaps with a few years of experience) who have volunteered to serve a broader constituency of Vincentians. They have volunteered their talents and time:

- To attend Council meetings and AGMs
- To serve on the Council executive or a committee
- To serve on projects at the cross-conference, Council, and regional level
- To attend learning sessions, and retreats with other Vincentians
- To attend social events (Vincentian get-togethers do not always need to be “business” oriented)

The success of the Society at all levels depends on the Holy Spirit acting through Vincentians who have generously donated their talents and time to serving people in need.

Guiding Principle 4: Continuous Learning

Principle:

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.

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Vincentian Skill Set

Section 3: Conference Support

Section 4: Council Support

Section 5: Vincentian Spirituality and Vocation

Guiding Principle 4: Continuous Learning

Section 1: Introduction

It is important for Vincentians to continually improve their skills in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, to improve the sensitivity, quality, and efficiency of their service to the persons in need and to help them be aware of the benefits, resources and opportunities that are available for their Neighbours in Need.

Section 2: Vincentian Skill Set

A good Vincentian will use many skills in their service to Neighbours in Need:

- humility, honesty, listening, prayer
- love of neighbour
- knowledge of services from government and other agencies and charities
- engaging parishioners and other benefactors
- organizational, financial, communication and leadership
- advocacy for social justice with government, agencies and in the public domain
- ability to learn, adapt and change

Section 3: Conference Support

New members should be paired up with a mentor in the conference. A mentor should have a good knowledge of the Society's rules and practices and be easily approachable to answer questions. At the start, this mentor may be a partner on home visits. However, it is valuable to go on home visits with other Vincentians as well, so you can learn from the different strengths each Vincentian has.

It is important to attend conference meetings, not only to connect with your fellow Vincentians but also as a source of learning. In the meeting there will be prayers, a spiritual reflection, discussions on how best to help the Neighbours in Need, to organize various projects, to promote social justice, and to become aware of and involved in activities of the other affiliated councils. The conference members will support each other to become better Vincentians.

Guiding Principle 4: Continuous Learning

Section 4: Council Support

The councils (Particular, Central, Regional and National) provide support for continuous learning by:

- Organizing conferences, meetings, workshops, and retreats
 - A fun way to learn while socializing with other Vincentians
- Developing educational and training materials

In addition to the learning materials on the GTCC website (ssvptoronto.ca) you should seek out other sources of materials. The regional (provincial) and the national websites also have training materials, newsletters, and videos. Since the Society is represented in over 150 countries, you can find good materials on the SSVP websites from other countries as well.

Training opportunities are practically unlimited. Certainly, non-SSVP training and leadership courses taken online or at work can also improve your skills as a Vincentian. Make it a habit to check out something new each month.

Section 5: Vincentian Spirituality and Vocation

In addition to our knowledge and technical skills, it is even more important to perform our Vincentian activities with the right motivation and spirituality. If we serve persons in need out of a sense of pity or to reinforce our superiority, then we will do more harm than good. If we strive to become humbler, appreciate the talents of others, acknowledge our limitations, and seek to do better, then we can keep growing as a Vincentian.

St. Vincent de Paul said: “God asks first for your heart and only then for your work.” In Christ we see the persons in need, and, in the persons in need, we learn to see the image of Christ. The persons in need person will hopefully see the image of Christ in us as we provide service with love. This is our way to evangelize, to spread the Kingdom of God on earth. It is truly a privilege to serve the persons in need person. They are our masters. They give us the opportunity to see the face of Christ. They cause us to pray for strength and guidance. They draw us closer to Jesus our Savior.

Once we accept that being a Vincentian is our vocation, it becomes easy to accept the need for continuous learning. This is our vocation, if we want to become good (maybe even excellent) at it, then we will need to spend the time to learn and improve the needed skills.

Guiding Principle 5: Renewal

Principle:

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

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Best Practices for an Active Healthy Conference

Section 3: Conference Recruitment and Renewal

Guiding Principle 5: Renewal

Section 1: Introduction

Conference Renewal Foundation:

The basic foundation of Conference/Council Renewal involves serving our members by:

- ❖ Revitalizing and Restoring Members Vincentian Spirituality
- ❖ Refreshing Current Members' SSVP Commitment
- ❖ Rejuvenating Conference/Council creative Energy through Leadership Succession Planning
- ❖ Recruiting New Members to give new life into the Conference/Council

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the persons in need of the persons in need and to those who are most rejected by society. (*The Rule, 1.6*)



SSVP Essential Elements of Conference Formation:

The Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul was born in three essential elements which are fundamental to the formation of its members.

- ❖ Spirituality
 - Members are attracted to the Society and to Christ who animates its work. We are all connected through *Prayer*, by our *Personal* contact with the *Persons in need*.
- ❖ Friendship
 - Seeking to deepen mutual love and support amongst members through serving those in need with one mind and heart.
- ❖ Service
 - Serving Christ in the suffering, persons in need and marginalized persons, bringing them love and respect, aid, and development, hope and joy, in a more just society.

Guiding Principle 5: Renewal

Section 2: Best Practices for an Active Healthy Conference

What is a 'Conference':

- ❖ The 'Conference' is the basic unit of the Society
- ❖ It is also the first level of the Society's structure
- ❖ Vincentians form a Conference, which functions within a specific area, such as a parish, a school, a workplace, and engages in person-to-person service to the persons in need.
- ❖ Our members *turn concern into action* through direct, compassionate service to those in need.

"The main role of a conference is to group together Christians who wish to pursue the Society's mission. A conference is a gathering of people similarly motivated to serve Christ by serving the persons in need. Working within the conference, members can nourish and renew their faith, and sustain each other through prayer so that each member will grow closer to God." (The Rule, 2.2.2)



Characteristics of the IDEAL Conference:

- ❖ 6 or more members
- ❖ Meets once or twice a month for about 90 minutes
- ❖ Meeting Agenda includes prayer, spiritual reading & reflection,
- ❖ Servant Leader President with strong Executive members' support
- ❖ Active and Full member participation
- ❖ Proper record keeping and accountability
- ❖ Client Home visitations are appropriately anchored through Vincentians Sharing, Ongoing Renewal, Continuous Learning, and effective Equity of Service.

Meetings are held "in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity, and Christian joy", providing "for consideration in common of the experiences of each member and the problems encountered in the pursuit of a better service" (The Rule, Schema I, Art. V, 1 & 2)



Conference Christian Community Living:

- ❖ A faith community that enjoys each other and has fun together as we pray, grow spiritually and in our commitment to serve Christ in those that are in need.
- ❖ An animated community of action, offering personal contact with all in need primarily through home visits as well as in a variety of other ways “to turn concern into action”.
- ❖ A welcoming community that recruits constantly and orients, mentors, and trains new members on our Vincentian vocation.
- ❖ A growing community that is committed to continuous learning and upgrading the skills of all members in order to improve service to those in need.
- ❖ A responsible community that engages in spiritual reflection at every meeting, proper record keeping, shared responsibilities and promotes leadership succession planning.
- ❖ An inclusive community that can celebrate our faith, our diversity and our differences and make our presence and work known in the parish.
- ❖ A community working alongside other non-profits in seeking solutions to generational poverty.
- ❖ A community that enjoys each other and has fun together as we pray, grow spiritually and in our commitment to serve Christ in those that are in need.

Conference Annual Wellness Check:

- ❖ What are we doing well?
- ❖ What can we do better?
- ❖ Are the conference members kept busy?
- ❖ Too busy? Need new members - Recruit!
- ❖ Not busy enough: let us go to the persons in need... what else can we do?
- ❖ Do we have regular conference meetings?
- ❖ Along with the usual agenda items, what do we talk about? Do we share a laugh or two?
- ❖ How do we as Vincentians live and deepen our spirituality?
- ❖ Conference Leadership Succession Planning in place?

Guide for Conference/Council Succession Planning Session:

- ❖ Schedule Succession Planning Session with TCC Facilitator
- ❖ Roundtable Meeting with Conference/Council Members
 - Roundtable Discussion about Conference/Council President role
 - What do they view as the role of President?
 - What challenges and rewards do they perceive associated with this position?
 - What skills do they perceive are necessary to be a President?
 - Identify who within this group has the skills necessary to be President
 - Nomination Form - who would you nominate for President and what are their skillsets
 - Identify each member's role to support the new Conference/Council President
 - My Role Form - what would YOU do to support a newly elected President
- ❖ Post Roundtable Meeting discussion - Meet with President Nominee
 - Review Nomination Forms with each Nominee individually
 - Review My Role within New PC documents with Nominee
 - Ask Nominee to reflect and pray upon Nominee recommendations and My Role candidates
 - If Nominee accepts nomination, plan for election at the next meeting or within 3 months

Guide for Conference/Council Succession Planning Session

- ❖ Hold Conference/Council election (follow Election of President Procedure - The Rule, 2.3)
- ❖ Newly Elected President Transition Activities
 - Allow time for orientation, mentoring and training of new President
 - Appoint Executive team based on Questionnaire on what support each person stated they would provide to newly elected President.
 - Identify what training/mentoring is required for new Executive (Vice President/s, Treasurer, Secretary & Spiritual Advisor
 - Identify additional Support for Conference/Council
 - TCC Guide for Conference Presidents and Executive Members
 - Website Training modules/ Members Site/Resources/Best Practices

Guiding Principle 5: Renewal

Section 3: Conference Recruitment and Renewal

Conference Recruitment Drive:

- ❖ Recruiting new members to the Society is crucial to the ability of Conferences to carry out their work of meeting their Neighbours in Need.
- ❖ New members help to share the workload, provide energy, and bring new ideas to even the most active conference.
- ❖ A successful recruitment drive requires a strong understanding of your conference's current situation:
 - Why do you want new members?
 - Are your current members open to welcoming new members?
 - Why would a parishioner want to join your conference?
 - If you were coming to your first meeting at the conference that currently exists in your parish, would you feel welcome and valued?
 - Would you be inspired by the level of commitment and the depth of the members' spirituality?
 - Would you enjoy the meetings?
 - Would you want to come back?

Vincentian Recruitment and Renewal Activities:

- ❖ Spiritual Renewal
 - Is a Conference Spiritual Facilitator in place?
 - Promoting Characteristic of Vincentian Spirit
 - Spirit of Charity, Service & Sharing
 - Spirit of Humility
 - Spirit of Truth & Justice
 - Spirit of Warm Acceptance & Cordiality

❖ Conference/Council Renewal

- Recruiting new members
- Be prepared, form a renewal team, and develop a plan
- Draw on available support and resources – Particular Council, neighbouring Conferences.
- Welcome, Nourish, Encourage and Mentor new members, those first few months are very critical.

❖ Leadership Renewal

- Leadership Mentoring Program
- Leadership Succession Planning

Recruitment and Renewal Guide:

- ❖ Form a Conference Recruitment Team
- ❖ Consider Your Membership Needs
- ❖ Make the Appeal
 - Personal Invitations
 - Bulletin Announcements
 - Pulpit Talk
- ❖ After Mass Follow-up Part I: Immediate Personal Contact
- ❖ After Mass Follow-up Part II: The Telephone Contact
- ❖ First Meeting
- ❖ After the First Meeting
- ❖ Home Visitation
- ❖ Second Meeting – Congratulations, you are on your way!

"With God's help, you will continue to succeed in your leadership and in your duties, because Our Lord's work is accomplished not so much by the multitude of workers as by the fidelity of the small number whom He calls." St. Vincent de Paul