

THE RULE AND STATUTES
OF THE
SOCIETY OF
SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL
CANADA



“Help honors when, to the bread that nourishes, it adds the visit that consoles, the advice that enlightens, the friendly shake of the hand that lifts up sinking courage; when it treats the poor man with respect, not only as an equal but as a superior, since he is suffering that which we would perhaps not be able to bear ourselves; since he is among us as the messenger of God, sent to put our justice and charity to the test, and to save us by our works.”

(Frédéric Ozanam, from an article in L'Ère nouvelle, October 21, 1848.)

**INTERPRETATION OF THE RULE
AND CANADIAN STATUTES**

These Internal Statutes of Canada received the approval of the Permanent Section of the Council General on June 8, 2007. They are subordinate to, and interpreted according to, the Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul of the International Council General and to the International Statutes, and shall be treated together with them as a single legal document.

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PREAMBLE

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

It is with great joy that I present the new Rule and Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Canada. The 1979 edition of the Rule and Statutes, which had guided us for a number of years, was updated in 1995. However, once the new International Rule and Statutes were adopted at the Special General Meeting in Rome, in October, 2003, it became necessary to revise our Rule and Statutes in detail. The task was undertaken with dedication and the Rule and Statutes for our Canadian Vincentians were restructured in depth. In June 2006, at the Annual General Assembly of the National Council in St. John's Newfoundland the new Rule and Statutes were presented to the members who voted their approval. The Rule and Statutes were then sent to the International Council General which granted ratification in June 2007.

As in the International Rule and Statutes, our Canadian Statutes highlight:

- the fundamental Vincentian mission of serving, protecting and speaking for the poor;
- the importance of loving and respecting those we serve;
- the importance of loving and respecting each other as we carry out our mission;
- the importance of the home visit in our mission.

The production of these statutes was made possible through the efforts of a small group of dedicated Vincentians who worked long hours with painfully short deadlines. The Rule and Statutes Committee members included: Viola Corbett, Jean-Claude Bienvenue, John Staley, Don Hunter, Barry Granary (deceased), Penny Craig (VP and Committee Chair), Clermont Fortin (VP), and Jacquelyne Lord (Editor). Special thanks are also extended to two past-presidents, Ellen Schryburt (1995-2001) and Robert Martineau (1983-1995), as well as to the Spiritual Advisor of the National Council, Monsignor Peter Schonenbach, for their input and advice.

The members of the Rule and Statutes Committee were responsible for writing the drafts of the different articles. These drafts were discussed, reworked and then combined to produce a preliminary version of the Rule and Canadian Statutes that was sent to members across Canada so they could read it and respond to it. Their comments and suggestions for amendments have helped to make our final document a truly national Rule and Canadian Statutes.

The publication of the Rule and Statutes is of special significance to all Canadian Vincentians. It is the fundamental document of the Society. Therefore, I would ask every member to become familiar with it, and to use it as an educational and reference tool in the formation of members and in service to the poor. It is rooted in the words and the spirituality of our principal founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and our patron, Saint Vincent de Paul.

Serving in hope,

Michael Burke
President, National Council of Canada (2001 – 2007)



THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CANADA

VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

VISION

As a Catholic lay organization, we will embrace the world in a network of charity, serving Christ in the suffering, poor or marginalized, bringing them love and respect, aid and development, hope and joy, in a more just society.

We also seek to deepen our spirituality and the mutual love and support amongst members, so that, seeing how we serve those in need with one mind and heart, people are attracted to the Society and to Christ who animates it. ^{ICG}

MISSION

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a lay Catholic organization whose mission is:

To live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

VALUES

The Mission of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul implies that as Vincen-tians, we:

- **see Christ in anyone who suffers;**
- **come together as a family;**
- **have personal contact with the poor;**
- **help in all possible ways.**

Adopted: SSVP-NCC, AGA, June 2003

LOGO

The Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (the International Council General) has adopted a logo and recommended it to the Society in every country. However it is up to each National (Superior) Council to authorize the use of the Society's logo within its jurisdiction.¹ The National Council of Canada has adopted this logo.

The logo has the following meaning:



- The fish is the symbol of Christianity and, in this case, represents the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.
- The eye of the fish is the vigilant eye of God seeking to help the poor in our midst.
- The crossing at the tail or the tie-knot represents unity and oneness among members and also the union with the poor.
- The circle bounding the logo signifies the global or worldwide stature of the SSVP, an international Society.
- The words *serviens in spe* mean to serve in hope, the hope that comes from Our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ See 2.6.2



OPENING PRAYER

L: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

All: Amen.

L: *Come Holy Spirit, live within our lives.*

All: And strengthen us by your love.

L: *Send forth your spirit and new life will be created.*

All: And the whole face of the earth will be renewed.

L: *Let us reflect on the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, recalling his unity and presence among us: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (short silence)*

All: Lord Jesus, deepen our Vincentian spirit of friendship during this meeting. Make us responsive to the Christian calling to seek and find the forgotten, the suffering or the deprived, so that we may bring them your love. Help us to be generous with our time, our possessions and ourselves, in this mission of charity. Perfect in us your love and teach us to share more fully in the Eucharistic sacrifice offered for all.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen

L: *Most sacred heart of Jesus.*

All: Have mercy on us.

L: *Immaculate heart of Mary.*

All: Pray for us.

L: *Saint Vincent de Paul.*

All: Pray for us.

L: *Saint Louise de Marillac.*

All: Pray for us.

L: *Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.*

All: Pray for us.

L: *Blessed Rosalie Rendu.*

All: Pray for us.



CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen

L: *Saint Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

All: Pray for us.

L: *Saint Vincent de Paul.*

All: Pray for us.

L: *Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.*

All: Pray for us.

L: *For all the benefactors of the poor, that God may reward them with eternal life.*

All: Lord, hear us.

L: *For our Society and all its members, that God may renew our spirit of unity and of service.*

All: Lord, hear us.

L: *For all who are sick and suffering, that God may give them courage and consolation.*

All: Lord, hear us.

L: *For all our deceased members, the deceased poor and our deceased benefactors, that God may grant them eternal rest.*

All: Lord, hear us.

L: *For the unity for which Christ prayed, that all may be one in truth and charity.*

All: Lord, hear us.

L: *For those who have no homes, that they may quickly find a place in which they can live a happy and decent life.*

All: Lord, hear us.

L: *That if it be God's will, Frédéric Ozanam, our founder may be canonized by the Church.*

All: Lord, hear us.

L: *That our Holy Father the Pope may be granted the protection, guidance, strength and consolation that he needs to discharge his duties as Christ's vicar on earth.*

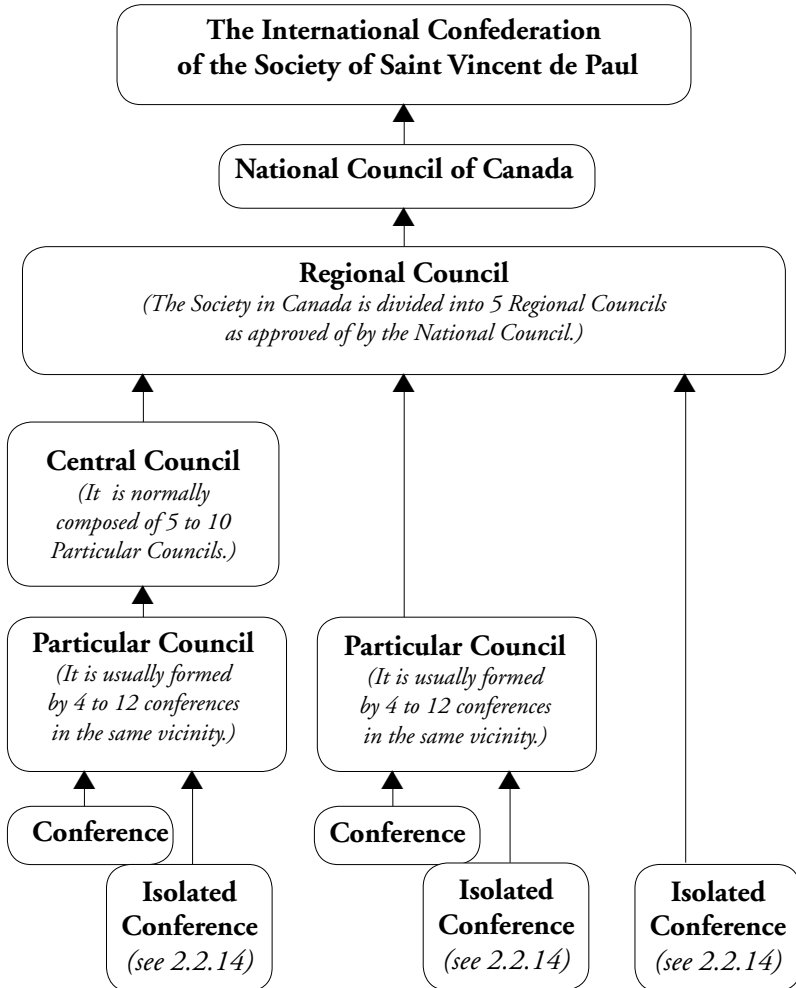
All: Lord, hear us.

L: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

All: Amen.



ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL IN CANADA



{ Areas where all levels of councils exist } { Areas where no Central councils exist } { Areas where no Central or Particular councils exist }



SECTION 1

BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE RULE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

1.1 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

(See the International Rule for the full expression of the International Society's fundamental principles and spirituality.)

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a Catholic lay organization of charity,

- by its constitution,
- in its composition,
- in its administration.

The primary goal and purpose of the Society, its members, staff, volunteers and benefactors is:

- to serve and to minister to all the poor¹, making no distinctions of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions;
- to promote their dignity in accordance with Christian values and the philosophy of the Society as expressed in the Rule.

Vincentians, in serving the poor:

- are living the message of the Gospel;
- are transformed through Christ.

Vincentians recognize that the service, the activities and the attachment to traditions, as expressed in the stated parameters of the Society, reflect the vision of:

- our main founder Blessed Frédéric Ozanam,
- our patron Saint Vincent de Paul.

¹ See 1.2

Vincentians belong to a worldwide community, and members:

- are drawn from every cultural and ethnic group,
- are united by prayer and reflection,
- take part in gatherings and meetings to organize and administer assistance wherever needed.

Vincentians work as a team within the Society and also in collaboration with other people of good will to:

- serve the poor,
- discover and help redress situations of social injustice that cause poverty, suffering and need.

Vincentians believe that:

- they are serving Christ when they serve the poor;
- the activities of the Society reflect the spirit of Christ in promoting the reign of God.

Vincentians carry out their work keeping in mind that:

- no work of charity is foreign to the Society;
- they are the loving companions to their brothers and sisters;
- the Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future looking towards sustainable development and the protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

Vincentians, through person-to-person contact,

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

1.2 THE POOR

The word poor designates men, women and children who, either as individuals or as families, are encountering difficulties in their lives. The poor may include:

- the homeless,
- immigrants and refugees,
- inmates and their families,
- those with no source of income,
- those searching for employment,
- seniors and those on fixed incomes,
- those living alone with few resources,
- those suffering physically or mentally,
- those who are going through a strike or a lockout,
- those abused physically, sexually or psychologically,
- the working poor who have problems making ends meet,
- those enrolled in governmental financial assistance programs,
- those who have a problem of dependency on drugs, gambling, alcohol, etc.²

2 This list is open ended and not limited to the groups of people mentioned. See also Appendix 5.11 for details concerning places to visit the poor and for referrals.

1.3 VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY

The Gospel of the Lord according to Saint Matthew – Chapter 25 – verses 31 – 40

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven, he will sit upon his royal throne and all the nations will be assembled before him. Then he will separate them into two groups as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place on his right hand, the goats on his left. The king will say to those on his right:

“Come. You have my Father’s blessing! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.

Then the just will ask Him: “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison?” And the king will answer them: “I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.”

The mission of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a response to the message of Our Lord in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. Members of the Society are called to value the principle of life, which manifests God’s love for men, women and children throughout the world. Christ came to give hope to the poor and expects Vincentians to do the same.

By meditation, prayer, reflection on the scriptures, and the teachings of the Church, Vincentians seek to:

- develop their awareness of God,
- develop their relationship with the poor,
- bear witness by acts of kindness in the spirit of Christ.

The Gospels are the prime source of Vincentian spirituality. Meditating on the spirit of the Rule and on the lives of the saints, especially those of Saint Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam is recommended for greater spiritual development.

1.3.1 Characteristics of the Vincentian Spirit

For a Catholic, a vocation is a call of the conscience enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Every vocation leads to a commitment, that is, to an absolutely free adherence to a particular kind of life. Vincentians accept and seek close adherence to a number of characteristics particular to the Society.

1.3.1.1 *The Spirit of Charity, Service and Sharing*

Charity is patient. Charity is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Charity does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Charity never fails.

1 Corinthians 13

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is founded on the principle of serving the poor. This activity of charity is the fundamental characteristic of the Society. Frédéric Ozanam said: “I would like to embrace the whole world in a network of charity.” 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, the poor.

1.3.1.2 *The Spirit of Humility*

Humility is one of the fundamental characteristics of the Society. Frédéric Ozanam states: “... our guiding rule should be neither to force ourselves on the public gaze nor to conceal ourselves from those who may wish to find us.” Good works speak for themselves. But simplicity and humility,

- strengthen Vincentians,
- hold vanity in check,
- proclaim the Gospel values with a loud voice.

1.3.1.3 The Spirit of Truth and Justice

Vincentians work towards the goal of justice for all. When serving the poor, they are open and nonjudgmental, inclusive and not exclusive. Vincentians act without prejudice and are honoured to serve the poor. Honesty and truth are paramount if the Society is to follow its mandate. The distribution of funds and goods is a privilege. The goods belong to the Society inasmuch as the Society is the steward whose responsibility it is to distribute them to the poor.

1.3.1.4 The Spirit of Warm Acceptance and Cordiality

A heartfelt welcome, cordiality and accepting people as they are, characteristics of the early Christians, are part of the Vincentian way. The poor can be demanding, but a cheery disposition and a welcoming smile can make all the difference.

1.4 MEMBERSHIP IN THE SOCIETY

People everywhere are called by Christ to proclaim the Gospel and to be His presence on earth. The Society, as a Catholic lay organization, remains faithful to these teachings of the Church.

Members join the Society because they seek to develop their faith by living it both individually and communally. The Society is for people who feel a need to improve their Christian life and view the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul as a means to accomplish this end.

1.4.1 Categories of Members

Pursuant to the prescription of the Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (revised in 2003), the Vincentian tradition and legal requirements, the following categories of member are recognized:

1.4.1.1 *Full Member*

Any person of good will, desirous of living his or her faith by loving and serving the poor and of participating in the meetings and activities of the Society, according to the principles set forth in the International Rule, may become a Full Member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul of Canada. The President, Vice-President and Spiritual Advisor of conferences and councils shall be Roman Catholic.

1.4.1.2 *Auxiliary Member*

Any person, whether this person be Catholic or not, who sincerely and publicly accepts the Society's principles, may become an Auxiliary Member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul of Canada.

An Auxiliary Member:

- may or may not have contact with those being served;
- is invited to attend the general meetings, but not to vote thereat. Also is invited to participate in the charitable activities of the Society;
- may not run for office.

1.4.1.3 Benefactor

Persons who are recognized because of their financial contributions or other support to the Society are considered Benefactors. They may be invited to attend general meetings.

1.4.1.4 Young Adult Member³

Full members between the ages of 19 and 35.

1.4.1.5 Youth Member

Full members between the ages of 12 and 19 working with an adult full member as mentor.

3 Young adult members may belong to a regular conference in which case they are considered regular members. However, they may also be members of a young adult conference, for example, in a university where they are studying.



SECTION 2

ORGANIZATION OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL IN CANADA

2.1 PROLOGUE

The mission of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is to serve Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy. To accomplish this mission, the SSVP is organized to achieve set objectives through well-defined activities.

Functioning within a specific area, such as a parish, a school, a workplace, etc., Vincentians form a conference, and engage in person-to-person service to the poor.

The Society has a simple and effective structure, which exists to support it at all levels. The Conference¹ is the first level of this structure.

Historically, as conferences increased in number and expanded geographically, it became necessary to form different levels of Councils.²

The councils, whether they be Particular, Central, Regional, National or International, are responsible for the animation and coordination of activities and Special Works at all levels of the Society from the conferences on up. They may themselves engage in activities and Special Works independently of the conferences. They also help maintain the original spirit of friendship, belonging and sharing for all Vincentians.

In order to provide for consistency in presidential change over at all levels, newly elected presidents shall take office on July 1 of the appropriate year.

¹ Throughout the Rule, the word *conference* always refers to an *aggregated conference*.

² Throughout the Rule, the word *council* always refers to an *instituted council*.

2.1.1 Incorporation, Revision of By-laws and Annual Review

It is mandatory for any council or conference that decides to incorporate under provincial law, to send its proposed by-laws and its request for authorization to incorporate, through the higher-level councils, to the National Council, for review and approval. As a rule, Conferences should not apply for incorporation because both their financial resources and the number of their members generally do not warrant it. However, there are exceptions

Each council or conference, once incorporated under provincial law, must proceed with an annual review of its by-laws and send any proposed significant revisions to the National Council, through the higher-level councils, for review and approval.

At least once a year, each conference and council must meet to evaluate its service to the members and to the poor as well as to examine the effectiveness of its Special Works and other projects. At this time it must also explore ways to provide better service, ways to find those in need, and must consider new types of needs to alleviate.³

2.1.2 The Operations Manual of the National Council of Canada (hereinafter referred to as the Operations Manual)

The Operations Manual of the National Council of Canada is a document that is separate from, but complementary to the Rule and Canadian Statutes. It sets forth National Council policies and procedures, and contains various administrative forms and other information necessary for the management of activities, and service to the poor. All conference and council presidents should have a copy of the National Council Operations Manual. The contents are kept up to date by the National Council of Canada Administration. The Operations Manual is available on the website, www.ssvp.ca.

³ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.10 and C.11, for suggested agendas for these meetings.

2.2 CONFERENCE

2.2.1 Definition

The founding members of the Society gathered together and called themselves the Conference of Charity. The term conference has been an integral part of the vocabulary of the Society ever since.

Vincentians, within the limits of a parish, a school, a store, a workplace, etc., join together to form a conference. The conference provides an environment in which they develop and nurture a common spiritual life and where they grow in their closeness to the Lord as they encounter Him in the poor.

In a conference, objectives and activities are planned, developed and carried out to help the poor. Conferences report to their particular council. Special provisions specified in 2.2.14 govern Isolated Conferences.

2.2.2 Role and Responsibilities of a Conference

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 the poor. 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.

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.

The responsibilities of conference members are varied. The most important one is to bring comfort and aid to the poor. The fundamental activity is the person-to-person encounter with the poor through home visits, carried out by pairs of Vincentians. Home visitation demands the highest respect for the dignity of the poor. Vincentians are the guests of the persons being visited, as those they visit are the hosts.

Within the conference, to carry out its mission, members:

- set objectives,
- plan, develop and carry out activities,
- work as a team,
- make decisions by consensus.

Following their recruitment, new conference members should be instructed about the mission of the Society. This will include its Rule, Canadian Statutes, spirituality, history, structure, objectives, main activities and special works. Within a conference, continuous formation should be provided.

Conference members should be made aware of, and become defenders of, social justice. They must be proactive in their defence of the poor.⁴

Vincentians should act as catalysts and be the conscience of their local community, as they cooperate with parish organizations, neighbouring conferences, other faith communities and social service agencies.

Vincentians must seek to avoid duplication and competition in the provision of services. The Society should play a leading role in cooperating with others because it cannot do alone everything that needs to be done. In all endeavours, assistance should be welcomed from anyone who is sincere and prepared to help, even in a small way.

2.2.3 Aggregation

The visible unifying link within the Society is the Aggregation of the Conferences and the Institution of the Councils declared by the International Council General (ICG). The International Council General preserves among all conferences that unity of values, affections and practices cherished by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul.

After the formation of a first executive and following a satisfactory trial period of one year, a new conference, working through the intermediate councils, can submit an Application for Aggregation.⁵ The President of

⁴ See 3.22.

⁵ The form needed to apply for the Aggregation of a Conference is in the *Operations Manual*.

the National Council must review all such applications, and once they have been approved, forwards them to the International Council General.

Once the Permanent Section of the International Council General has given its approval, the President General notifies the President of the National Council and the conference concerned. The President of the National Council signs the Certificate of Aggregation and forwards it, through lower councils, to the newly aggregated conference.

2.2.4 Election of the President

A President, elected by conference members in a secret ballot, directs the conference. An election for a president must be conducted at the expiry of the term of office of the sitting president⁶. If no election has taken place at the end of the term, the president of the next higher council shall convoke and preside over the election of a new president.

To proceed with the election, the retiring president or the vice-president notifies the members of an election meeting to take place at a specific date and place at least 30 days prior. Members present at such a meeting will appoint an election Chair and a Secretary. If necessary, the president of the next higher level Council may be asked to chair the election proceedings.

The Chair requests the names of prospective candidates, all of whom must be full members, and confirms whether or not the nominees are willing to stand for office.

- If only one (1) candidate is nominated for the presidency and accepts, he or she is declared elected by acclamation.
- If there are two candidates, the one who obtains the most votes wins the election. In the event of a tie, a second ballot must be held at the same meeting.
- If there are more than two candidates and no one obtains 50% + one of the votes on the first ballot, a second secret ballot will be held at the same meeting with the names of the two candidates who obtained the greatest number of votes on the first ballot.
- After the votes have been counted, the Chair announces the results.

⁶ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.2 and C.3, for the information on the Election of a President and for the Nomination Form.

After the newly elected president has appointed a vice-president, secretary and treasurer,⁷ it is the responsibility of the retiring president and officers to promptly turn over to the new officers all books of minutes, financial records, accounts, and other relevant documents.

For new conferences, the election procedure may be less formal. Preferably, it should be done in the presence of the next higher council president or delegate.

2.2.5 Term of Office

A conference president is elected for a term of office of three years. This term of office may be renewed once only for a period of three years or less.

The term of office of the retiring executive officers ends only when the newly elected president appoints new executive officers.

2.2.6 Duties of the President

The president shall be dedicated to the service of the poor, to the needs of the conference, and to the spiritual and moral needs of the members.

The president should epitomize the Society's spiritual mission and, at each conference meeting, ensure that there is a reading, carefully chosen for the spiritual benefit of the members.

The president should be an experienced active member who has a good knowledge of the Rule and Canadian Statutes and their application, and who understands and values the culture of the Society.

Ideally, the president of a conference should reside within the limits of the area (e.g.: parish) served by the conference.

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

⁷ In order to protect the credibility of the Society and to avoid all conflict of interest, it is recommended that the officers designated by the president of a conference not be his or her close relatives.

As the servant leader of the conference, the president must:

- take the fullest, most active interest in the welfare of the members;
- support and assist them in their Vincentian actions as circumstances require;
- meet with any member who does not attend meetings to discuss the situation.

It is the president's responsibility to:

- maintain the membership of the conference and provide positive reinforcement to the members;
- encourage the recruitment of new members.

To realize the main objectives of the Society, the president should:

- allocate a reasonable quantity of charitable work and various other tasks to each conference member;
- make sure that all tasks are properly carried out.

The president should:

- avoid autocratic behaviour;
- never claim, in the execution of his or her duties, special privileges or distinction;
- act with a considerable measure of humility;
- always keep in mind that the president is at the service of the members.

To ensure the uninterrupted pursuit of the work to which much effort has been devoted, the president should personally see to the preparation of one or more possible successors.

It is important for the president to remain fully informed of the needs of those served and of the work of the members without, however, monopolizing the work.

As much as possible, decisions should be made collectively to foster a community/team spirit within the conference both in its orientation and in its activities.

The president ensures that links and communication are effectively maintained between the conference and the council to which it is attached.

As a voting member representing the conference at higher councils, the president takes part in meetings held by these councils. If unable to attend, the president should be represented by a substitute designated by proxy.⁸

The president develops working relations with:

- neighbouring conferences,
- the parish council,
- agencies and government welfare organizations.

The president represents the conference in contacts with the local civil and religious authorities and should take advantage of such contacts to acquaint fellow parishioners and other members of the community with the needs and achievements of the Society.

The president shall see to it that an annual report is submitted to the council immediately above the conference.

2.2.7 Appointment and Role of Officers

After consultation with the members, the president appoints the following conference officers:

- a vice-president,
- a secretary,
- a treasurer.

The appointed officers accept the responsibilities conferred on them by the president. When necessary, other members can be entrusted with special duties. It is possible to name a treasurer who is not a member of the Society. However, in such cases, this person is appointed by the president because of his or her expertise and can take part in the deliberations in a meeting but does not have any voting rights.

2.2.7.1 Duties of the Vice-President

The vice-president:

- presides at conference meetings and acts in lieu of the president for conference activities in the absence of or the disability of the president;

⁸ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

- replaces the president at council and other meetings when he or she is unable to attend;
- carries out various duties that have been assigned such as taking charge of committees, planning activities for the recruitment of youth/young adults, membership drives, etc.

2.2.7.2 Duties of the Secretary

The secretary prepares the minutes of the meetings and reports thereon. The minutes should be prepared so as to present an exact report of what transpired during the previous meeting.

The secretary is responsible for keeping records, statistical or other, of the conference, including all records related to the election of the president.

With the participation of the other conference officers, the secretary is responsible for the preparation of the annual report.

The secretary keeps an up-to-date list of members with names and addresses, and the date they joined the conference.

The secretary should note all changes of address of the members and notify the council at the next higher level. When a member moves to another area, the secretary, with the member's permission, advises the conference in that area of the arrival of the Vincentian.

The secretary shall ensure the confidentiality and safety of the information gathered about members and about those served.

2.2.7.3 Duties of the Treasurer

The treasurer exercises control over financial operations with prudence and integrity. Managing the assets of a conference requires mature judgment and a high sense of responsibility.

The treasurer is responsible for conference funds, which means:

- preparing the conference budget;
- keeping records of all receipts and expenditures.

The treasurer must see to it that:

- deposits are made regularly and promptly; large sums of money are not allowed to accumulate before a deposit is made at a financial institution;
- account books are kept up-to-date, indicating at all times the true financial position of the conference;
- a financial report is presented at each meeting and integrated into the minutes to ensure that the true financial situation of the conference is known at all times.

For auditing purpose, invoices and/or statements shall be obtained before any disbursement is effected.

All payments should be made by cheques signed by two persons duly authorized by the conference.

To safeguard the good name of the Society:

- all accounts should be paid as they become due;
- account books shall be reviewed, at least once a year or upon request, by a financial review committee made up of members of the conference or of qualified persons outside the conference;
- any financial review is to be presented to the conference members.

Isolated Conferences shall submit their financial reports, at least once a year, to the Particular Council that serves as their liaison with the Society.

2.2.8 Appointment and Role of the Spiritual Advisor

In accordance with the tradition established at the beginning of the Society, a Spiritual Advisor shall be appointed by the president. The Spiritual Advisor shall foster the spiritual life within the conference in the light of guidance from the Holy Spirit. But the spirit of the Rule shall be promoted in its entirety and be the basis for any program of spiritual development.

Should a priest, permanent deacon or other member of a religious order not be available as Spiritual Advisor, the president, after consultation with

conference members, may appoint a member who has the appropriate spiritual training.

Priests, permanent deacons and members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office within the Society other than that of Spiritual Advisor. The Spiritual Advisor may attend meetings but has no voting rights.

2.2.9 Meetings

Conference meetings shall be held regularly. The International Rule states that this means at least twice a month. The time and place is determined by the members of the conference.

Regular meetings provide an opportunity for the conference members to:

- plan activities and develop projects;
- strengthen their spirit of community;
- celebrate mutual friendship;
- express their desire to serve the Lord by serving the poor;
- pray and reflect together to deepen their spirituality;
- work and grow as a team in resolving the individual and family difficulties brought to their attention;
- review their contacts with the poor and share their experiences.

The financial status of the conference is reviewed during a meeting. A secret collection should also be taken up during the meeting.⁹

Conference meetings should not be lengthy. Expediency can be achieved if officers and members spend some time preparing before each meeting and have pertinent documentation readily available.

A meeting shall include a spiritual reading followed by an exchange. Vincentians are encouraged to participate actively in sharing insights on spiritual topics, particularly in the way they relate to the development of a Christian attitude towards the poor and to the development of the Society's service ministry.

⁹ See Section 3.11.

Conference meetings offer the best place for the education and formation of members both spiritually and as servants of the poor. This ongoing formation complements the formation sessions sponsored by councils.

The development of members' skills can be improved by visiting the poor and discussing their experiences at the conference meeting. Everyone learns and solutions come more easily when a problem is thoroughly analyzed through a group discussion in which all members participate.

A typical agenda for a conference meeting:

- Opening prayer
- Word of welcome from the president
- Spiritual reflection
- Reading of an article of the Rule
- Reading and adoption of the agenda
- Reading and adoption of minutes of the last meeting
- Correspondence
- Financial report
- Reports on visits by members¹⁰
- Information from higher councils
- Reports: committees; activities; special cases, etc.
- Allocation of visits
- Planning, development and realization of projects to improve service offered to the poor
- A round table for members comments
- Secret collection
- Varia
- Time and date of the next meeting
- Closing prayer

¹⁰ **Commentary:** The objective of these reports is not to pass judgment on those being visited but rather to find the best ways to help them.

2.2.10 Finance

The Society shall preserve its good reputation for honesty and responsible stewardship.

Funds received from all sources (collections, benefactors, members, higher councils, etc.) are to be used exclusively in the pursuit of the Society's aims and objectives.¹¹

Only a reasonable reserve should be allowed to accumulate, usually based on previous budgets and anticipated expenditures.

All surpluses shall be shared annually¹² with the next higher council for distribution to the less fortunate conferences of the council and to other higher councils.

Any asset, including, but not limited to, trust accounts, investments, real estate, which is held in the name of the Society, must be used by Vincentians for the Society's purposes.

If any such asset is transferred to any other entity, it should not be transferred without proper reimbursement, either,

- in cash, or
- accompanied by a memorandum or other similar document, approved by the next higher council, setting forth a mutually agreeable exchange of services.

Any property so transferred from the Vincentian entity to any other group must not continue to carry the name of the Society for any purpose whatsoever.

¹¹ See 3.13.

¹² The conference may decide to send this amount once a year, or in monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual instalments, see also policy FIN 007.

The Society must not hold title to any asset just for the purpose of holding such assets;¹³ it must use these assets to pursue the Society's mission.¹⁴

The fiscal year should run from January 1 to December 31.

2.2.11 Reporting and Accountability

At each meeting, a financial report stating revenues and expenses should be presented to the members and reported in the minutes.

A financial report and an activity report shall be submitted to the conference and the next higher council by January 31 each year.

Such reports are a legal requirement under laws, which govern charitable organizations. For this reason, each conference should apply for Charitable Organization status in accordance with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) requirements and legislation.

Such financial and activity reports are essential so that the higher councils may better grasp both the strengths and weaknesses of the conferences and the scope of their work, with a view to offering assistance and serving more effectively. The facts detailed will often be an inspiration to other conferences and councils.

These reports should be published and made available to all members and to the community in general.

¹³ See 3.13.

¹⁴ **Commentary:** Members should never take the attitude that the money is theirs, or that those served have to prove they deserve it.

Although financial assistance most often involves activities organized by the conference to help the poor, it would be wrong to equate a successful conference with the amount of money it receives or passes on to those in need. As with all gift giving, the value of the gift lies in the intention of the donor. It is the love and concern behind the gift that makes it meaningful. Conferences with few resources can still have a significant impact. The member's gift of time and sincere expression of concern may be the best offering and most effective assistance a conference can give.

2.2.12 Youth and Young Adult Members

The Society should work diligently to welcome young members into all conferences. Their experience of a community of faith and love and their exposure to poverty deepen their spirituality, spur them to action and help them to grow as human beings.

Each conference should engage in recruiting young members. Efforts should also be made to establish conferences composed exclusively of youth / young adults when circumstances permit. Such conferences may be established in conjunction with a high school, college, university, parish or any person-to-person service to serve the poor and promote human dignity.

When a Youth or Young Adult Conference is established, the council with jurisdiction shall appoint an adult mentor who is not to control, but rather to share information and make his or her experience available to the membership.

2.2.13 Voting

All decisions are made by consensus after reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate, matters are put to the vote. Voting is conducted by show of hands unless the president or his or her substitute decides, in exceptional circumstances, to proceed by secret ballot when the matter is deemed sensitive or divisive. A simple majority shall validly adopt resolutions. Each voting member in attendance at the meeting is entitled to one vote. A voting member is a person who has been an active member of a conference for six (6) months. The president of the conference, or his or her substitute, as Chair of the meeting, does not vote. However, in the event of a tie vote, the Chair shall then vote, which vote shall be considered the casting vote.

2.2.14 Isolated Conferences

In any diocese or region, there may exist one or several conferences, which are not geographically within the area of a functioning Particular Council. They are referred to as “Isolated Conferences”. To be considered isolated a conference must be situated 100 kilometres or more from the nearest Particular Council.

A conference situated in a region where the geography is such that even a distance of less than 100 kilometres makes linkage with a Particular Council impracticable, or which has other valid reasons for requesting the designation of Isolated Conference, must submit its request to the National Council for approval. The National President, in concert with the Regional Council will make the appropriate organizational decision.

Though Isolated Conferences may participate only occasionally in the ongoing activities of the closest Particular Council due to distance, it is the express wish of the Society that they be afforded the opportunity for involvement in the works and decisions of the councils.

The closest Particular Council may be asked to represent an Isolated Conference at the Central and Regional Councils to which that Particular Council is attached. Whenever the isolated Conference requires information or wishes to convey its views to a higher Council, it will write to or confer with this Particular Council.

In a diocese or area where no Particular or Central Councils have been organized, all functioning conferences, and this includes Isolated Conferences, will report to the appropriate Regional Council.¹⁵

2.2.15 Responsibilities of the Isolated Conference to the Particular Council

Isolated conferences have responsibilities to the Particular Council regarding communication with, and participation in Particular Council activities and meetings. These include:

- responding to any Particular Council communications they receive;
- providing a report from the conference for each meeting of the Particular Council;
- giving input related to items on the agenda as a demonstration of the principle that all Vincentians work together regardless of geographical boundaries;
- providing the Particular Council with as much information as possible concerning the issues the Isolated Conference is facing in its area so that help may be made available;
- providing the Particular Council with a report for the National Council of Canada Annual report, respecting the established timelines;
- attending the annual meeting of either the Particular, Regional or National Council.

¹⁵ See 2.6.7.

2.3 PARTICULAR COUNCIL

2.3.1 Definition

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

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

Particular Councils report to either:

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

2.3.2 Role and Responsibilities of a Particular Council

The Particular Council:

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

The Particular Council keeps conferences informed about:

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

The Particular Council provides conference members with the opportunity to:

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

The Particular Council:

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

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

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

The Particular Council:

- communicates with any Isolated Conference in its jurisdiction to allow that conference full participation in the council meetings. Initial contact may be carried out through a letter of welcome from and introduction to the Particular Council;
- continues the contact by sending the notice of meetings of the Particular Council to the conference; the invitation to attend the meeting could be sent by Skype, telephone or other media if this would facilitate the contact;
- offers the Isolated Conference the opportunity to present additions to the agenda of meetings and to participate in prayer, reflection and discussions. Using the various media mentioned above will give the Isolated Conference the opportunity to vote in meetings;
- makes arrangements for the Isolated Conference to participate indirectly in Particular Council meetings if direct participation is not possible, which would allow the conference to provide input and to vote. Email or regular mail could be used for this purpose keeping in mind the timeline;
- facilitates the participation of Isolated Conference presidents in the vote for the president of the Particular Council. If attendance at the annual meeting is not possible, a mail-in ballot may be used;
- encourages the Isolated Conference presidents to attend at least one meeting a year for the valuable interaction that such occasions provide; If the cost of attending a meeting is problematic, the Particular

council could discuss the situation to find a solution. The Particular Council President could also visit the Isolated Conference to help promote the idea of members coming together as a family.

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

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

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

The Particular Council should solicit financial support for its activities from its conferences as stated in the Rule and Canadian Statutes¹ and in keeping with the internal policies.

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

2.3.3 Incorporation

A Particular Council shall only be incorporated if it conducts Special Works, possesses real estate or hires staff.

The Particular Council president shall forward its application for incorporation to:

- higher level councils for review and recommendation;
- the National President for review and approval.

This procedure ensures compliance with the spirit and letter of the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society.

An incorporated Particular Council shall discharge all responsibilities and obligations with respect to the provisions of its constitution and by-laws.²

¹ See 2.2.10 and 2.3.13

² See 2.1.1

2.3.4 Institution of a Particular Council

2.3.4.1 *Establishing New Particular Councils*

In the creation of a Particular Council, the most important points to consider shall be:

- the Society's effectiveness in its service to those in need;
- the benefit to members.

The National President approves the creation of such a council on the recommendation, in writing, of the presidents of all appropriate higher councils, and then recommends its Institution by the International Council General.

Conferences applying for the Institution of a Particular Council shall use the appropriate form³ to request its institution. The National President shall be provided with all the necessary information for the study of the application.

2.3.4.2 *Reorganizing Particular Councils*

An application may be made to reorganize a Particular Council with a view to:

- enhancing or extending the activities of the conferences;
- increasing the effectiveness of the Society in the particular area under the jurisdiction of this Particular Council;
- facilitating the ministry of the members in accordance with the Rule of the Society.

The National President, on the recommendation of the relevant higher Councils, approves applications for reorganization.

2.3.5 Voting Members⁴

The voting members at Particular Council meetings are:

- the president⁵ and vice-presidents of the council;
- the presidents of the conferences in its jurisdiction;
- another member of each conference designated by the president with the assent of the conference;

³ The form needed to apply for the Institution of a Particular Council is in the National Council *Operations Manual*.

⁴ Voting Members were called Members by Right in the preceding version of the Canadian Rule. They are those who represent their members at higher council levels

⁵ See 2.3.16 for information about the president's vote at Particular Council meetings.

- substitutes representing conference presidents by proxy if they are unable to attend;⁶
- the secretary and treasurer of the council if they are members of the Society;
- the youth or young adult member if one has been named.

2.3.6 Election of the President

Voting members of the Particular Council eligible to vote to elect the president of the council by secret ballot are:

- the presidents of the conferences in its jurisdiction;
- another member of each conference designated by the president with the assent of the conference;
- members representing absent presidents by proxy.

Voting members elect the president of a Particular Council by secret ballot at the expiry of the term of office of the sitting president⁷. If the sitting president does not call an election, the president of the next higher council shall, within a period of three months after the expiry of the term, convene a meeting of voting members from each conference and chair the election proceedings.

The Chair requests the names of prospective candidates, all of whom must be full members, and confirms whether or not the nominees are willing to stand for office.

- If only one (1) candidate is nominated for the presidency and accepts, he or she is declared elected by acclamation.
- If there are two candidates, the one who obtains the most votes wins the election. In the event of a tie, a second secret ballot must be held at the same meeting.
- If there are more than two candidates and no one obtains 50% + one of the votes on the first ballot, a second secret ballot will be held at the same meeting with the names of the two candidates who obtained the greatest number of votes on the first ballot.
- After the votes have been counted, the Chair announces the results.

⁶ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

⁷ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.2 and C.3, for the information on the Election of a President and the Nomination Form.

2.3.7 Term of Office

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

The term of office of the retiring executive officers ends only when the newly elected president appoints the new executive officers⁸. It is the duty and obligation of the retiring officers to promptly turn over to the new officers all books of minutes, financial records, accounts, and other relevant documents.

2.3.8 Duties of the President

The president of the Particular Council shall endeavour to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the Council as described in 2.3.2. As president, he or she is a voting member of his or her Particular Council⁹, and of the Central, Regional and National Councils.

In addition to the duties described in 2.3.2, the president should also visit conferences in the council's jurisdiction. The president makes such visits in order to:

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

As servant leader of the Council, the president shall:

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

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

- good communication is developed and maintained between the council and the conferences;

⁸ In order to protect the credibility of the Society and avoid all conflict of interest, it is recommended that the officers designated by the president of a council not be his or her close relatives.

⁹ See 2.3.16 for information about the president's vote at Particular Council meetings.

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

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

The president is Chair of the Corporation, if the council is incorporated, and must ensure that the by-laws are respected at all times, are reviewed annually and are revised if necessary.¹⁰

2.3.9 Appointment and Role of Officers of the Executive Committee

After consultation with council members, the president appoints executive officers consisting of vice-presidents, who can be one to three in number, a secretary and a treasurer.¹¹ A youth member with voting rights may also be appointed. It is possible to name a secretary and/or treasurer who are not members of the Society. However, in such cases, they are appointed by the president to serve on the council because of their expertise and can take part in the deliberations but do not have a vote.

2.3.9.1 Duties of the Vice-President

A vice-president:

- presides at council meetings and acts in lieu of the president for council activities in the absence or disability of the president;
- collaborates with the president in all matters affecting the council;
- assists in the visitation of conferences;
- is Vice-Chair of the Corporation, if the council is incorporated;
- carries out various duties that have been assigned, such as taking charge of committees, planning activities for recruitment, youth membership, training and formation, etc.

¹⁰ See 2.1.1,

¹¹ **Commentary:** It is important for the president and officers to belong to a conference and to visit those in need as often as possible. This ensures that all the members are operating at the grass-roots level and keeping their feet on the ground. Accepting the authority of the conference president in the allocation of the work to be done is also an expression of humility.

2.3.9.2 *Duties of the Secretary*

The secretary:

- sends out invitations and agendas for all meetings;
- prepares, presents and signs the minutes of all meetings;
- keeps records and archives including all records related to the election of the president;
- collates annual and other reports from the conferences;
- transmits these reports to higher councils when appropriate;
- drafts correspondence and other documents at the request of the president;
- maintains an up-to-date list of the members of the council;
- is the custodian of the stamp or mechanical device generally used for affixing the seal of the council;
- ensures the confidentiality and safety of data about members and about those being served;
- signs such contracts, documents or instruments in writing as require his or her signature;
- has such other powers and duties as may, from time to time, be assigned by the president or that are related to the position of secretary.

In the case of an incorporated council, the secretary also:

- signs all by-laws;
- keeps records of all amendments and additions to them.

2.3.9.3 *Duties of the Treasurer*

The treasurer is responsible for keeping accurate and appropriate records of:

- the funds and securities of the council;
- all receipts and disbursements.

The treasurer must ensure that:

- funds are deposited, in the name of the council, at such financial institutions as decided by the council;
- invoices and/or statements are obtained before any disbursement is effected.

The treasurer:

- informs members of the council's financial position by submitting a written statement at every meeting;
- prepares and submits an annual budget to the council for approval;
- prepares and presents an annual financial report;
- is one of the signatories of the cheques, as well as other financial instruments, along with the president and/or another officer;
- has other powers and duties as assigned by the president.

In the case of an incorporated council, the treasurer also ensures that a financial review of the council is conducted annually, according to recognized accounting rules, and as required by the Constitution and by-laws of the corporation.

2.3.10 Appointment and Role of the Spiritual Advisor

The president appoints the Spiritual Advisor who may be a priest, a permanent deacon or a member of a religious order. The president may consult with the local Bishop or the head of the religious order, as appropriate. When no person with such qualifications is available, the president, after consultation with members of the council, may appoint a Vincentian who is qualified to exercise such a function.

The Spiritual Advisor:

- attends the meetings;
- participates in the discussions;
- promotes the spirit of the Rule in its entirety as the basis for any program of spiritual development;
- has no voting rights.

The presence of the Spiritual Advisor strengthens the bond between the spiritual and apostolic activities of the council and those of the Church. Priests, permanent deacons and members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office in the Society other than that of their spiritual work.

2.3.11 Role and Responsibilities of the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is made up of:

- the officers of the council;
- the past president;
- other appointed members, such as the Spiritual Advisor, who have no voting rights.

The Executive Committee meets as often as is necessary to discharge the responsibilities of the Particular Council.

The role of the Executive Committee is to ensure that the policies, procedures and projects, as approved by the voting members of the Council, are respected and executed.

2.3.12 Meetings

Meetings of the Particular Councils should be held every month, or more frequently if the interest of the Society so requires, at a time and place determined by the president. Conference members are encouraged to attend to keep informed about council affairs. These non-voting members may be given the right to speak during the meeting but they will, in humility, recognize the right of the elected council members to have the greater share in the discussion.

2.3.13 Finance

The main source of funding for Particular Councils is the annual contribution¹² by the conferences in their jurisdiction.¹³ Funds may also be solicited from conferences for specific and urgent needs.

Particular Councils have a duty to financially support higher councils by sending them surplus funds for the maintenance and expansion of the Society in Canada and throughout the world. Particular Councils should define strategies to improve their fund-raising activities and develop new approaches for funding Special Projects, in compliance with the Society's principles and practices.

¹² The conference may decide to send this amount once a year, or in monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual instalments.

¹³ See 2.2.10, see also policy FIN 007

Only a reasonable reserve should be accumulated based on previous budgets and anticipated expenditures. All surpluses over and above such a reserve should be shared with the next higher council.¹⁴

2.3.14 Reporting and Accountability

Particular Councils shall submit their annual financial and activity reports and those of conferences in their jurisdiction to the next higher council by February 28 of each year.

They shall also submit to the next higher council any audit conducted in conferences under their jurisdiction within a reasonable period after the conclusion of the audit. Other reporting may be required according to the by-laws in the case of an incorporated council.

Such financial and activity reports are essential for the council and the higher councils. These reports make it possible for all the councils to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of the conferences in the different jurisdictions and the scope of their work. It enables the councils to offer assistance where necessary and to serve more effectively. Such reports should be made available to the membership and to the public.¹⁵

2.3.15 Youth and Young Adult Members

Young members are needed to rejuvenate the Society and to bring in new ideas.

Particular Councils have a specific responsibility to encourage the recruitment and promotion of young people within reporting conferences, and to support the formation of Youth and Young Adult Conferences, where appropriate.

Without creating a parallel organization, councils at appropriate levels should promote Youth Councils when circumstances permit. Such councils shall have the same relationship with their reporting council as any other committee related to the reporting council.

¹⁴ See 2.2.10

¹⁵ It is recommended that Councils at all levels apply for Registered Charity status with the Canada Revenue Agency so they may issue Income tax receipts for donations received, in money or in kind.

2.3.16 Voting

Voting is conducted by show of hands unless the president or his or her substitute decides, in exceptional circumstances, to proceed by secret ballot when the matter is deemed sensitive or divisive. A simple majority shall validly adopt resolutions. Each voting member in attendance or represented at the meeting is entitled to one vote. The president of the Particular Council, or his or her substitute, as Chair of the meeting does not vote. However, in the event of a tie vote, the Chair shall then vote, which vote shall be considered the casting vote.

2.3.17 Quorum

The quorum is established when no less than 30% of eligible voting members are present or represented at any meetings.

2.3.18 Proxies

A voting member who cannot attend a meeting of the Particular Council should be represented by a member or an officer of his or her conference certified by a signed Proxy Form,¹⁶ which shall be presented to, verified and accepted by the president or his or her substitute before the meeting.

However, voting members¹⁷ appointed by the Particular Council President cannot be represented at any meeting by proxy.

¹⁶ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

¹⁷ These include the Vice-Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer and Youth or Young Adult member.

2.4 CENTRAL COUNCIL

2.4.1 Definition

Particular Councils may group together to form a Central Council within a given geographical area determined by the National Council. Central Councils report directly to their Regional Councils. The name of the council should reflect the area that it coordinates.

2.4.2 Role and Responsibilities of Central Councils

The primary role of Central Councils is to assist Particular Councils to live the Gospel message in accordance with the mission and values of the Society in Canada.

Central Councils must also:

- stimulate growth of the Vincentian membership;
- encourage interaction between members of councils and conferences;
- assist in the development of Vincentian works;¹
- promote opportunities for the spiritual growth of all the members;
- promote the ongoing education and development of all the members.

A Central Council, as the higher council in a designated geographical area, recommends to the Regional Council:

- any new conference that has applied for aggregation;
- any new Particular Council that has applied for institution.

A Central Council may engage in charitable activities and special works which:

- are beyond the capacity of a Conference or a Particular Council;
- have community-wide implications.

The Central Council carries out these activities or Special Works with the support of the councils in its jurisdiction and, when necessary, with the collaboration of outside organizations.

¹ These works include stores and other such activities.

A Central Council shall:

- solicit financial support from Particular Councils in its jurisdiction;
- provide the appropriate Regional Council with an annual financial and activity report.

The Central Council must ensure that elections for presidents of the Particular Councils under its jurisdiction take place every four years.

Upon the dissolution of a conference or a Particular Council, the Board of Directors of the Central Council shall put into effect Administrative Procedure 002 – Closing of Conferences and Councils, as described in the Operations Manual.

The Central Council shall convene an Annual Meeting to:

- present the minutes of the previous Annual Meeting;
- present the reports of the Central Council President, of the Board of Directors, and of the different Committees;
- present the annual audited financial statements for adoption;
- present the operating budget of the Central Council for adoption;
- vote on the appointment of auditors;
- discuss and vote on the adoption of any motion introduced by the Board of Directors;
- carry out the election of a new Central Council president if it is an election year.²

2.4.3 Incorporation

A Central Council should only be incorporated when it undertakes Special Works, possesses real estate or hires staff.

The Central Council president shall forward its application for incorporation to:

- higher-level councils for review and recommendation;
- the National President for review and approval.

This procedure ensures compliance with the spirit and letter of the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society.

² See 2.4.5

An incorporated Central Council shall fulfill all its responsibilities and obligations with respect to the provisions of its constitution and by-laws.³

2.4.4 Institution of a Central Council

A Central Council should normally be composed of five to ten Particular Councils. However, its size may vary depending on local practices or geography.

2.4.4.1 Establishing New Central Councils

To establish a new Central Council, the procedure is as follows:

- All the Particular Councils in a given area, representing their member conferences and any Isolated Conference for which they serve as liaison, together recommend the establishment of a Central Council.
- They send a written request to the National Council of Canada, through the reporting councils, asking if they may apply for the establishment of a Central Council.
- Once assent is given, an application to that effect is prepared and sent to the National Council using the appropriate form for the Institution of a Central Council⁴, accompanying it with all the information needed to study the application.
- The President of the National Council reviews the application and once it has been approved, forwards it to the International Council General.

2.4.4.2 Reorganizing Central Councils

The National Council, through the reporting councils, has the duty to ensure that the size of Central Councils is such that they are able to facilitate:

- the spiritual development of their members;
- the animation and coordination of the work of the Particular Councils in their respective jurisdictions.

³ See 2.1.2

⁴ The form needed to apply for the Institution of a Central Council is in the National Council *Operations Manual*.

- A. An existing Central Council may, through the Regional Council, ask the National President for authorization to reorganize.
- It may have expanded beyond the recommended five to ten Particular Councils. In this case, it may want to split into two Central Councils.
 - It may have shrunk below the recommended five to ten Particular Councils. In this case, it may want to abandon its Institution, or suspend its activities while retaining its Institution.

Once it has the authorization of the National President, the Central Council may carry out the reorganization. Following a successful realignment, if the Central Council has split in two, the original Council that is now smaller, retains its Institution. However, the Particular Councils that no longer belong to the original Central Council, if they wish to do so, may apply for Institution of a new Central Council by proceeding as described in 2.4.4.1. If they do not wish to do so, they will then report directly to the Regional Council.

If, as a result of the reorganization, the Central Council has abandoned its Institution or suspended its activities while retaining its Institution, the Particular Councils formerly under its jurisdiction will then report directly to the Regional Council.

As part of the reorganization,

- any newly formed Central Council along with the original Central Council will be given the opportunity to work out details related to any finances and material goods.
- if the Institution of the Council has been abandoned or its activities suspended, the Particular Councils formerly under its jurisdiction will be given the opportunity to work out details related to any finances and material goods.

However, if the councils concerned do not come to an agreement concerning the different aspects of the reorganization, the National President will make the necessary decisions based on the information at hand.

If an existing Central Council has expanded beyond or shrunk to fewer than the recommended number of five to ten Particular Councils but has not made a request for reorganization, the National President may ask that this be done.

The National President, after consultation with the appropriate instances, can determine the size of each Central Council.

- B. If the Central Council has expanded beyond the recommended limits, the President of the National Council may:
- make a request for reorganization to the concerned Central Council president and his or her Board of Directors. A timeline for such a reorganization would also be specified.
 - give the president of the Central Council concerned an opportunity to review its current boundaries, and make recommendations for adjustments that would be in line with established guidelines. For example, the Central Council could be split in two, or it could lose its Institution or suspend its activities while retaining its Institution.

Following a successful reorganization, if the Central Council has split in two, the original Council that is now smaller, retains its Institution. However, the Particular Councils that no longer belong to the original Council, if they wish to do so, may apply for Institution of a new Central Council by proceeding as described in 2.4.4.1. If they do not wish to do so, they will then report directly to the Regional Council.

If, as a result of the reorganization, the Central Council has abandoned its Institution or suspended its activities while retaining its Institution, the Particular Councils formerly under its jurisdiction will then report directly to the Regional Council.

As part of the reorganization,

- any newly formed Central Council along with the original Central Council will be given the opportunity to work out details related to any finances and material goods.
- if the Institution of the Council has been abandoned or its activities suspended, the Particular Councils formerly under its jurisdiction will be given the opportunity to work out details related to any finances and material goods.

However, if the Central Council concerned does not proceed with a reorganization as was requested, the National President will make the necessary organizational decisions based on the information at hand.

2.4.5 Voting Members

Voting Members of the Central Council each of whom is entitled to one vote at any meeting, are:

- the president⁵ and vice-presidents of the Central Council;
- the presidents of the Particular Councils within the Central Council's jurisdiction;
- substitutes representing Particular Council presidents by proxy⁶ if these presidents are unable to attend;
- another member of each Particular Council designated by the president with the assent of his or her council;⁷
- the secretary and treasurer if they are members of the Society;
- the youth or young adult member if one has been named.

2.4.6 Election of the President

Voting members for the election of a Central Council president are:

- the presidents of each Particular Council within the Central Council's jurisdiction
- the presidents of all the conferences within the Central Council's jurisdiction;
- members representing absent presidents by proxy;
- the officers of the Central Council if they are members of the Society.

⁵ See 2.4.18 for information about the president's vote at Central Council meetings.

⁶ See *the Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

⁷ **Commentary:** for reasons of good order and efficiency, the National Council, through the Regional Council, may authorize Central Councils to admit only Particular Council presidents as voting members. Too many participants might, in some cases, tend to prolong discussions and make it impossible to reach effective decisions.

These same considerations also apply to other articles of the Rule and Canadian Statutes, which, if rigorously applied, could jeopardize the orderly and efficient functioning of certain councils. Serious objections will be considered, as the need arises, by the National Council and a decision arrived at in the most reasonable and equitable manner possible. However, it must be remembered that it is not the prerogative of each council to decide whether or not an exception should be made to an Article of the Rule and Canadian Statutes, without the advice or consent of the National Council. Any Central Council in which this problem arises should provide the National Council with all the information needed to study the problem.

An election for a president⁸ must be conducted by secret ballot at the expiry of the term of office of the sitting president and carried out at the Annual Meeting. Three months before the meeting, an Election Committee of three (3) senior Vincentians is formed for the purpose of organizing the election of a new president. The Election Committee invites members of the council who are eligible to vote to elect a president, to forward the names of prospective candidates, all of whom must be full members. The committee will contact these candidates before the Annual Meeting to confirm whether or not they are willing to stand for office.

At the Annual Meeting, a member of the Election Committee will act as Chair to preside over the election according to the following procedure:

- If only one (1) candidate is nominated for the presidency and accepts, he or she is declared elected by acclamation.
- If there are two candidates, the one who obtains the most votes wins the election. In the event of a tie, a second ballot must be held at the same meeting.
- If there are more than two candidates and no one obtains 50% + one of the votes on the first ballot, a second secret ballot will be held at the same meeting with the names of the two candidates who obtained the greatest number of votes on the first ballot.
- After the votes have been counted, the Chair announces the results.

If no election has taken place at the end of the term, the president of the next higher council shall convoke and preside over the election of a new president.

2.4.7 Term of Office

The president of the Central Council is elected by secret ballot by the voting members for a term of office of five years. This term of office is not renewable.

The term of office of the retiring executive officers ends only when the newly elected president appoints the new executive officers. It is the duty and obligation of the retiring officers to promptly turn over to the new

⁸ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1 and C.2, for the information on the Election of a President and for the Nomination Form.

officers all books of minutes, financial records, accounts, and other relevant documents.

2.4.8 Duties of the President

The Central Council president, with the assistance of the executive officers, shall perform all duties and has all the responsibilities described in 2.4.2. Upon election, the president becomes a voting member of the Board of Directors of the council, and a voting member of the pertinent Regional Council and the National Council.

As servant leader of the Council, the president shall:

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

The president shall:

- sign such contracts, documents or instruments in writing that require his or her signature;
- be responsible to the Board of Directors for the coordination of all affairs of the council, and all matters affecting the council;
- be considered an agent of the council when he or she is acting under the authority of and at the express intention and direction of the Board of Directors or any committee thereof.

In addition to any other duties conferred by the Board, the president shall:

- be responsible for supervising the day-to-day management of the affairs of the council;
- be responsible for supervising the maintenance of the office of the council and the functioning of the management sub-committees;
- be responsible for naming the Spiritual Advisor, all the officers of the council and the chairpersons of the standing committees all of whom hold office at his or her discretion;
- be chairperson of any meetings of the executive, the Board and the members;
- be familiar with and sign all the minutes along with the secretary or any other officer appointed by the Board for this purpose
- be, *ex officio*, a member of all committees of the council;

- be one of those named whenever the council has the right to have a director appointed to any other council or organization.

The President shall also:

- be responsible for requesting from the Particular Councils, by February 28 of each year, an Annual Report for the preceding year;
- cause an Annual Report of the Central Council's activities for the preceding year to be sent to the Regional Council by March 30 of each year;
- work with the secretary to prepare the agenda for the Annual Meeting of the council;
- visit the councils and conferences within the Central Council's jurisdiction when possible to share information and provide encouragement and assistance as needed;
- act as chairperson of the corporation, if the council is incorporated, and ensure that the Constitution and / or by-laws are respected at all times, are reviewed annually and are revised if necessary.⁹

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

2.4.9 Appointment and Role of Officers of the Executive Committee

After consultation with council members, the president appoints the following executive officers¹⁰:

- vice-presidents, who can be one to three in number,
- a secretary,
- a treasurer,
- a youth or young adult representative,
- a Spiritual Advisor.

⁹ See 2.1.1

¹⁰ In order to protect the credibility of the Society and avoid all conflict of interest, it is recommended that the officers designated by the president of a council not be his or her close relatives.

These officers form the Executive Committee and if they are members of the Society, all have voting rights, with the exception of the Spiritual Advisor. However, if the secretary and /or treasurer are not members of the Society and have been appointed to serve on the Council because of their expertise, they do not have any voting rights.

2.4.9.1 Duties of the Vice-President

A vice-president:

- presides at council meetings and acts in lieu of the president for council activities in the absence or disability of the president;
- collaborates with the president in all matters affecting the council;
- is Vice-Chair of the Corporation, if the council is incorporated;
- carries out various duties that have been assigned, such as taking charge of committees, planning activities for recruitment, youth membership, training and formation, etc.

2.4.9.2 Duties of the Secretary

The secretary of the council:

- sends out invitations and agendas for all meetings;
- prepares, presents and signs the minutes of all meetings;
- keeps records and archives, including all records related to the election of the president;
- collates annual and other reports from the reporting councils;
- forwards these reports to higher councils when appropriate;
- drafts correspondence and other documents at the request of the president;
- maintains an up-to-date list of the members of the council;
- is the custodian of the stamp or mechanical device generally used for affixing the seal of the council;
- ensures the confidentiality and safety of data about members and about those being served;
- signs such contracts, documents or instruments in writing as require his or her signature;
- has such other powers and duties as may from time to time be assigned by the president or that are related to the position of secretary.

In the case of an incorporated council, the secretary also:

- signs all by-laws;
- keeps records of all amendments and additions to them.

2.4.9.3 Duties of the Treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for keeping accurate and appropriate records of:

- the funds and securities of the council;
- all receipts and disbursements.

The treasurer must ensure that:

- funds are deposited, in the name of the council, at such financial institutions as decided by the council;
- invoices and/or statements are obtained before any disbursement is effected.

The treasurer:

- informs members of the council's financial position by submitting a written statement at every meeting;
- prepares and submits an annual budget to the council for approval;
- prepares an annual financial report;
- is one of the signatories of the cheques, as well as other financial instruments, along with the president and/or another officer;
- has other powers and duties as assigned by the president.

In the case of an incorporated council, the treasurer also ensures that a financial review of the council is conducted annually, according to accounting rules, and as required by the Constitution and by-laws of the corporation.

2.4.10 Appointment and Role of the Spiritual Advisor

The president appoints the Spiritual Advisor who may be a priest, a permanent deacon or a member of a religious order. The president may consult with a local Bishop or the head of the religious order, as appropriate. When no person with such qualifications is available, the president, after consultation with members of the council, may appoint a Vincentian who is qualified to exercise such a function.

The Spiritual Advisor:

- attends the meetings;
- participates in the discussions;
- promotes the spirit of the Rule in its entirety as the basis for any program of spiritual development;
- has no voting rights.

The presence of the Spiritual Advisor strengthens the bond between the spiritual and apostolic activities of the council and those of the Church.

Priests, permanent deacons and members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office in the Society other than that of their spiritual work.

2.4.11 Role of the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee, chaired by the president or his or her substitute:

- reports to the Board of Directors;
- assists the Central Council President;
- assists in the administration of the affairs of the Central Council;
- recommends operating procedures;
- recommends to the Board of Directors policies and appointments in accordance with the provisions of the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society.

2.4.11.1 Responsibilities of the Executive Committee

The responsibilities of the Executive Committee include overseeing the day-to-day management of the Central Council on behalf of the Board of Directors. These include, but are not limited to, responsibilities related to budgets, Special Works and reports.

Budgets:

- reviewing and recommending the annual operating and capital budgets to the Board of Directors;
- monitoring adherence to the budgets;
- considering, and where appropriate, approving recommendations for any departure from accepted operations policies or approved budgets;
- recommending the appointment of auditors;
- reviewing and recommending the annual audited financial statements for presentation to the Annual Meeting of the council.

Special Works:

- reviewing and preparing for approval by the Board of Directors, the operating policies and procedures of any Special Works programs, for example, store operations, homes etc., to ensure they are consistent with the Rule and Canadian Statutes and spirituality of the Society;
- ensuring that all legislation governing the operation of the Special Works programs is respected;
- reviewing and recommending to the Board of Directors staffing that may be required for any Special Works programs.

Reports:

- reviewing and recommending to the Board of Directors, the Annual Report for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Council;
- reviewing and causing to be sent through the Board of Directors, to the next higher council any applications for aggregation or institution;
- at their request, assisting conferences and councils in obtaining their charitable status;
- on request, providing assistance in the completion of annual reports;
- ensuring that annual reports are received from the particular councils within the jurisdiction of the Central Council by the stated deadlines;
- ensuring that a Central Council Annual Report is sent through the Board of Directors to the next higher council by the stated deadline.

2.4.11.2 Meetings

The Executive Committee shall meet monthly, excluding July and August, or more frequently if the interest of the Society so requires, at a time and place determined by the president.

2.4.12 Board of Directors

The affairs of the Central Council are governed by a Board of Directors comprised of:

- the president and one or two vice-presidents;
- the presidents of the Particular Councils in its jurisdiction;
- the designated members of the Particular Councils;
- the secretary and treasurer of the Central Council if they are members of the Society;
- a youth or young adult representative;
- the Spiritual Advisor.

The Particular Councils are represented on the Board of Directors of the Central Council by their president and another member designated by the president and approved of by the voting members of the respective Particular Councils. If these representatives are unable to attend a meeting, substitutes should be appointed using the Proxy Form.¹¹

2.4.12.1 *Special Nominations*

The president of the board may appoint one or more persons chosen among or outside the general membership of the Society to be in charge of one or more of the working or standing committees entrusted with specific tasks that serve the interests and development of the Society.

The choice of persons from outside the Society to sit on committees should not be considered as a general rule but rather as an exceptional procedure. Such persons may be invited to take part in the work of the Council or a committee:

- because of their personal qualifications;
- because there is a need for members of their profession on the Executive Committee;
- when it is not possible to find within the regular membership a sufficient number of persons qualified to fill administrative positions.

This becomes especially pertinent in incorporated councils that need to hire staff, or carry out some particular task. These persons may participate in the discussions but have no voting rights.

¹¹ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

2.4.13 Role and Responsibilities of the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible to the Central Council for:

- the implementation of higher level councils decisions affecting the Central Council;
- the coordination and development of the Society's activities in the area under the jurisdiction of the Central Council;
- monitoring the effective management of the Central Council office, where applicable.

Its main responsibilities are to:

- ensure the affairs of the Society in the particular councils and conferences under its jurisdiction are carried out in compliance with the Rule and Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Canada;
- establish standing and ad hoc committees to carry out efficiently and effectively the role of the Society in the area under its jurisdiction;
- communicate to the Regional Council, to be sent to the National Council, recommendations for the creation of new particular councils and conferences;
- communicate to the Particular Councils under its jurisdiction any information coming from the Regional Council and National Council;
- see to the setting up of an Election Committee and the organization of the election of the president at the Annual meeting if it is an election year;
- act on the recommendations of the National Council for changes in the boundaries of the Central Council if the case arises.

It must also:

- manage the financial affairs of the Central Council by drafting an annual budget and accountability report for consideration and approval at the Annual Meeting;
- monitor financial performance and recommend property and capital expenditures, lines of credit and investments to the Central Council;
- forward to the Regional Council, to be sent to the National Council, the contributions recommended by the National Council;
- review and approve the hiring and remuneration of any employees of the Central Council.

It undertakes to:

- promote and implement effective communication within the Society;
- develop and maintain effective relations with the Catholic Church, other Christian churches, ecclesial communities and other faiths, as well as the civil authorities in its area as part of its mission of serving the poor;
- promote social justice and the protection of the environment, and delegate responsibilities in these areas to the particular councils and conferences under its jurisdiction when appropriate;
- take measures to increase membership within councils and conferences under its jurisdiction.

2.4.14 Board of Directors Meetings

Meetings of the Board of Directors should be held quarterly, or more frequently if the interest of the Society so requires, at the time and place determined by the Board of Directors.

2.4.15 Finance

Funds received from Particular Councils, or collected directly by the Central Council are to be used exclusively for the normal pursuit of the Society's aims and objectives. No surplus, other than a reasonable reserve should be accumulated. Central Councils have a duty to financially support higher councils by sending to them surplus funds for the maintenance and expansion of the Society in Canada and throughout the world.

Central Councils should define strategies to improve their fund-raising activities and develop new approaches for funding Special Projects, in compliance with the Society's principles and practices.

2.4.16 Reporting and Accountability

Each Central Council shall ensure that an annual report and a revenue statement are submitted to the Regional Council by March 30th each year. Other reporting may be required for incorporated councils by their Constitution and by-laws.

2.4.17 Youth and Young Adult Members

Every effort must be made to have a youth or young adult member on the Board of Directors of the Central Council.

2.4.18 Voting

Voting is conducted by show of hands unless the president or his or her substitute decides, in exceptional circumstances, to proceed by secret ballot when the matter is deemed sensitive or divisive. A simple majority shall validly adopt resolutions. Each voting member in attendance or represented at the meeting is entitled to one vote. The president of the Central Council, or his or her substitute, as Chair of the meeting, does not vote. However, in the event of a tie vote, the Chair shall then vote, which vote shall be considered the casting vote.

2.4.19 Quorum

The quorum is established when no less than 30% of eligible voting members are present or represented at any meetings.

2.4.20 Proxies

A voting member who cannot attend a meeting of the Board of Directors or the Annual Meeting of the Central Council should be represented by a member or an officer of his/her Particular Council certified by a signed Proxy form,¹² which shall be presented to, verified and accepted by the President of the Central Council or his or her substitute before the meeting.

However, voting members appointed by the President of the Central Council cannot be represented at any meeting by proxy.

¹² See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

2.5 REGIONAL COUNCIL

2.5.1 Definition

The Society in Canada is divided into five Regional¹ Councils as approved of by the National Council:

The Atlantic Regional Council

Jurisdiction: The provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick

The Quebec Regional Council

Jurisdiction: The province of Quebec

The Ontario Regional Council

Jurisdiction: The province of Ontario

The Western Regional Council

Jurisdiction: The provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut

The British Columbia and Yukon Regional Council

Jurisdiction: The province of British Columbia and the Yukon

2.5.2 Role and Responsibilities of Regional Councils

The main responsibilities of Regional Councils are:

- coordinating the activities of the conferences and councils under their jurisdiction;
- encouraging the education and the development of the members;
- promoting the expansion of the Society in the region;
- ensuring that reporting conferences and councils are functioning in accordance with the Rule and Canadian Statutes;
- promoting the recruitment of youth members within the region.

Regional Councils shall:

- communicate all relevant information to the councils and Isolated Conferences within their jurisdiction;
- forward information and reports from them to the National Council;

¹ The term Provincial Councils was used previously for certain of these councils.

- support and implement national programs where applicable.

Regional Councils may adopt policies and guidelines:

- according to their needs and tradition;
- in conformity with the Rule and Canadian Statutes;
- subject to the approval of the Board of Directors of the National Council.

The Regional Council shall convene an Annual Meeting to:

- present the minutes of the previous Annual Meeting;
- present the reports of the Regional Council President, of the Board of Directors, and of the different Committees;
- present the annual audited financial statements for approval;
- present the operating budget of the Regional Council for approval;
- vote on the appointment of auditors;
- discuss and vote on the adoption of any motion introduced by the Board of Directors;
- present the new president and executive officers if it is an election year.

By virtue of their mandate, Regional Councils have the full powers of a higher Council over the councils and conferences under their jurisdiction. These powers are to be exercised with prudence and are subject to the approval of the Board of Directors of the National Council.

2.5.3 Institution

The National President reviews and approves applications for the Institution of Regional Council on the recommendation of the Board of Directors and of all the Central and Particular Councils concerned. The National President forwards such applications to the International Council General for final approval by the President General.

2.5.4 Voting Members

The voting members of the Regional Council each of whom is entitled to one vote at any Regional Council meeting are:

- the president² and vice-presidents of the Regional Council,
- the presidents of the Central and Particular Councils, the presidents of Isolated Conferences as appropriate,

² See 2.5.16 for information about the president's vote at Regional Council meetings.

- the substitutes representing presidents of reporting councils by proxy if any of these presidents are unable to attend.³
- the youth or young adult representative on the Regional Council, if one has been named⁴,

2.5.5 Election of the President

The president of a Regional Council is elected, by secret ballot, by the presidents of all the councils and conferences within the Regional Council's jurisdiction.⁵

One year before the expiry of the term of office of the sitting president, the sitting president and Board of Directors form an Election Committee of three (3) senior Vincentians for the purpose of electing a new president.

- The Election Committee sets a deadline for nominations, which shall be at least eight (8) months before the sitting president's term of office expires.
 - The Chair of the committee sends a letter to the presidents of all councils and conferences under the regional council's jurisdiction, inviting qualified full members to submit their names to the Election Committee.
 - Mail-in ballots are sent to all voting members along with information concerning the deadline by which the ballots must be sent in.
- a) If only one (1) candidate is nominated for the presidency and is accepted by the Election Committee, he or she is declared elected by acclamation.
 - b) If there are two (2) candidates:
 - Once the deadline has passed, the votes are counted and the candidate who receives at least half plus one (50% + 1) of the votes sent in wins the election.

³ See *the Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy form.

⁴ Appointed voting members are those Executive officers whom the president has chosen: vice-presidents and the youth or young adult representative.

⁵ See *the Complementary Documents*, C.2 and C.3, for information about the Election of a President and for the Nomination Form.

- The sitting president advises voting members of the result of the election soon after the Election Committee has finished counting the votes.
- c) If there are more than two (2) candidates:
- Once the deadline has passed, the ballots are counted and the candidate who receives at least half plus one (50% +1) of the votes sent in wins the election.
 - If no candidate receives half plus one (50% +1) of the votes on the first mail-in ballot, the Election Committee will organize a run-off election as rapidly as possible, again by mail-in ballot.
 - The names of the two candidates who received the greatest number of votes in the first election will appear on the ballot.
 - Ballots must be sent in by a pre-determined deadline announced by the Election Committee.
 - Once the deadline has passed, the votes are counted and the candidate who receives half plus one (50% +1) of the votes sent in wins the election.
 - The sitting president advises voting members of the result of the election soon after the Election Committee has finished counting the votes.

The installation of the new president and the presentation of his or her new executive take place at a regional council general meeting at the end of the term of the sitting president.

If no election is called by the sitting president and Board of Directors, the President of the National Council shall, within a period of three months after the expiry of the term, appoint a committee to organize an election.

2.5.6 Term of Office

The president of the Regional Council is elected for a term of five years. This term is not renewable.

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

2.5.7 Authority and Responsibilities of the President

The president of the Regional Council, is the primary spokesperson for the Society in the region and, with the assistance of the executive officers:

- shall perform all the duties and take on all the responsibilities described in 2.5.2;
- is responsible for developing productive relationships with religious and civil authorities in the region.

As servant leader of the Regional Council, the president shall:

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

The president of the Regional Council:

- is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Council to represent the interests of the region;
- recommends all aggregations, institutions and incorporations within the region to the National Council;
- collaborates with the National President;
- may be entrusted with specific responsibilities by the National President;
- shall report to, or seek advice from the National President on any issues or matters of national concern, or on those which have implications for one or more of the Regional Councils.

The president:

- chairs Regional Council meetings, Board of Directors' meetings and is ex officio chair of all Regional Council Committees;
- chairs the Corporation if the council is incorporated;
- ensures that Constitution and by-laws of the Corporation are respected at all times, are reviewed annually and are revised if necessary.⁶

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

⁶ See 2.1.1

2.5.8 Appointment and Role of Officers of the Executive Committee

After consultation with council members, the president appoints the following executive officers⁷:

- vice-presidents, who can be one to three in number;
- a secretary,
- a treasurer,
- a youth or young adult representative,
- a Spiritual Advisor.

These officers form the Executive Committee and, if they are members of the Society, all have voting rights, with the exception of the Spiritual Advisor. However, if the secretary and/or treasurer are not members of the Society and have been appointed to serve on the Council because of their expertise, they may participate in deliberations, but do not have any voting rights

2.5.8.1 Duties of a Vice-President

A vice-president:

- may be called on to preside at council meetings and to act in lieu of the president for council activities in the absence or disability of the president;
- collaborates with the president in all matters affecting the council;
- is Vice-Chair of the Corporation, if the council is incorporated;
- carries out various duties that have been assigned, such as taking charge of committees, planning activities for recruitment, youth membership, training and formation, etc.

2.5.8.2 Duties of the Secretary

The secretary of the council:

- sends out invitations and agendas for all meetings;
- prepares, presents and signs the minutes of all meetings;
- keeps records and archives including all records related to the election of the president;

⁷ In order to protect the credibility of the Society and avoid all conflict of interest, it is recommended that the officers designated by the president of a council not be his or her close relatives.

- collates annual and other reports from the lower level councils;
- transmits these reports to the National Council when appropriate;
- drafts correspondence and other documents at the direction of the president;
- maintains an up-to-date list of the members of the council;
- is the custodian of the stamp or mechanical device generally used for affixing the seal of the council;
- ensures the confidentiality and safety of data about members;
- signs such contracts, documents or instruments in writing as require his or her signature;
- has such other powers and duties as may from time to time be assigned or that are related to the position of secretary.

In the case of an incorporated council, the secretary also,

- signs all the by-laws;
- keeps records of all amendments and additions to them.

2.5.8.3 *Duties of the Treasurer*

The treasurer is responsible for keeping accurate and appropriate records of:

- the funds and securities of the council;
- all receipts and disbursements.

The treasurer must ensure that:

- funds are deposited, in the name of the council, at such financial institutions as decided by the council;
- invoices and/or statements are obtained before any disbursement is effected.

The treasurer:

- informs members of the council's financial position by submitting a written statement at every meeting;
- prepares and submits an annual budget to the council for approval;
- is one of the signatories of the cheques, as well as other financial instruments, along with the President and/or another officer;
- shall prepare an annual financial report, which will be part of the Regional Council's Annual Report to the National Council;
- has other powers and duties as assigned by the president.

In the case of an incorporated council, the treasurer also ensures that a financial review of the council is conducted annually, according to recognized accounting rules, and as required by the Constitution and by-laws of the corporation.

2.5.9 Appointment and Role of the Spiritual Advisor

The president appoints the Spiritual Advisor who may be a priest, a permanent deacon or a member of a religious order. The president may consult with the religious authorities in the region or the Head of the Religious order, as applicable.

The Spiritual Advisor:

- attends the meetings;
- participates in the discussions;
- organizes spiritual events such as retreats, Mass on special occasions, prayer sessions, etc., at meetings and at general assemblies of the Regional Council;
- promotes the spirit of the Rule in its entirety as the basis for any program of spiritual development;
- has no voting rights.

The presence of the Spiritual Advisor strengthens the bond between the spiritual and apostolic activities of the council and those of the Church. Priests, permanent deacons and other members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office in the Society other than that of Spiritual Advisor.

2.5.10 Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is made up of:

- the president and vice-presidents of the Regional Council;
- the presidents of the Particular and Central Councils⁸ who report to the Regional Council, or the substitutes representing these presidents by proxy⁹, if they are unable to attend;

⁸ If appointed voting members outnumber elected voting members, the President has the authority to modify the number of voting members by allowing the Presidents of the Particular and Central Councils to designate a second delegate with voting rights. However, such designated voting members cannot be represented by proxy at any meetings of the Board. The Regional President shall consult with and seek approval by the National President before making such a change. A voting delegate may not hold more than one proxy.

⁹ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy form.

- the youth or young adult representative on the Regional Council, if one has been named;¹⁰
- the secretary and treasurer of the Regional Council, who may participate in deliberations but do not have voting rights;
- other advisors appointed by the president for specific missions, who may participate in deliberations but do not have voting rights;
- the Spiritual Advisor who may participate in deliberations but does not have voting rights.

2.5.11 Role and Responsibilities of the Board of Directors

Voting members of the Board shall be entitled to vote on all significant decisions affecting the Regional Council, after consideration and recommendation by its Executive Committee.

If the Regional Council is incorporated, the Board shall assume all responsibilities conferred by the Constitution and by-laws, and shall cause all statutory reports to be submitted to government institutions as prescribed by law and regulations.

The Board of Directors is responsible to the Regional Council for:

- the implementation of National Council decisions affecting the Regional Council;
- the coordination and development of the Society's activities in the region under the jurisdiction of the Regional Council;
- monitoring the effective management of the Regional Council office, where applicable.

Its main responsibilities are to:

- ensure that the affairs of the Society in the councils and conferences under the jurisdiction of the Regional Council are carried out in compliance with the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Canada;
- establish standing and ad hoc committees to carry out efficiently and effectively the role of the Society in the area under its jurisdiction;

¹⁰ Appointed voting members are those Executive officers whom the president has chosen: vice-presidents and the youth or young adult representative.

- send to the National Council, recommendations for the creation of new councils and conferences which have been forwarded by the Councils under its jurisdiction;
- communicate to the Central Councils under its jurisdiction any information coming from the National Council;
- see to the setting up of an Election Committee and the organization of the election of the president.

It must also:

- manage the financial affairs of the Regional Council by drafting an annual budget and accountability report for consideration and approval at its Annual Meeting;
- monitor financial performance and recommend property and capital expenditures, lines of credit and investments to the Regional Council;
- forward to the National Council, the annual contribution from reporting councils and any other contributions from reporting councils and conferences meant for the National Council;
- review and approve the hiring and remuneration of any employees of the Regional Council.

It undertakes to:

- promote and implement effective communication within the Society;
- develop and maintain effective relations with the Catholic Church, other Christian churches, ecclesial communities and other faiths, as well as the civil authorities in its region as part of its mission to serve those in need;
- promote social justice and the protection of the environment, and delegate responsibilities in these areas to the reporting councils under its jurisdiction when appropriate;
- encourage its reporting councils and conferences to develop initiatives to increase membership.

2.5.12 Meetings

The Executive Committee should meet at least quarterly.

The Board of Directors shall meet twice a year, or more often as required, to properly manage the affairs of the Council, or according to the Corporation statutes.

A Regional Council shall hold an Annual Meeting of all members to coincide with a Board of Directors meeting.

2.5.13 Finance

The main source of funding for Regional Councils is the annual contribution by the councils in their jurisdictions.

Funds may also be solicited, through the regular channels, from Councils and Conferences for specific and urgent needs.

Other sources of funding to meet budgetary needs may be sought from outside the Society (e.g.: bequests, Foundations, etc.) in compliance with the Society's principles and tradition.

2.5.14 Reporting and Accountability

The president of the Regional Council shall submit annual regional activity and financial reports to the National President by April 30 each year.

The president shall also submit to the National Council the results of all audits conducted in conferences and councils under the jurisdiction of the Regional Council within a reasonable period after the conclusion of the exercise.

2.5.15 Youth and Young Adult Members

One important objective of the Society is to expand its membership with a view to including more youth and young adults. While conferences have the primary responsibility for the recruitment and formation of youth, the Regional Council shall support them in this mission, and in the organization and coordination of youth groups within the region. The youth or young adult member appointed to the executive should be delegated with this responsibility.

2.5.16 Voting

Voting members are listed in Article 2.5.4. Voting on all matters is conducted by a show of hands, unless the president or his or her substitute decides, in exceptional circumstances, to proceed by secret ballot when the matter is deemed sensitive or divisive. A simple majority shall validly adopt resolutions. Each voting member in attendance or represented at the meeting is entitled to one vote. The president of the Regional Council, or his or her substitute, as Chair of the meeting, does not vote. However, in the event of a tie vote, the Chair shall then vote, which vote shall be considered the casting vote.

2.5.17 Quorum

The quorum is established when no less than 30% of eligible voting members are present or represented by proxy at any meetings.

2.5.18 Proxies

A voting member from a council who cannot attend a meeting of the Regional Council should be represented by a member or an officer of his/her council using a signed Proxy Form¹¹, which shall be presented to, verified and accepted by the president or his or her substitute before the meeting. Appointed voting members¹² cannot be represented by proxy at any meeting. A voting delegate may not hold more than one proxy.

¹¹ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

¹² Appointed voting members are those Executive officers whom the president has chosen: vice-presidents and the youth or young adult representative.

2.6 THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CANADA

2.6.1 Definition

The National Council¹ is the highest body and the official voice of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Canada. It holds one Annual General Assembly. The National Council is composed of:

- the president;
- the presidents of the councils under the National Council's jurisdiction, or delegates appointed by proxy² to replace them;
- the members of the Executive Committee: the vice-presidents, the secretary, the treasurer, the youth or young adult representative and the Spiritual Advisor.

The National President, with the approval of the Board of Directors, may appoint a maximum of three advisors from within or outside the general membership of the Society who may participate in deliberations of the National Council but have no voting rights.

2.6.2 Role and Responsibilities of the National Council

The National Council, through its elected president, its appointed Executive Committee, and its Board of Directors, provides leadership at the general and special meetings and for all Vincentian activities throughout Canada.

The National Council is the sole authority for the use of the name, logos and colours of the Society within Canada and ensures that the basic principles of the Society, as contained in the Rule and Canadian Statutes, are communicated to and respected by all Vincentians.

The National Council represents the Society in issues dealing with social justice and the environment. It may delegate its authority to deal with such issues to councils or conferences at the local or regional level.

¹ In the International Rule, the National Council is referred to as the Superior Council.

² See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy form.

The National Council is, for all legal purposes, the highest and ultimate body responsible before any type of national or international jurisdiction for events occurring within Canada. However, under no circumstances, shall the National Council or any of its Board members, be liable for events occurring without their full and proven knowledge.

The National Council also has the responsibility of supporting and executing the Council General's decisions and directions.

The National Council shall convene an Annual General Assembly (AGA) to:

- present the minutes of the previous Annual General Assembly;
- present the reports of the National Council President, of the Board of Directors, and of the different Committees;
- present the annual audited financial statements for approval;
- present the operating budget of the National Council for approval;
- vote on the appointment of auditors;
- discuss and vote on the adoption of any motion introduced by the Board of Directors;
- proceed with the installation of the new National President if it is an election year;
- present the President's proposed Executive Officers for approval;
- present for approval the amount of the financial contribution for the year that each council and conference is to send to the National Office for administrative needs, the development of the Society, redistribution and international obligations.³

In addition, during the Annual General Assembly or in a Special Meeting the National Council:

- may amend the Canadian Statutes;
- may adopt policies and procedures to guide the members with regards to the internal structure and governance of the Society and its various programs and activities.

The National Council designates the locations where the Annual General Assemblies are held. The Annual General Assembly is traditionally used to educate members, and to enhance Vincentian spirituality and fraternal exchanges through the organization of workshops and social events.

³ These international obligations are mostly to the International Council General.

2.6.3 Institution of the National Council of Canada

The International General Council instituted the National Council of Canada on September 27, 1971. It was incorporated under federal law on August 4, 1982 and has the status of charitable organization under the Income Tax Act.

2.6.4 Voting Members

The voting members of the National Council, each of whom is entitled to one vote at the Annual General Assembly or at any Special Meeting, are:

- the president⁴ and vice-presidents of the National Council;
- the presidents of the Regional, Central and Particular Councils or the substitutes representing these presidents by proxy⁵ if they are unable to attend;
- other members of the National Executive Committee as defined in 2.6.8.

2.6.5 Election of the National President

- The National Past President, or one of the vice-presidents, shall chair an Election Committee of three (3) senior Vincentians appointed by the Executive Committee to coordinate and preside over the election. This committee must be struck 18 months before the end of the term of a sitting president. If the National Past President is not available, the National President will appoint a chair.
- Once the election has been announced, and before the deadline set by the Election Committee, which must precede the Annual General Assembly that takes place one year prior to the end of the term of the sitting president, Full Members from across Canada who feel they have the necessary qualifications to be president are invited to submit their names to the Election Committee.⁶ Candidates should be members in good standing who will not be more than 65 years of age when elected.
- The Election Committee sets a deadline for nominations. This deadline shall be at least two months before the Annual General Assembly.
- At the Annual General Assembly in June, one year before the end of the term of the sitting president, candidates will have the opportunity to address the members of the National Council.

⁴ See 2.6.18.

⁵ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

⁶ See *Complementary Documents*, C.2 and C.3, for the information on the Election of a President and the Nomination Form.

- In the weeks following the Annual General Assembly, the election will be carried out by using mailed-in secret ballots sent in by all the voting members. These voting members are the presidents of the aggregated conferences and instituted councils, and the national vice-presidents. Ballots must be sent in by a pre-determined deadline announced by the Election Committee.
- a) If only one (1) candidate is nominated for the presidency and is accepted by the Election Committee, he or she is declared elected by acclamation.
 - b) If there are two candidates:
 - Once the deadline has passed, the votes are counted and the candidate who receives at least half plus one (50% + 1) of the votes sent in wins the election.
 - The National Council President announces the results of the election as soon as the Election Committee has finished counting the votes.
 - The news will be communicated to the members through the reporting councils at the different levels.
 - The installation of the new president and the presentation of his or her Executive Committee take place at the next Annual General Assembly of the National Council.
 - c) If there are more than two candidates:
 - Once the deadline has passed, ballots are counted and the candidate who receives at least half plus one (50% + 1) of the votes sent in wins the election.
 - If no candidate receives half plus one (50% + 1) of the votes on the first mail-in ballot, the Election Committee will organize a run-off election as rapidly as possible, again by mail-in ballot.
 - The names of the two candidates who received the greatest number of votes in the first election will appear on the ballot.
 - Ballots must be sent in by a pre-determined deadline announced by the Election Committee.
 - Once the deadline has passed, the votes are counted and the candidate who receives half plus one (50% + 1) of the votes sent in wins the election.
 - The National Council President will announce the results of the election as soon as the Election Committee has finished counting the votes.

- The news will be communicated to the members through the reporting councils at the different levels.
- The installation of the new president and the presentation of his or her Executive Committee take place at the next Annual General Assembly of the National Council.

An election shall also be held when a sitting president has ceased to perform his or her functions by reason of resignation, incapacity or death. The Board of Directors shall determine the procedure to follow in such cases.

2.6.6 Term of Office

The President of the National Council is elected for a term of six years. This term is not renewable. A person may serve as National President only once during his or her lifetime.

However, the term of office may be extended as per International Rule, Basic Requirement 11.

The term of office of the members of the Executive Committee expires when a new National President takes office on July 1 of the appropriate year.

2.6.7 Authority and Responsibilities of the National President

The National President is the first servant leader of the Society in Canada. He or she represents the National Council at the international level. He or she is accountable to the National Council and, throughout the year, is responsible for:

- providing leadership;
- making any decision necessary for the good governance and development of the Society in Canada, within the framework of the strategies and policies agreed upon by the National Council and, after consultation, preferably with the Board of Directors, but at least with the Executive Committee;
- promoting Vincentian spirituality;
- developing and maintaining productive relationships with members of the Vincentian family in Canada;
- developing and maintaining productive relationships with religious and civil authorities;

- implementing the resolutions passed by the Board and by the Annual General Assembly.

The National President:

- chairs the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors;
- appoints members of national committees;
- is an ex officio member of all national committees.

The National President is responsible for:

- ensuring the provision of efficient and continuous administrative services by the National Office;
- hiring an Executive Director and other employees as needed for the administration of the National Office, with the hiring and the remuneration subject to the approval of the Board of Directors;
- completing the annual performance evaluation report of the Executive Director.

National Office employees may be invited to participate in deliberations but have no voting rights.

The National President has the authority to:

- approve all corporate statutes and by-laws;
- approve all applications for aggregation by conferences;
- approve all applications for institution by councils.

The National President has delegated authority from the President General to suspend any aggregated conference, instituted council or member under his or her jurisdiction to protect the Society and those being served. In such circumstances, the National President shall notify the President General.⁷

Should the conference, council or member concerned not accept the suspension, an appeal may be made to the President General. A suspended conference, council or member may first present an appeal to the Board of Directors of the National Council during a Board meeting. Board members will listen to the appeal and vote on it.

⁷ International Statutes 6.8 to 6.11.

The National President may, for serious reasons, nullify the election of a member as president of a conference or council. If the member, conference or council concerned does not accept the decision, an appeal may be presented to the Board of Directors of the National Council.

The National President may authorize an audit of a council, a conference or a Special Work of the Society, in addition to the regular annual report. This action may be taken after consultation with the president of the next higher council to whom the council, conference or Special Work to be audited reports.

The National President has access to all correspondence generated by conferences and councils of the Society in Canada. All Council presidents have the same right in relation to the conferences and councils within their jurisdiction.

The National President shall continue and further develop existing communication strategies to keep the membership informed of decisions, major activities and events initiated by the Council General and by the National Council. Communications shall also include information about activities, best practices and spiritual experiences by councils and conferences to strengthen fraternal links, to educate and to build solidarity among Vincentians in Canada.

2.6.8 Appointment and Role of Officers of the Executive Committee

An Executive Committee assists the National President. Upon being elected, he or she, after consultation with council members, appoints the officers and members of the Executive Committee from within the general membership of the Society⁸. The appointees are:

- vice-presidents, up to a maximum of three;
- a secretary;
- a treasurer;
- a youth or young adult representative;
- a Spiritual Advisor;
- former National Presidents (unless this provision is modified by a majority vote of the National Council).

⁸ In order to protect the credibility of the Society and avoid all conflict of interest, it is recommended that the officers designated by the president of the council not be his or her close relatives.

The Spiritual Advisor and the former National Presidents may take part in the deliberations but do not have voting rights.

The Treasurer and Secretary may also be chosen from outside the general membership of the Society, provided they are lay Christians who accept the principles of the Society. They may take part in the deliberations but do not have any voting rights.

2.6.8.1 Duties of the Vice-Presidents

- The vice-presidents collaborate with the National President and are entrusted by him or her with specific responsibilities.
- The first vice-President shall replace the National President when the latter is absent or unable to fulfill his or her duties.

2.6.8.2 Duties of the Secretary

The secretary:

- prepares and presents the minutes of the meetings;
- has delegated responsibility for the organization of all meetings at the national level;
- is responsible for the safekeeping of the National archives⁹ including all records related to the election of the president;
- may be asked to carry out other tasks by the National President.

2.6.8.3 Duties of the Treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for:

- National Council funds;
- keeping accurate records of all receipts and disbursements;
- informing members of the Council's financial position by submitting a written statement at every meeting;
- preparing a budget for the Council, which is approved at the Annual General Assembly;
- acting as one of the signatories of cheques and other financial instruments;
- ensuring that a financial review of the Council is conducted annually, according to recognized accounting rules, and as required

⁹ See 3.15

- by the Letters Patent and By-laws of the Corporation;
- monitoring and making recommendations to the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors about property and capital expenditures, lines of credit and investments;
- carrying out reviews and other related tasks, as required;¹⁰
- exercising any other powers and carrying out any other duties assigned by the National President.

2.6.9 Appointment and Role of the Spiritual Advisor

The National President shall arrange for a member of the Clergy or the Episcopate to serve as the Society's National Spiritual Advisor.

The Spiritual Advisor:

- provides spiritual direction and advice to the Society and promotes the spirit of the Rule in its entirety as the basis for any program of spiritual development;
- attends all meetings of the National Council where he leads opening and closing prayers, the spiritual reading and reflection;
- participates in deliberations but has no voting rights;
- chairs the Spiritual Committee;
- may be asked to contribute articles to Council publications and for the website, to organize and to animate religious activities such as retreats for Council members;
- may be asked by the National President to carry out other tasks in relation to his role.

Priests, permanent deacons and other members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office in the Society other than that of their spiritual work.

2.6.10 Executive Committee

The Executive Committee, reporting to the Board of Directors, has delegated responsibility for the day-to-day affairs of the National Council.

Its main responsibilities are to:

- implement and communicate the resolutions adopted by the National Council;

¹⁰ See 2.6.10 and 2.6.12.

- develop and recommend to the Board of Directors amendments to the Rule, policies, programs and practices for the internal management, the protection and the development of the Society in Canada;
- develop and recommend to the Board of Directors short and long term plans for the expansion of the Society;
- manage other National Committees on behalf of the Board of Directors;
- organize meetings of the Board of Directors and the Annual General Assembly;
- review and recommend to the Board of Directors the creation of new councils and changes to the boundaries of existing councils.¹¹

It must also:

- prepare the annual operating budget and financial statements for approval by the Board of Directors and by the National Council;
- recommend to the Board of Directors property and capital expenditures, and investment strategies.

It undertakes to:

- develop and recommend to the Board of Directors strategies for effective relations with the Catholic Church, Christian churches, ecclesiastical communities and other faiths, as well as civil authorities;
- propose to the Board of Directors efficient ways to communicate with all levels of the Society in Canada;
- publish the VincenPaul-Canada magazine and any other publications approved by the Society for the general membership and other subscribers.

2.6.11 Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is composed of the following each of whom has one vote at Board meetings:

- the president¹²,
- the vice-presidents,
- the presidents of the Regional Councils,
- the young adult representative.

¹¹ See 2.6.12.

¹² See 2.6.18.

The secretary and the treasurer of the Executive Committee are also members of the Board but do not have voting rights. Non-voting members of the Executive Committee may participate in the deliberations of the Board of Directors.

2.6.12 Role and Responsibilities of the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible to the National Council for:

- the implementation of National Council decisions;
- the coordination and development of the Society's activities in Canada;
- monitoring the effective management of the National Office.

Its main responsibilities are to:

- ensure that the affairs of the Society in Canada are carried out in compliance with the Rule, Statutes and Basic Requirements of the International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul;¹³
- review the Canadian Statutes annually and recommend to the National Council amendments thereto;
- submit the approved amendments to the International Council General for final approval, and ensure their subsequent dissemination to all conferences and councils in Canada;
- develop recommendations and policies for consideration by the National Council;
- establish standing and ad hoc committees to carry out the work of the Society in Canada efficiently and effectively;
- approve the creation of new councils and changes to the boundaries of existing councils.

It must also:

- manage the financial affairs of the National Council by drafting an annual budget and accountability report for consideration and approval by the National Council;
- monitor financial performance and recommend property and capital expenditures, lines of credit and investments to the National Council;
- recommend, annually, the contribution to the National Council by councils and conferences as per 2.6.2;

¹³ The version of the International Rule revised in 2003.

- review and approve the hiring and remuneration of the Executive Director as well as the hiring of any other employees of the National Office.

It undertakes to:

- promote and implement effective communication within the Society;
- develop and maintain effective relations with the Catholic Church, other Christian churches, ecclesial communities, other faiths, and the civil authorities in its mission to serve those in need;
- promote social justice and the protection of the environment, and delegate responsibilities in these areas to conferences and councils, when appropriate.

2.6.13 National Committees

The National Council has a number of standing committees and may establish ad hoc committees.¹⁴

2.6.14 Meetings

The National Council shall hold an Annual General Assembly, which includes a statutory meeting of the Corporation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, presided over by the president as per the Letters Patent. In addition to the Annual General Assembly, Special Meetings may also be called when the Board of Directors of the National Council deems it necessary.

Such a Special General Meeting, presided over by the National President, shall be convened by decision of the Board of Directors or upon a written request by more than 50% of the voting members. Such a meeting should be held within a reasonable time after it is requested. Voting members shall be advised by mail sent to their last known address or via electronic mail at least thirty (30) days before the date of the meeting. Such meetings are usually held to discuss a specific issue or an urgent matter requiring resolution by the National Council.

Generally, the Board of Directors meets semi-annually as well as at the time of the Annual General Assembly. However, it may meet as often as

¹⁴ See the National Council *Operations Manual* for more information about the committees.

the interest of the Society requires. The National President determines the time and place of such meetings.

The Executive Committee meets semi-annually, between meetings of the Board of Directors, or as often as the Society's current affairs require. The National President determines the time and place of such meetings.

2.6.15 Finance

The councils and conferences provide most of the income required to support the National Council financially. The Board of Directors may also establish other sources of income to support the budget of the National Council.

2.6.16 The Society's Funds and Properties

The authority to dispose of, purchase, mortgage, lease or rent the Society's real estate assets shall remain with the National Council. This authority can be delegated by the Board of Directors to conferences and councils, as appropriate.

2.6.17 Reporting and Accountability

The fiscal year of the National Council ends on March 31 unless another fiscal period is approved by the National Council. The annual financial and activity report should normally be made available to the membership, the Episcopate and the community in general. Statutory reports to governments shall also be completed.

2.6.18 Voting

Voting on all matters, except for the election of the National President, is conducted by a show of hands, unless the president or his or her substitute decides, in exceptional circumstances, to proceed by secret ballot when the matter is deemed sensitive or divisive. A simple majority is required to adopt resolutions. Each voting member in attendance or represented at the meeting is entitled to one vote. The president of the National Council, or his or her substitute, as Chair of the meeting, does not vote. However, in the event of a tie vote, the Chair shall then vote, which vote shall be considered the casting vote.

2.6.19 Quorum

The valid adoption of resolutions at any meeting of the National Council, the Board of Directors, or the Executive Committee shall require the attendance or representation of at least 30% of the voting members.

Any amendment to the Rule must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast at a meeting of the National Council.

2.6.20 Proxies

A voting member who cannot attend a meeting of the National Council may be represented by a member or an officer of his or her council or conference delegated by a signed Proxy Form¹⁵, which shall be presented to, verified and accepted by the National President. A designated voting delegate may not hold more than one proxy letter. Voting members appointed by the National President cannot be represented by proxy at any meeting.

¹⁵ See the *Complementary Documents*, C.1, for the Proxy Form.

2.7 SPECIAL WORKS OF THE SOCIETY

2.7.1 Definition

Special Works of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul may be defined as those areas of work responding to specific community needs. The works shall be consistent with the objectives of the Society and be under the control of councils or conferences. When a Special Work requires administration covering a wide area, for example, in the case of a Community Store or a Summer Camp, it should be organized by a Particular or Central Council.

Councils or conferences shall seek incorporation¹ when the Special Work involves a commercial operation or hiring staff.

In the event a Special Work is separately incorporated by a Conference/Council, care should be taken at the outset to ensure that its Articles of Incorporation, by-laws, and other governance and management documents recognize the relationship to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, including, but not limited to, name use, logo use, asset acquisition or disposal.

The President of the Council to which any of the Society's Special Works belongs, is entitled, after due consultation with the President of the National Council and evaluation of the legal consequences, to replace the members of the Board of Management of that Special Work and any of its employees regardless of their function.

Special Works may include:

- the operation of stores
- summer camps
- visiting homes for the aged
- visiting shut-ins
- prison ministry
- drop-in centres for women
- shelters and soup kitchens
- low-cost housing
- etc.

¹ See 3.10 as well as National Council Policy ADM 001 in the *Operations Manual*.

2.7.2 Twinning

Twining is a Special Work of the Society. It is a fraternal sharing of the Society's prayers, relations and resources with less fortunate conferences and councils within Canada and abroad.

Twining has been an informal part of the Society since its creation because conferences and councils have always tried to assist one another. It became more firmly established when the 1979 Plenary Session of the International Council General stated that "all monies collected in the name of the Society anywhere, belong, in principle, to the poor of the world". Canada started to develop a formal twinning program in the 1980's.

The three types of twinning² in Canada are:

- External: with an aggregated conference or instituted council of another country;
- Internal: with an aggregated conference or instituted council in Canada;
- Pre-Aggregation Twining (PAT): with a Conference developing in a mission area of Canada.

2.7.3 Stores

Since the foundation of the Society, Vincentians have been active in the distribution of various types of essential goods to those they serve. Stores bear witness to our Christian faith through our solicitude and care of those who lack adequate clothing, furniture and other types of necessities.

Stores act as intermediaries between people wishing to make donations in kind and those in need. Stores make supplies available for free or at a low cost which is in keeping with the budget of those the Society serves.

Saint Vincent de Paul stores, as Special Works, are the most visible activity of the Society, because they involve a commercial operation and a social service at specific locations in the community. The operation of a store requires a supply of goods donated by benefactors for those in need, or retail sale at low prices to maintain the commercial viability

² Refer to National Council Twining Internal Policy in the *Operations Manual*.

of the operation. It may include the establishment, maintenance and operation of workshops, warehouses, stores and shops, as required for the service to the poor.

Stores may also be used as training and educational centres where those in need can learn a trade, or develop workplace skills, which will eventually enable them to become self-supporting.

Stores can also allow for the manufacture and sale of goods of different kinds, such as crafts, for the benefit of the poor.

The operation of a store shall be legally and effectively under the control of and run by a conference or council. Usually, the store constitutes a separate incorporated entity, the majority of whose administrators are members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Stores shall comply with the provisions of the Rule and Canadian Statutes and the Society's internal policies and procedures with regards to incorporation, operations and dissolution of the entity.

Stores should be financially viable and any surpluses should be reinvested in the extension of the Society's services to the poor.

To open a store, it is necessary to:

- make a survey of the needs in the area where the opening of a store is projected;
- define a suitable area and find a site for the store;
- recruit volunteers to manage and/or to help in the stores and, if necessary, recruit permanent and/or temporary employees;
- find or purchase equipment for displaying the goods and for functioning commercially (cash register, counters, telephone, etc.)
- publicize the project;
- develop a program for collecting merchandise for the store (clothing, furniture, home appliances, dishes, books, bedspreads, etc...);
- inspect merchandise and reject any that is too badly damaged to keep in the store;
- repair or clean if necessary, any merchandise that can be kept in the store;
- display, distribute or sell merchandise that is fit to use;

- create a friendly environment;
- use any profits made to serve the poor.

2.7.4 Summer Camps

Camping is an opportunity to use God's gift of nature as an educational and experiential tool. Many children and young people are not able to benefit from summer camp due to a lack of funds or family situations. Summer camps provide an opportunity for children and youth who live in large urbanized areas to:

- develop an affinity with nature;
- experience God in a new setting;
- become more aware of environmental issues.

Several conferences and councils have purchased lands suitable for camping. Activities such as swimming, canoeing, hiking, horseback riding, organized sports and games are a few of the activities that may be made available to children in a milieu of Christian love and care. Camps are supported by conferences, councils, schools and by members of the public who wish to help defray the camping fees. Camps also provide an opportunity for young people to become camp counsellors and leaders.

Many recognized accredited summer camps exist in different parts of Canada. Some conferences and councils pay for the cost of a stay in one of these camps for children and young people who otherwise would not have such a vacation.

2.7.5 Prison Ministry

"I was in prison and you visited me," (Matt 25:36). This is a key directive from Christ to act with compassion and love for those incarcerated. In cooperation with the prison authorities including the prison chaplain, Vincentians may receive permission to visit jails. They arrange opportunities for Eucharistic prayer services, the sacrament of Reconciliation, and spiritual counselling. Walking the hallways and ranges of the prison, and inquiring about the physical and spiritual needs of the inmates as well as those of their loved ones, are some of the ways that Vincentians may serve.



SECTION 3

SPECIFIC PROVISIONS OF THE CANADIAN STATUTES

3.1 AMENDMENTS TO THE CANADIAN STATUTES

Any modification or amendment to the present Canadian Statutes shall be approved by a two-thirds majority vote at a meeting of the National Council. However, no modification or amendment to the present Canadian Statutes may be discussed at a meeting of the National Council, unless a notice of motion, bearing the signatures of at least three voting members, has been filed with the National Office within thirty (30) days following the official notification of a meeting

3.2 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The official languages of the National Council of Canada are French and English.

All official documents, communications, material and publications originating from the National Council of Canada destined for the general membership, shall be published in both official languages. In addition, all meetings of the National Council shall be conducted in both official languages.

3.3 POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE SOCIETY

The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a non-violent approach to any situation. The Society encourages Vincentians to participate fully in public life in such a way as to bring Christian values to political matters but no conference or council can endorse any candidate for election to a political post.

A Vincentian, who holds a political office at any level of government, cannot hold any mission of representation or office in the Society during his or her term of political office. However, he or she may remain a member of the Society.

3.4 ADVOCACY

The National President is the spokesperson for the Society on matters of social justice and other related issues, in union with the National Council's Board of Directors. The president of a Regional Council alone can speak for the Society on local and/or regional issues of social justice and other subjects that are linked to the mission and values of the Society. The National President can delegate this same responsibility to Central Council Presidents.

3.5 SCREENING AND RISK MANAGEMENT

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, a charitable organization, is committed to the protection and safeguard of:

- the vulnerable persons¹ it serves;
- its members;
- its volunteers;
- its employees.

The Society has a moral, ethical and spiritual obligation to appropriately screen and train its members, volunteers and staff. It is legally required under the principle of "duty of care". This responsibility is part of the risk management framework.²

All potential members and employees of the Society, at any level, who, regularly or from time to time, have contact with and serve vulnerable persons, must successfully meet screening requirements, complete orientation and training, and abide by applicable internal policies and procedures approved by the National Council of Canada.³

The screening process includes the following:

- Completion of a Membership Application Form
- A Police Record Check
- A Screening interview of the applicant
- Interviews of applicant's references
- Signature of a Service Covenant/Confidentiality Agreement
- Orientation and Training

¹ Vulnerable persons are those who are in a position of material or emotional need, who are sick, or who are physically or mentally handicapped

² Since there is an inherent degree of risk in serving the poor, the Society must take reasonable measures to reduce any risk.

³ See the National Council *Operations Manual* for more information on the screening process.

3.6 CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE

The concept of confidentiality is based on the individual's right to privacy, expressed or implied, and has both legal and ethical implications. Confidentiality means that disclosures made by a family or an individual to any of the Vincentian conference or council members or staff, will not be revealed to others, except in specific circumstances, and then only for the purpose of serving the family or individual in question.

Members shall observe the utmost confidentiality in the provision of material aid and any other kinds of help. Confidentiality is one of the building blocks for the development of mutual trust between the persons being served and the Society. Persons being served should be informed that their identity will be protected by the Society, and that their consent will be sought before any disclosure is made to persons or organizations outside the Society.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul may need to collaborate with other community groups or government agencies when serving those in need. In situations such as preparing Christmas hamper lists, obtaining assistance from food banks, making a referral to a government social agency, etc., it is sometimes important to share information with those outside the Society concerning the individual or family being served. Those in need, benefiting from such collaboration, shall be informed of the necessary disclosures in such cases.

Information about a family or an individual may be released to persons or organizations outside the Society, for example, the police or child protection services, without the informed consent of those concerned. This is the case if:

- the situation is urgent;
- there is a real danger that a person will cause harm to himself or herself or others;
- there is a real danger to the community at large.

When time permits, the conference or council president should be consulted before action is taken.

Conferences and councils shall keep accurate and secure records of persons being served. These records as well as any archives should be kept in a secure place under the responsibility of the conference or council president or his or her substitute.

Confidentiality is part of the service covenant of all members and staff. A breach of this requirement may be grounds for requesting the resignation of the member or the employee. Members and staff of the Society should be informed of and guided by relevant internal policies and guidelines about disclosure.

3.7 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

In order to fulfill the mission of the Society with justice and transparency, anyone who serves it in any capacity:

- a member;
- an employee;
- a volunteer, who though not a member, works for the Society;
- any member of the families of these persons;

should avoid, and report any potential or actual conflict of interest situations.

Such a conflict occurs when the self-interest of any of those mentioned above might conflict with the best interest of the Society.⁴ When in doubt, the matter shall be discussed with the conference or council president to clarify the situation and find a solution.

3.8 PAID EMPLOYEES AND THE PRINCIPLE OF VOLUNTEERISM

Employees of the Society may not be elected to or appointed to office in conferences, councils or Special Works projects in order to maintain the voluntary character of the Society. An exception may be made in instances where their technical or other expertise is needed to render service, but an employee shall not be appointed as a Council President or Vice-President.

Employees may attend meetings of the Conference, Council or Special Work to which they report, and may participate in deliberations but have no voting rights.

Employees wishing to participate fully in the work of a conference may become members of a conference provided this conference is not, at the same time, their employer.

⁴ See the *Operations Manual* for National Council Guidelines on Conflict of Interest.

3.9 REMOVAL OF A MEMBER/OFFICER/DIRECTOR/PRESIDENT

Should it become necessary to consider the removal of a member, officer, director or president, the conference or council concerned shall follow the administrative procedures established by the National Council for situations of this nature.⁵

3.10 INCORPORATION AND REGISTRATION AS A CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

Councils that operate a Special Works program such as a store, and have staff, should apply for incorporation of the council in accordance with National Council of Canada policy.⁶ The Special Work should not act as the incorporated body.

All conferences and councils should apply for registered charitable organization status under the Income Tax Act so that tax receipts may be issued, in compliance with Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) requirements. An annual Charities Return must be submitted to the CRA by the registered conference or council otherwise the charitable status may be revoked. Monies received through parish collections may not flow through parish books and have Income Tax receipts given by the parish.

3.11 THE SECRET COLLECTION

A secret collection from members present should be part of every conference and council meeting.

This tradition has existed from the time of the very first Conference in 1833. The secret collection provides an opportunity for members, if they wish to do so, to make a personal contribution by donating money according to their financial situation, without the knowledge of other Vincentians. The money is usually collected, declared and deposited by the Treasurer to be used to serve the poor.

⁵ See *Operations Manual*, ADM PR 003.

⁶ See *Operations Manual*, ADM-001.

3.12 FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Traditionally, the most common fundraiser in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is the Poor Box. Vincentians holding the Poor Box at the entry of the church after Sunday liturgies also serve as a reminder to the whole parish of the work carried out by Vincentians on behalf of those in need in the local area. However, Conferences and Councils may pursue other forms of fundraising that are in keeping with the values and principles of the Society.

3.13 THE USE OF FUNDS AND ASSETS - ETHICAL INVESTMENTS

The Society uses funds and property to help relieve the suffering of the poor. Included in this is the help given directly to individuals and to families as well as funds spent for the organization, the maintenance and the development of works and services to relieve the suffering of the poor.

Conferences and councils zealously manage and maintain the Society's assets. They shall avoid hoarding money. Unused funds and surpluses accumulated beyond a reasonable reserve fund shall be remitted to the council at the next higher level.

The Society may not, at any level, allot funds to other organizations, except for branches of the Vincentian family, for example, the Sisters of Charity. Funds may be allotted to organizations which are pursuing objectives similar to those of the Society and which are registered charities according to the Income Tax Act. However funds may be allotted only if the Society participates in the activities of these organizations and plays an active role in their management.

Ethical investment practices shall be followed to ensure that the Society does not, at any level, invest in companies or institutions which:

- operate in a way that seriously disadvantages the poor;
- endanger the environment;
- are involved in military weapons;
- adhere to or promote, explicitly or implicitly, values contrary to those of the Society.

Vincentians entrusted to undertake previously and duly authorized offices, missions or tasks for the Society are entitled to the refund of the expenses

incurred. Expenses related to the organization of meetings and conferences are authorized. Expenses related to the participation of Vincentians attending such meetings or conferences are also authorized as long as these events are designed to help the Society function well and to contribute to the improvement of services to the poor.

3.14 AUDITING AND REVIEW OF FINANCIAL RECORDS

All conferences and councils must have their financial records reviewed annually by a knowledgeable person and submit an annual report to the next higher council.

Incorporated bodies shall also complete an annual Registered Charities Information Return⁷ and a Corporate Tax Return. They may apply for the Government Services Tax (GST) rebate. A very substantial percentage of the income of the corporation, as is indicated in government regulations, shall be spent on charitable work. The Directors of the corporation are responsible for all deductions at the source.

All conferences and councils with a Canada Revenue Agency business number shall also complete an annual tax return.

3.15 RETENTION AND ARCHIVING OF RECORDS

Conferences and councils are required to provide for the ongoing maintenance and safekeeping of all records that provide historical data related to governing documents.

⁷ Form T3010

Non-incorporated Conferences or Councils	
Documents	Time Kept
Aggregation, Institution, Twinning forms	Perpetuity
Membership Application forms	Perpetuity
Canada Revenue Agency: Charitable Registration forms	Perpetuity
Minutes of meetings	Perpetuity
Financial Records	5 years
Lists of members of the boards of directors	Perpetuity
General correspondence during the mandate of any president	3 years past the end of the term of that president
Case records	3 years
Annual Reports	Perpetuity
Proxies during the mandate of any president	3 years past the end of the term of that president

If provincial government regulations specify a period of more than five years for keeping financial records, the government regulations take precedence.

Incorporated Conferences and Councils

In addition to the above-mentioned documents, all incorporated Conferences and Councils will retain/archive the following documents:

- Copies of any by-laws approved by the National Council;
- Personnel files;
- Canada Revenue Agency: Charitable Registration documents, Letters Patent and Supplementary Letters Patent documents; Approved by-laws of the Corporation; legal contracts, deeds; other legal agreements entered into by the Corporation, Charitable Returns.⁸

⁸ The National Archives are kept by Les Archives nationales, Gouvernement du Québec.

3.16 CLOSING OF A CONFERENCE OR COUNCIL

Because of the closing down of a parish, or the clustering of parishes, a conference or council may submit a recommendation for closure or for its amalgamation with another conference or with a council, as the case may be. In such a case, the National Council Administrative Procedure⁹ shall be followed.

The procedures outlined in the International Council General Rule¹⁰ shall be followed for the suspension or dissolution of a conference or council. The Regional President may assist conferences and councils in any procedures.

3.17 DISPUTES AND ISSUES

Disputes within the Society should be resolved in a Vincentian spirit of charity, for the good of the Society and the people it serves. Informal discussions between the members concerned and their conference and/or council president should resolve the issue satisfactorily. The National Council *Operations Manual* offers guidelines for any such situation. The president of the relevant Regional Council shall intervene if the problem persists. He or she may ask the National President to strike a mediation or arbitration committee to inquire into the dispute. This committee will report on the situation to the National President.

At the request of the National President, the International Council General may intervene in disputes arising at conference or council level. Its proposed decision shall take into account the spirit of the Society and the Canadian Rule.

Any member, conference or council that takes legal action through civil or other tribunals, without the express authorization of the International President General, in order to settle disputes between members, conferences or councils, shall be automatically separated from the Vincentian friendship by virtue of this action and shall be excluded, for all intents and purposes, from the Society.

Conferences and councils, with the approval of the National President, may seek legal advice and defend themselves if legal action is taken against them or

⁹ See the National Council *Operations Manual* for ADMIN PR –001.

¹⁰ See 6.7 – 6.11.1 of the International Rule and 2.6.7 of the Canadian Rule and Statutes.

against one of their members by an organization or an individual outside the Society. The National President shall seek full disclosure of the facts and seek the advice needed for the situation before giving his or her approval.¹¹

3.18 INSURANCE COVERAGE

The Society has a legal and ethical obligation to protect its members while they are involved in mission activities on behalf of the Society in Canada. Conferences, councils and Special Works, at all levels, should take steps to purchase general liability insurance for all their members and staff. The risks covered should include all those specified by the National Council. Insurance coverage must be renewed as long as the need for it exists.

3.19 VISITING 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 woman.¹²

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. This 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.

3.20 PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Society should inform the general public as well as the civil and religious authorities of its works, achievements and needs. This is essential for the Society in order to:

- have it recognized as a major Catholic charitable organization;
- thank supporters for their help;

¹¹ See the *Operations Manual* for ADM-003.

¹² See 2.2.2.

- promote its expansion and support, financial and otherwise.

To these ends, the president of the local conference or council is responsible for acting as the spokesperson for the Society within his or her area of jurisdiction.¹³

3.21 WORKING WITH CHRISTIAN OR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Each Vincentian should seek to deepen a personal commitment to ecumenism and to cooperation in works of charity and justice as a contribution towards the achievement of that full and visible unity of the Church. However, the Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The president, vice-president and Spiritual Advisor of conferences and councils should therefore be Roman Catholic. In certain situations, though not Roman Catholic, they may be members of churches and ecclesial communities which share certain Catholic beliefs such as the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the seven Sacraments and devotion to Mary. The local Bishop shall be consulted before the Society allows them to stand for election or nomination to the positions of president or vice-president.

The Society accepts the principle of affiliated groups. These groups are usually members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities, or non-Christian religions. They may participate in the charitable work and the fraternal life of the Society. However, they are not eligible for office in the Society.

3.22 WORKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the injustices that cause it. Therefore, it is committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice.

Affirming the dignity of each human being as created in God's image, Vincentians envision a just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted. The distinctive approach of Vincentians

¹³ See 3.4

to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those in need who are suffering from injustice. The Society helps those in need to speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on their behalf so that they will not be ignored.

The Society opposes discrimination of all kind and strives, through charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, for people of different cultures, religions and ethnic origins, thus contributing to the peace and unity of all the peoples of the world.

The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future and looks towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.



SECTION 4

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY

4A THE RULE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL¹

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIETY AND SERVICE TO THE POOR

1.1 *Origins*

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide Christian community, founded in Paris in 1833, by a group of young Catholic lay people and an older person, who joined together to create the first Conference. The Society wishes to remember them all with gratitude, as they set an example of dedication to the poor and to the Church. From Le Taillandier, who received the first inspiration, to Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Deveaux, Félix Clavé, all of them knew, in their humility, how to seek the wise advice and support of the one who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society, Emmanuel Bailly.

The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charisms of each one. Among them, Blessed Frederic Ozanam was a radiant source of inspiration.

The Society has been Catholic from its origins. It remains an international Catholic voluntary organisation of lay people, men and women.

¹ Section 4A, taken verbatim from the International Rule, respects the original numbering of the articles.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF OUR SERVICE

1.2 The Vincentian Vocation

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.

1.3 Any form of personal help...

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.

1.4 ...to anyone in need

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

1.5 To Seek Out the Poor

Vincentians strive to seek out and find those in need and the forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity.

1.6 Adaptation to a Changing World

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 poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.

OUR PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POOR

1.7 *Prayer Before Personal Encounters or Visits*

Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for the peace and joy of Christ.

1.8 *Reverence for the poor*

Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God's image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ.

Members observe the utmost confidentiality in the provision of material and any other type of support.

1.9 *Empathy*

Vincentians endeavour to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve. Rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.

1.10 *Promotion of self-sufficiency*

Vincentians endeavour to help the poor to help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community.

1.11 *Concerns for deeper needs and spirituality*

Vincentians are sincerely concerned with the deeper needs and the spiritual well-being of those they help, always observing a profound respect for their conscience and the faith they believe in, listening and understanding with their hearts, beyond

both words and appearances.

Vincentians serve in hope. They rejoice in discovering the spirit of prayer in the poor, for in the silence, the poor can perceive God's Plan for every person.

The acceptance of God's Plan leads each one to nurture the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace in themselves, their families and all those whose lives they touch. Vincentians are privileged to foster these signs of the presence of the Risen Christ in the poor and among themselves.

1.12 Gratitude to those we visit

Vincentians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognise that the fruit of their labours springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the poor they serve.

2. VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND VOCATION

Faith in Christ and the Life of Grace

“Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (Rom. 5,1-2).

2.1 *Love in Union with Christ*

Convinced of the truth of the Apostle St. Paul’s words, Vincentians seek to draw closer to Christ. They hope that someday it will be no longer they who love, but Christ who loves through them (Gal 2,20 “... I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God”), and that even now, in their caring, the poor may catch a glimpse of God’s great love for them.

2.2 *The journey together towards holiness*

Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity.

Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God’s grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their ideal is to help relieve suffering for love alone, without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves.

They draw nearer to Christ, serving Him in the poor and one another. They grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and one another.

Therefore, their journey together towards holiness is primarily made through:

- *Visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live. Vincentians assume the needs of the poor as their own.*

- *Attending the meeting of the Conference or Council, where shared fraternal spirituality is a source of inspiration.*
- *Promoting a life of prayer and reflection, both at the individual and community level, sharing with their fellow members. Meditating on their Vincentian experiences offers them internal spiritual knowledge of themselves, others and the goodness of God.*
- *Transforming their concern into action and their compassion into practical and effective love*

Their journey together towards holiness will be all the more fruitful if the members' personal lives are characterised by prayer, meditation on the Holy Scriptures and other inspirational texts and devotion to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary, whose protection we have always sought, and to the teachings of the Church.

2.3 Prayer in Union with Christ

In every Conference throughout the world and in their personal lives, Vincentians raise their prayers to God, united with the prayer of Christ, on behalf of one another and their masters the poor, whose suffering they wish to share.

2.4 The Spirituality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

The spirituality of one of its founders inspires Vincentians profoundly. The Blessed Frederic Ozanam:

- *Sought to renew faith, among all people, in Christ and in the civilising effect of the teachings of the Church through all time.*
- *Envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world.*
- *Attained holiness as a layman through living the Gospel fully in all aspects of his life.*
- *Had a passion for truth, democracy and education.*

2.5 *The Spirituality of St. Vincent*

Having been placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul by the founding members, members of the Society are inspired by his spirituality, manifest in his attitudes, his thoughts, his example and his words.

For Vincentians, the key aspects of St. Vincent's spirituality are:

- *To love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms;*
- *To see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ;*
- *To share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ the Evangeliser and Servant of the poor;*
- *To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.*

2.5.1 *Essential virtues*

Vincentians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:

- *Simplicity – frankness, integrity, genuineness.*
- *Humility – accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts, talents and charisms, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.*
- *Gentleness – friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, tenderness and patience in our relationship with others.*
- *Selflessness – dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.*
- *Zeal – a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.*

2.6 *A vocation for every moment of our lives*

The Vincentian vocation affects all aspects of members' daily lives, making them more sensitive and caring in their family, work and leisure activities. Vincentians are available for work in the Conferences only after fulfilling their family and professional duties.

3. MEMBERS, CONFERENCES, COUNCILS – COMMUNITIES OF FAITH & LOVE

3.1 *Membership*

The Society is open to all those who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbour in need. (See Article 6.4 of the Rule).

3.2 *Equality*

The Society, in each of its Conferences (the primary basic unit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), makes no distinction regarding gender, wealth, occupation, social status or ethnic origin.

3.3 *Meetings of the Vincentian members*

The members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide Community of Vincentian friends.

3.3.1 *Frequency of the meetings*

The Conferences meet regularly and consistently, usually weekly, but at least every fortnight.

3.4 *Fraternity and simplicity*

Meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.

3.5 *Preserving the spirit*

Members of all ages strive to preserve the spirit of youth, which is characterised by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination. They are willing to make sacrifices and take risks for the benefit of the poor wherever they may be: by sharing their discomfort, needs, and sorrows and defending their rights.

3.6 *Councils*

Conferences are grouped under various levels of Councils.

Councils exist to serve all the Conferences they coordinate. They help the Conferences to develop their spiritual life, to intensify their service and to diversify their activities so that they may always be responsive to the needs of those who suffer.

Councils at appropriate levels are particularly called to: create new Conferences, to help existing Conferences to expand, to promote Special Works, to prepare training courses and encourage Vincentians to attend them, to foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian Family, to promote cooperation with other organisations and Institutions, to develop friendship between members in the same area, to provide communication to and from Conferences and higher Councils. In summary, to promote the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world.

3.7 *Young members*

Young members keep the Society young. They see with new eyes and often look far ahead. The Society works constantly to form Youth Conferences and welcomes young members into all Conferences. Their experience in a community of faith and love and their exposure to poverty deepen their spirituality, spur them to action and help them to grow as human beings. The senior members assume the responsibility of assisting them along their path of training, respecting their personal choices and their aspirations of Vincentian service.

3.8 Aggregation and Institution of Conferences and Councils

The visible unifying link within the Society is the Aggregation of the Conferences and the Institution of the Councils declared by the Council General.

3.9 Subsidiarity and freedom of action

The Society embraces the Principle of Subsidiarity as its basic standard of operation. Decisions are made as close as possible to the area of activity to ensure that the local environment and circumstances (cultural, social, political, etc.) are taken into consideration. In this way, the Society promotes local initiatives within its spirit. This freedom of action of Conferences and Councils, which has been kept faithfully since the origins of the Society, enables them to help the poor spontaneously and more effectively, free from excessive bureaucracy.

In exercising this freedom of action to face the challenge of poverty in their area, Vincentians feel called to pray together for guidance and strength and for that creative imagination which is the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, “Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 3,1).

3.10 Democracy

All decisions are made by consensus after the necessary prayer, reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate, matters are put to a vote.

3.11 Presidents as servant leaders

Following Christ’s example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavour to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charisms of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.

3.12 Formation of members

It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor and help them be aware of the benefits, resources and opportunities that are available for the poor. The Society also offers members higher training in order to better help to raise the cultural and social level of those who request this support.

3.13 The spirit of poverty and encouragement

Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Advisor is very important.

3.14 The use of money and property for the poor

Vincentians should never forget that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money.

Nevertheless, the Society uses money and property to help relieve the suffering of those in need. The Society's funds must be handled with the utmost care, prudence and generosity. Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. Accurate records must be kept of all money received or spent. The Society may not allot funds to other organisations, except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family, save under exceptional circumstances.

3.15 Communication

The vitality of the Society's network of charity depends on the regular and rapid exchange of news and information. Such communication broadens the members' horizon and enhances the interest of members in the experiences and challenges of their brothers and sisters throughout the world. The Vincentian response to communication is a willingness to learn and a desire to help.

4. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE VINCENTIAN AND CATHOLIC NETWORK OF CHARITY

4.1 *Twinning*

Conferences and Councils help others in need, both at the national and international level. This is one of the activities most cherished by the Society. The awareness of acute poverty in a great number of countries and the Vincentian preferential option for the poor spurs Conferences and Councils to assist others with less resources or in particular situations.

This direct link between two Conferences or Councils, consisting of sharing prayer, a profound friendship and material resources, is called twinning. This activity contributes to world peace and to understanding and cultural exchange among peoples.

4.1.1 *Prayer as the basis of friendship*

Twinning promotes spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help. Funds and other material resources can be provided to enable a Conference or Council to help local families. Financial, technical, medical and educational support is given to projects which are suggested by the Society locally and which encourage self-sufficiency. Even more important is support given through prayer, as well as through mutual communication regarding what has been accomplished and what is happening among Vincentians in each area, including news about persons and families.

4.1.2 *Vincentians' personal commitment*

The Society urges the Vincentians to consider undertaking a personal commitment for a particular period of time to work with Vincentians in other countries or to spread Conferences.

4.2 *Emergency assistance*

When disasters, war or major accidents occur, the Society launches emergency initiatives on the spot and provides funds for the local Society to help victims.

4.3 *The Vincentian Family*

Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help, form a single family. Gratefully remembering the support and encouragement the first Conference received from Blessed Rosalie Rendu, the Society maintains and develops close relationships with other branches of the Vincentian family, while preserving its identity. It cooperates with them in spiritual development and common projects, as well as with the Church's charitable pastoral initiatives at every level, whenever this may be mutually enriching and useful to those who suffer.

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH HIERARCHY

5.1 *A close relationship*

Faithful to the clear intentions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the Society has a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Respect of the members for the hierarchy provides the foundation for harmonious reciprocal cooperation.

5.2 *Autonomy*

The Society is legally autonomous as to its existence, constitution, organisation, rules, activities and internal government. Vincentians freely choose their own officers and manage the Society's activities and assets with full autonomy, in accordance with their own Statutes and the legislation in effect in each country.

5.3 *Moral recognition*

The Society recognizes the right and duty of the diocesan bishop to confirm that none of its activities is contrary to Catholic faith or morals. The Society, whenever possible, informs the diocesan bishops of its activities annually, as a sign of ecclesial communion.

6. OTHER RELATIONSHIPS - ECUMENICAL AND INTER-FAITH RELATIONSHIPS

6.1 *Every member should foster ecumenism*

Each Vincentian should seek to deepen a personal commitment to ecumenism and to cooperation in works of charity and justice as a contribution towards the achievement of that full and visible unity of the Church for which Christ prayed, ‘that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (Jn 17:21).

6.2 *The Society is committed to ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation*

Following the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul recognizes, accepts and encourages the call to ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation which arise from its charitable activity. It is prepared to participate in the Church’s ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives within each country, in harmony with the diocesan bishop.

6.3 *The adoption of practical initiatives*

Conferences and Councils should establish a dialogue with their counterparts in other Christian churches or ecclesial communities and other faiths, with regard to cooperation in charitable work, wherever this is appropriate.

6.4 *Ecumenical and inter-faith membership*

In some countries, circumstances may make it desirable to accept as members Christians of other confessions or people of other faiths who sincerely respect and accept the Society’s identity and its principles insofar as differences of faith allow. The Episcopal Conference should be consulted.

6.5 Preserving the Catholic credo and ethos

The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The President, Vice-President and Spiritual Advisor should, therefore, be Roman Catholic. They may, in certain situations depending on national circumstances, and after consultation with the local diocesan Bishop, be members of churches and ecclesial communities which share the Catholic belief in, among other issues, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the seven Sacraments and devotion to Mary.

6.6 Affiliated groups can work very closely with us

The Society accepts the principle of affiliated groups. These groups consist mainly of members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities who are attracted by the work of the Society and/or its spirituality. They are welcome to participate in the charitable work, appropriate Council discussions and the fraternal life of the Society, but are not eligible for office in the Society. Groups from non-Christian religions may also be similarly affiliated.

6.7 Relationships with state agencies and other charities

When the problems they encounter are beyond their competence or capacity, Vincentians may contact State Agencies and other more specialised charitable organisations, provided that such action helps the Society in its struggle against injustice and respects the spirit of the Society.

7. RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY – WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

7.1 *The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions*

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

7.2 *A vision of the civilization of love*

Affirming the dignity of each human being as created in God's image, and Jesus' particular identification with those who are excluded by society, Vincentians envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted.

As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and the civilization of love. In this way, the Society shares the Church's mission to evangelise the world through visible witness, in both actions and words.

7.3 *Vision of the future*

The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

7.4 *The practical Vincentian approach to social justice*

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those we visit who suffer from injustice.

7.5 *A voice for the voiceless*

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.

7.6 *Facing the structures of sin*

Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak out clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements.

7.7 *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 Society strives, with charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, so that all are able to understand, recognise and defend the right of each person to be responsible for his or her own life. The Society promotes understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.

7.8 *Political independence of the Society*

The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a non-violent approach.

It is good that some members follow and fully participate in their political vocation in such a way that they bring Christian values to political matters. Those members who hold political offices will be asked, always with charity, not to hold any mission of representation in the Society during their term of political office.

7.9 *Working with communities*

The Society should work not only with individuals in need but also with families and communities. It can help an excluded or deprived local community to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity which leads it to improve its economic, social or environmental well-being, always retaining the personal contact of members with those who suffer.

**4B INFORMATION RELATING TO THE STATUTES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION
OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL**

4.1 The Confederation

At the international level, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is united in its spirituality and management through the International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, hereinafter referred to as the Confederation, which is presided over by the President General.

The Confederation is the sole owner of the Society's name. Only the International Council General may, on behalf of the Confederation, authorize or prohibit the use of its name.

4.2 The International Head Office

The Confederation's head office is located in Paris, France, the city where the first conference was founded in 1833.

4.3 Official Languages

In recognition of the establishment of the first Saint Vincent de Paul Conference in France, the official language of the Confederation is French. All the Confederation's official documents shall be drafted in this language.

The co-official languages of the Confederation are Chinese, English, Portuguese and Spanish. The Confederation undertakes to publish most of its publications in all the official languages.

4.4 The Assembly of the Council General

The supreme democratic body of the Confederation is the Council General, which meets in ordinary or extraordinary assemblies and is presided over by the President General.

4.5 Frequency of Assembly Meetings

The Council General Assembly normally meets once every six years. An Extraordinary General Assembly shall be convened when requested by the President General, or by 50% or more of the voting members.

4.5.1 Voting Members

The Council General is composed of the elected Presidents of the Superior (National) or Assimilated Councils, which they represent, and which are instituted in the different countries and in clearly defined regions around the globe. Each president is entitled to one vote.

Assimilated Councils are Councils that have been instituted or Conferences that have been aggregated, and which are legally constituted within the scope of their national legislations as non-profit organizations representing a country or a region, in which a Superior Council has not yet been instituted.

4.5.2 Other Members

Different circumstances may mean that there are other members of the Council General as follows:

- **Associated Councils:** These are Councils that cannot achieve full legal member status due to limitations in their national legislations or to the fact that they have availed themselves of legal instruments governing legal members other than those established by the Council General.
- **Temporary members:** These are members appointed by the President General in countries or regions where the Society is not present and until such time as the appropriate Superior or Assimilated Council can be instituted.
- **Missionary members:** These shall be members appointed by the President General to perform specific tasks and services. They shall always include members that have served as International Presidents General.

The other members of the Council General as described above can participate in Council General deliberations but have no voting rights.

4.6 Affiliation to the Confederation

A Superior (National), Assimilated or Associated Council of the Society that wishes to join the Confederation shall submit a written request to this effect to the President General. The Council General, through its Permanent Section, approves such requests.

4.7 Legal Liabilities

Under no circumstances shall the Confederation or any of its governing members, by virtue of the affiliation described in Section 4.5 above, be liable for events occurring without their full and proven knowledge. The Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils shall, for all legal purposes, be the highest and ultimate bodies responsible before any type of national or international jurisdiction, for events occurring within their jurisdictional areas.

4.8 Election of the President General

The President General is elected by secret ballot by all the members of the Society, represented by the Presidents of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils. Each President is entitled to one vote. The election takes place at a General Assembly of the International Council General with a quorum of 30% of the voting members being present and the postal vote of those electors who are unable to attend in person. If no candidate obtains one half plus one of the votes presented, voting members present will vote in a second and final round for the two candidates having obtained most of the votes during the first round.

The term of office of the President General is six years; this term of office may be renewed once only. The President General may not be more than 65 years of age when elected.

4.9 Functions of the President General

The President of the Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and its Council General represents the Society before:

- the Holy See;
- all international religious or civil organizations;
- any public or private organization in general.

The President of the Confederation:

- supervises, fosters and coordinates the Society's activities worldwide;
- is responsible for implementing the resolutions of the Council General Assemblies, in compliance with the provisions of the Rule, the International Statutes and pursuant to the Society's tradition;
- reports annually, in January, to the members and Councils on the progress of the Society and the prospects for the future.

4.10 The Board of Directors of the Council General

The Board of Directors of the Confederation's Council General is composed of the President General, a Vice-President General, a Secretary General, a Treasurer General and a member entrusted with the International Youth Delegation, all of whom are appointed by the President General. A Spiritual Advisor is also part of the board but has no voting rights. The President General may also appoint deputies to the vice-president, secretary or treasurer to complete the Board. These deputies may participate in deliberations but have no voting rights.

4.10.1 Role and Responsibilities of the Board

The Board advises and counsels the President General.

The Board collaborates with the President General in the:

- development of strategies to be proposed to the Council General Assemblies;
- implementation of agreements reached at such Assemblies;
- the implementation of the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

4.11 The International Service Structure

4.11.1 *Territorial Vice-Presidents and Area Coordinators*

The President General appoints Territorial Vice-Presidents and Area Coordinators from among the Society's worldwide members.

The Territorial Vice-Presidents support and coordinate the Society in large geographical areas around the world. They may organize regional meetings with the authorization of the President General. Canada is represented by the Territorial Vice-President for North America, which also includes the United States and a number of island states of the Caribbean.

The Area Coordinators have delegated responsibility for a specific group of countries, and assist the Territorial Vice-Presidents in their supervisory and promotional tasks.

4.11.2 *Other International Services*

The President General may delegate to different members the task of presiding over work. Individual members may be delegated to carry out specific missions or to be part of commissions established to achieve particular objectives. A specific mission could be the re-structuring of the Society within a particular country, or the training and formation of Vincentians where insufficient resources exist.

4.12 The End of Terms of Office

In order to ensure the smooth hand-over of functions, all terms, posts and services delegated by the President General shall automatically cease six months after a new President General takes up his or her appointment.

4.13 The International Executive Committee

The International Executive Committee is responsible for coordinating the Society's strategy in the interim periods between Council General Assemblies. The committee must give particular attention to ensuring that what is done complies with the requests and matters approved at the General Assemblies. The Committee shall report, through the Secretary General, on the results of its management and administration during the interim years in which the

Assembly is not convened and shall request the ratification of its performance at the General Assembly.

4.13.1 Membership

The Permanent members of the Committee are the President General, the Vice-President General, the Secretary General, the Treasurer General, and the appointed Deputies.

Legal members of the Committee are the Presidents of the Superior (National) or Assimilated Councils having more than 1000 active and aggregated conferences within their jurisdiction. In addition, the President General shall appoint to the committee, on the proposal by the Permanent and legal members of the committee, five members from Superior (National) or Assimilated Councils with a lower degree of representation around the world. These members serve a two-year mandate.

4.13.2 Voting and Quorum

Each Superior (National) and Assimilated Council President, or representative, as described above, has one vote. The President General shall likewise have one vote, which, if the case may be, shall be considered the casting vote. The valid adoption of resolutions by the Committee requires the attendance or representation of at least 30% of its voting members.

Members of the International Service Structure are invited to attend the Committee meetings with a right to speak but not to vote.

4.14 The Permanent Section /Governing Board

The Permanent Section, presided over by the President General, is established at the Head office of the Council General of the Confederation. However, it may be convened anywhere in the world at the discretion of the President General. The members of the Permanent Section are the Board members of the Council General, the Territorial Vice-Presidents and the Correspondents. The Correspondents are responsible for liaison and support to National Councils and other members of the International Structure in the region assigned.

The mission of the Permanent Section is to supervise and monitor the activity of the Society worldwide to ensure a better international service to members

and to the poor. It makes any appropriate decisions within the scope of the Rule and Statutes, and ensures compliance with both the resolutions adopted by the General Assemblies and the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

The Permanent Section shall specifically monitor resolutions adopted at the most recent Assembly meeting of the Council General or by the International Executive Committee, as well as the degree of implementation of these resolutions in the different Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils and by the Council General itself whenever appropriate.

4.14.1 Voting Members

The voting members are the Presidents of Superior (National), Assimilated or Associated Councils attending a session of the Permanent Section. Each President is entitled to one vote.

4.15 Institution, Aggregation and Dissolution

Only the Council General is empowered to institute new Councils and aggregate new Conferences to the Society, after consulting the appropriate Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

The President General designates a Speaker to receive all proposals from the councils. He or she obtains opinions from the members of the Permanent Section specifically responsible for handling relations with the requesting councils. The Speaker presents the request to the Permanent Section, which either rejects or approves the application. The President General and the Secretary General sign all Aggregation or Institution Letters. The requesting Councils and the beneficiaries, councils or conferences, shall be notified of all decisions concerning the request for aggregation or institution.

Conferences applying for Aggregation must have been created and have provided services to the poor for at least twelve (12) months. The conferences and councils, once aggregated or instituted, shall retain their status unless circumstances require the President General to proceed with their suspension or exclusion.

4.15.1 Dissolution or Suspension

For reasons prompted by the seriousness of a particular event, the President General may temporarily suspend or permanently exclude a conference or a council, after notifying the Permanent Section accordingly. A permanent exclusion shall entail the cancellation of the aggregation or institution.

Each President of a Superior (National) or Assimilated Council has, on a precautionary basis by virtue of his or her election, received and accepted accordingly at the head office of the Council General, delegated powers to temporarily suspend a conference, council or member. A President may make such decisions in cases of extreme seriousness and urgency.

In such circumstances, the President General shall be notified of such decision and the justification for it, within 15 working days. The notification shall include full documentation, particularly relating to the intervention of a conciliation committee, where appropriate. The member, conference or council may appeal to the President General who shall approve of or reject the appeal.

4.15.2 Other Procedures

The President General, on the initiative and request of one of the International Territorial Vice-Presidents, shall start the procedure of suspension or exclusion in the event of any serious circumstances. The President General shall report this serious situation to the Permanent Section.

The Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council that has supervised the conference or council is responsible for executing the sanction, in agreement with the Council General, and for ensuring the transfer of the property and files of the dissolved organization.

In the event of suspension or dissolution of a Superior (National), Assimilated or Associated Council, the President General shall appoint a Provisional Board.

4.16 Extraordinary Procedure

In agreement with, and normally at the request of, the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council concerned, the Council General may intervene in disputes arising at conference or council level. Its proposed decision shall take into account the spirit of the Society and any specific aspects of the Society's Statutes at the location in question, providing they are approved in conformity with the Rule, the International Statutes, and are ratified accordingly by the Permanent Section.

4.17 Civil and other Tribunals

Any member, conference or council that takes legal action through civil or other tribunals, without express authorization from the Council General, in order to resolve disputes between members, conferences or councils, shall be automatically separated from the Vincentian friendship by virtue of this action and shall be excluded, for all intents and purposes, from the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.



SECTION 5

APPENDICES

5.1 ORIGINS

It is important for all Vincentians to educate themselves about the origins of the Society so they may better understand and appreciate the circumstances which led to its creation and expansion into a worldwide Catholic charitable organization. Formation sessions and personal reading will enable each member to become familiar with the main founders of the Society and with other people who contributed to its establishment.

The Canadian Rule would not be complete without the presentation of:

- a short biography of the Society's patron;
- short biographies of its main founders, and of Blessed Sister Rosalie who had a great influence on the Society's founders;
- a brief account of the origins of the Society in Canada.

5.2 SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL (1581 – 1660)

Saint Vincent de Paul, patron of the Society, was named patron of works of charity by Pope Leo XIII.

Vincent de Paul was born to peasant farmers on April 24, 1581, in a village near the city of Dax in Gascony, France. In 1595, his father, recognizing his intellectual talents and pleasing personality, and aware of the limited possibilities in the region, enrolled Vincent in a boarding school run by the Franciscans. Vincent received Tonsure and Minor Orders in 1596 and went on to complete his education at the University of Toulouse, France. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1600. His ambition was to obtain an ecclesiastical post, which would provide prosperity for him and family.

Father Vincent settled in Paris where in 1623, he received a degree in Canon Law from the University of Paris. He soon secured a position as Chaplain to Queen Marguerite de Valois but his life was to change shortly thereafter.

During this period, Father Vincent suffered an intense spiritual crisis. After some time, he promised that if God were to take away the darkness he was experiencing, he would dedicate his life to the service of the poor. The anguish went away and Father Vincent would remain faithful to his vow for the rest of his life.

Father Vincent became acquainted with Father Pierre de Bérulle, a holy priest who later became cardinal and who also became Father Vincent's spiritual director. Father de Bérulle got him his first parish at Clichy, near Paris, in May 1612. There Father Vincent rebuilt the local church and transformed it into a model parish. He was transferred to another parish in 1617, Châtillon-les-Dombes, where he again experienced the misery of the peasants and organized the practice of Christian Charity to respond to their material needs.

During this same period Father Vincent was also entrusted with the education of the son of Count Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi and his wife Françoise Marguerite, one of the most prestigious families in Europe. Count de Gondi appointed Father Vincent Chaplain of prisons and of the slaves rowing the galleys. King Louis XIII appointed him General Chaplain of the Galleys in February 1619 and he worked at this ministry for a few years. Father Vincent was becoming more devoted in the service of the poor whom he felt were his lords and masters. He felt the need to establish institutions to carry out his ministry and mission, which he now saw as the continuation of the mission of Jesus Himself.

Father Vincent received a generous endowment from the de Gondi family in April 1625 so he could pursue his work of charity. He set up missions and colleges spreading out to Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Poland and North Africa. He established The Confraternities of Charity in 1617 to attend to the poor and the sick. Today, this organization is known as the International Association of Charities (IAC).

The Archbishop of Paris granted his approval to Father Vincent's community of priests and brothers, The Congregation of the Mission, also known as Vincentians, on April 24, 1626. Their mission was to evangelize the poor in rural

areas and to help in the formation and education of priests. On November 29, 1633, in a small house in a suburb of Paris, the Daughters of Charity, an order of non-cloistered women, was established, co-founded by Father Vincent and Louise de Marillac to carry out a hands-on ministry to the poor.

Saint Vincent de Paul pursued his mission with great energy and conviction, answering the material and spiritual needs of the poor and the abandoned all his life. He is a most admirable example of charity in action. Saint Vincent de Paul passed away on September 27, 1660. Pope Clement XII canonized him on June 16, 1737.

5.3 BLESSED FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM (1813 – 1853) AND HIS COMPANIONS

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam is recognized as the main founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. He was that rare individual of intellectual genius and extraordinary holiness. He was a husband and father, professor and researcher, journalist and author, apologist and defender of the faith. Above all, he personified the Good Samaritan.

Antoine Frédéric Ozanam was born in Milan, Italy, on April 23, 1813 where his parents, residents of Lyon, France, had moved temporarily. His parents were devout Catholics who passed on to young Frédéric a deep love of God and the poor. After graduating from high school at the Royal College of Lyon, he moved to Paris to study law as his father wished. There, he was confronted with a society in deep turmoil and detached from its faith, as a result of the Revolution of 1830. Guided by André-Marie Ampère, an eminent scientist and Catholic, he came to the unshakable certitude that Christianity was the only remedy to cure the evils of his time.

He gathered around him students of like mind and faith and they confronted faculty members of the Sorbonne University who attacked their faith. He persuaded the Archbishop of Paris to have Father Henri Lacordaire, a renowned preacher, deliver a series of lectures at Notre-Dame Cathedral. The success of these lectures or conferences was overwhelming and the *Conférences de Notre-Dame* were launched.

Ideas about social justice were promoted in the *Tribune Catholique*, a newspaper founded in 1832 by Emmanuel Bailly. A literary circle, *La Société des bonnes*

études, was linked to this newspaper. The aim of this circle was to develop among Catholics a taste for historical, philosophical and religious research. Ozanam had a similar idea and he and friends became active in what became known as the *Conférences d'histoire*. It developed into a dynamic forum of discussion and research at the university.

One March night in 1833, a fellow student, a non-Catholic, challenged Frédéric and friends. His question was “What are you doing for them (the poor), you and your fellow Catholics...? Show us your works!” Ozanam knew that faith must be translated into action and that, like the apostles, they needed to evangelize by the practice of charity. He rallied the group when he cried out: “The blessing of the poor is that of God...let us go to the poor,”

One evening in May 1833, Frédéric and five other students met in the office of Mr. Bailly. The “Conference of Charity” was born. They asked Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul to teach them how to minister to the poor with love and respect, and she did so with much kindness. By 1834, there were more than 100 members and the Conference was renamed the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, taking the saint as an example to follow, and placed under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

Ozanam was becoming a respected figure in professional areas. As a Doctor of Law in 1836, he began a career as a lawyer and then became professor of Law in Lyon. In 1839, he graduated as Doctor of Literature. He finished first in the 1840 competitive examination of the Faculty of Arts and Literature at the Sorbonne. He was named professor of Foreign Literature at the same university in 1844.

Ozanam married Amélie Soulacroix in Lyon on June 23, 1841 in a wedding celebrated by his brother Alphonse. A daughter, Marie was born in July 1845. His life, with his family, teaching, research, writing and various civic social and religious commitments was a full one.

Other than his service to the poor, he researched the conditions of the working classes and defended their rights as human beings and workers. He co-founded the newspaper *l'Ère Nouvelle* (New era) to propagate his social and political ideas. Ozanam was one of the first to formulate the idea of a “natural salary” to claim compensation against unemployment and accidents, and to ask that a pension be guaranteed to workers.

In 1852, exhausted from excessive work over the years, he was forced to rest and went to Italy. However his health continued to deteriorate. Although weak, he left Italy with his wife by steamship on August 31, 1853 and landed in Marseilles, France a few days later. He passed away in that city on September 8, 1853, the feast of the birthday of the Blessed Mother, to whom he had such a great devotion. He is buried in the crypt of the Church of St-Joseph-des-Carmes in Paris. His feast is celebrated on September 9.

Pope John-Paul II beatified him in Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris on August 22, 1997.

Emmanuel Bailly (1794-1861)

Bailly was a journalist, editor and publisher. As publisher of the *Tribune Catholique*, he was involved with the *Société des bonnes études* and established a family boarding house where Ozanam stayed for a period. He was very close to young people and helped them combine their studies with their religious formation. Ozanam and his friends came naturally to him for advice regarding their plan to serve the poor. He provided a meeting place for the new Conference and generally guided their action. Having a great devotion to Saint Vincent de Paul, he linked the new Charity Conference to the great Vincentian spiritual family. He agreed to become the first President of the nascent Society, a position he occupied until he had to step down in 1844 due to illness. He remained a member of the Council almost until the end of his life.

Jules Devaux (1811-1880)

Devaux was born in the Normandy region of France and moved to Paris in 1830 to complete his medical studies. He met Ozanam and his friends when he took part in the *Conférences d'histoire*. He was present at the early meetings of the Society's foundation and one of those in the group who approached Bailly for advice. He was the first Conference treasurer. He settled in Normandy after completing his medical studies in 1839. Later in life, he abandoned the medical practice and travelled to Germany where he attempted to establish the first Conference but this attempt had to be postponed. Devaux, a discreet and self-effacing member of the Society, passed away in Paris in 1880.

Paul Lamache (1810-1892)

Lamache was born in the Normandy region of France. He settled in Paris to study law where he met Ozanam in 1832 and joined him in the *Conférences d'histoire*. He wrote many articles for different publications, participated in the great debates of his time and became involved in the beginnings of the Society. He was the first Catholic writer to declare himself against slavery. He was an eminent law professor at several universities in France and was a passionate defender of justice.

Auguste Le Taillandier (1811-1886)

Le Taillandier was born in Rouen, France in a family of tradespersons. His family moved to Paris where he pursued legal studies. He joined Ozanam in the *Conférences d'histoire* as a virtual silent witness because he did not participate in the discussions. In 1833 he told Ozanam that it would be better for them to join some charitable work rather than to involve themselves in futile debates. He was active in the founding of the Society, in addition to other charitable work such as giving religious instruction to apprentices and visiting inmates. He returned to Rouen, married, and founded a Conference there. He was honoured with several honorary titles and awards for his contribution to his community.

François Lallier (1814-1886)

Lallier made Ozanam's acquaintance at the Law Faculty of the Sorbonne and became one of his closest friends for the rest of his life. He was the godfather to Ozanam's daughter Marie. He participated in the debates of the *Conférences d'histoire* and was actively involved in all the steps leading to the founding of the Society. In 1835, he was entrusted by Bailly to write the first Rule of the Society. In 1837 he was appointed Secretary General of the Society and signed circulars, which form an important part of the Vincentian tradition. In 1879, the then President General commissioned him to write an account of the Society's origins and he produced a brochure in 1882. In his professional life, he was first a lawyer, and then later was named a magistrate in Burgundy where he was born.

Félix Clavé (1811-1853)

Clavé is the least known of the Society's founders. A native of Toulouse, France, he moved to Paris in 1831 where he pursued his studies and associated with Ozanam and friends. He participated actively in the founding of the Society. He founded a Conference in the district of Paris where he lived. He then moved to Algeria where he attempted to establish a Conference but without success. In 1839, he went to Mexico to live with relatives. During his absence, his name was linked to a sensational criminal case, the Lafarge affair. The criminal trial reached no conclusion; however, it deeply affected him. For a long time, the Society refused to speak of him and his role as a founder. Eventually, Clavé married. In his professional life he published several works, including some books of poetry. He died tragically two months after Ozanam's death.

5.4 BLESSED ROSALIE RENDU (1786-1856)

Jeanne-Marie Rendu was born in Grex, France of devout Catholic parents. During her childhood, she experienced the upheavals of the Revolution and wars which left many impoverished and others fighting against the Church.

On May 25, 1802, she began her life as a Daughter of Charity in Paris and was given the name of "Rosalie". Several months later, she was transferred to the Mouffetard District of Paris where she would work for more than fifty years amongst her beloved poor. At the age of twenty-eight, Sister Rosalie was appointed the Superior of the House.

Emmanuel Bailly, who eventually became the first President of the Society, sent Frédéric Ozanam and Auguste Le Taillandier to Sister Rosalie for guidance and direction in their work of charity before the Society was formed. For two years, Sister Rosalie directed the young Vincentians to the homes of the needy and abandoned, showering them all the time with advice and wise suggestions.

When it came to forming a second Conference, it was very difficult for the Vincentians to think about breaking the bonds that their friendship had created among them. The unassuming Daughter of Charity convinced them that a second Conference was needed and this became the starting point for the expansion of the Society.

In 1852, the Government of France presented her with the Cross of the Legion of Honour as the *Mère des pauvres*. She passed away on February 7, 1856 and was buried in Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris, at the request of the poor. On November 9, 2003, in recognition of a life devoted to the poor, Sister Rosalie was beatified.

5.5 ORIGINS OF THE SOCIETY IN CANADA

The conviction and enthusiasm of the founders of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul convinced many Catholic students to join the nascent Society. One of them was a young Canadian, Joseph Painchaud, Jr. (1819-1855). He joined the Saint Severin Conference while studying medicine in Paris. On returning home, Dr. Painchaud introduced the Society into Canada by establishing the Conférence Notre-Dame at Quebec's Cathedral (now a Basilica) Parish on November 12, 1846. During its first year of existence, the Conference members distributed \$5,000.00 to the poor, mostly to aid victims of two major fires that destroyed two thirds of the city in that year. The new Vincentians also opened a hospice for seniors, a Savings Bank (Caisse d'économie) for workmen and labourers and assisted German and Irish immigrants arriving in Quebec City. The Society expanded quickly and the first Particular Council was instituted on October 11, 1847 in the Quebec City area bringing together nine Conferences. The Superior Council, which is now called the National Council, was created in 1850.

Blessed Bishop Ignace Bourget, then Archbishop of Montreal, first established a Conference in Montreal in 1848 in Saint Jacques Parish. Dr. George Muir, who was an active member of the Quebec City Conference, moved to Toronto where he became the instigator of the first Conference at St. Michael's Cathedral Parish in 1850.

The Society continued to expand in Ontario with the establishment of the Conférence Notre-Dame de la Merci (bilingual) in Ottawa by Mr. Jimmy Joyce and his companions in December 1860. Three years later, the first francophone Conference was founded at the Notre-Dame du Bon Secours Parish (now Cathedral-Basilica) of Ottawa. The Society expanded to Hamilton, London, Windsor and other Ontario communities.

Mr. Michael Hannan founded the first Conference of the Atlantic Provinces in

Halifax, in 1853. Other Conferences soon sought aggregation in Saint John, New Brunswick, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island and St John's, Newfoundland. The Society also expanded into the Western provinces and British Columbia. In the Prairies, the first Conference was founded in St Boniface, Manitoba in 1913 and in Calgary, Alberta in 1931. Five Conferences were aggregated in Vancouver on March 1, 1915.

While Conferences and Councils were founded in many parts of Canada, they did not immediately join the National Council, instituted in Quebec City in 1850, due to the prevalent colonial status of the different provinces.

The first Feminine Conference was founded in Italy in 1856. However, it was only in 1933, in Quebec City, that the first Feminine Conference was established and aggregated in this country. Three more such Conferences were reported to exist in 1936. In 1915, there were ten Aggregated Conferences out of the 228 in existence, composed almost exclusively of young adults mostly located in the Quebec City region, active in a seminary, a university and within Catholic groups.

The establishment of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in different parts of the country was facilitated through the good offices of the local Bishops. For a long time, it was customary for a Bishop to preside over the General Assemblies of the Society and address the participants.

The unity of the Society was cemented and strengthened in 1969, under the presidency of Gérard Le May who reformed the National Council of Canada.

5.6 FEAST DAYS AND CEREMONIES

Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness. They are aware of their own failings and the need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. They draw nearer to Christ, serving Him in those in need and in one another, and by praying together.

Conference and council members should celebrate liturgical ceremonies together throughout the year, particularly Vincentian ceremonies such as the Annual Commissioning Ceremonies that help to maintain a spirit of profound

moral and material friendship among members. Feast Days are important dates for the Society and Vincentians should make a special effort to meet and demonstrate the spiritual nature of the Society by attending Mass together. The Feast Days are:

- April 23: Blessed Frédéric Ozanam's birthday;
- September 9: Feast Day of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam;
- September 27: Feast Day of Saint Vincent de Paul;
- December 8: Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Virgin Mother, patroness of the Society.

Certain other dates on which liturgical ceremonies are regarded as particularly meaningful to Vincentians are:

- November 9, Feast Day of Blessed Rosalie Rendu;
- First Sunday of Lent, because during Lent, the need to undertake more charitable works is emphasized along with the need for more prayer and penance.

5.7 INSTALLATION OF CONFERENCE OR COUNCIL PRESIDENT¹

The vocation of the Vincentian is to follow Christ through service to those in need and in so doing, to bear witness to His compassion and liberating love. A president, by virtue of his or her role, is called upon to represent and promote this vocation. After the election or nomination of a president at any level, an installation ceremony should be held in the presence of members to confirm the new president's commitment to this mission.

5.8 INSTALLATION OF A NEW MEMBER²

After at least six months in the Society, new members may take part in a Commissioning Ceremony to express their commitment to the spiritual dimension of membership. The ceremony may be conducted during a Mass, or at a conference meeting, with other members present.

¹ See *Complementary Documents*, C.4 and C.5.

² See *Complementary Documents*, C.6.

5.9 PRAYERS AND SERVICES FOR VARIOUS OCCASIONS³

Prayer is a part of each Vincentian's daily life and work and they try to "tune in to God" as often as possible throughout the day.

5.10 COMMISSIONING CEREMONY⁴

The Second Vatican Council said, "The laity who have followed their vocation and have become members of one of the associations ... approved by the Church, try faithfully to adopt the special characteristics of its spiritual life." Together, with our prayers, the Commissioning Ceremony helps members do this.

Any date is suitable for this annual ceremony. However, the beginning of the year or any of the Feast Days are especially recommended. The Commissioning is for full members only who have been active members of a conference for at least six months.

5.11 FINDING THOSE IN NEED

"Vincentians strive to seek out and find those in need and the forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity." (The International Rule, 1.5)

Vincentians can visit people in their homes or in:

- Hospitals
- Nursing homes, and residences
- Night shelters for the homeless
- Orphanages
- Prisons
- Holding areas for asylum-seekers
- Accommodations for AIDS victims
- etc.

³ See *Complementary Documents*, C.7 and C.8.

⁴ See *Complementary Documents*, C.9.

Vincentians may receive referrals from:

- Parish priests and other religious
- People visited
- Other parishioners
- The Society's Special Works, such as shops, furniture stores or advice centres
- Schools (permission of the families must be obtained before referring them to the Conference)
- Government agencies, especially those that provide support and benefits to, or counselling for, the poor
- Doctors and Health Workers (perhaps through a Society leaflet indicating how the Society can be contacted)
- Day centres for the elderly or for other disadvantaged people
- Support groups for the victims of crime
- Other care-giver organizations which do not have visiting programs
- Churches of other Christian denominations or religious centres of other faiths who do not have their own visiting program
- etc.

“The Society serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions.” (The International Rule, 1.4)

“(The Society) .. gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.” (The International Rule, 1.6)

COMPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS



References: Canadian Statutes – 2.2.6; 2.3.5; 2.3.6; 2.3.18; 2.4.5;
2.4.6; 2.4.12; 2.4.20; 2.5.4; 2.5.10; 2.5.17; 2.5.18; 2.6.1;
2.6.4; 2.6.20



C.1 PROXY FORM

I, _____ ,
appoint Brother/Sister _____ ,
a full member of the aggregated Conference of _____
or the instituted _____ Council of
located in the municipality of _____ ,
Province of _____ , Canada, to act and vote on
my behalf on any matter identified in the Notice of Meeting and on any other matter
properly presented at the Meeting scheduled for _____ .

Signature _____

Name of the person who is being represented by proxy

(please print)

Title

Conference/Council

Date (month/day/year)

Note: *Please cross out words which do not apply to the affiliation of the appointee. A designated voting delegate may not hold more than one proxy letter.*



C.2 ELECTION OF A PRESIDENT

This information relates to the relevant sections of the Canadian Statutes about the election and responsibilities of presidents at all levels of the Society.

1.1 NOMINATION FORM

This is a generic form to be filled out by candidates and nominators for the election of a president of a conference or council. The number of nominators increases with the level of responsibilities and the geographic area under jurisdiction. All nominators shall be Full Members of the Society within the jurisdiction for which an election is held. Only members of Aggregated Conferences and Instituted Councils are eligible as candidates or nominators.

The number of nominators is as follows:

Conferences:	2 nominators
Particular and Central Councils:	3 nominators
Regional Councils:	4 nominators
National Council:	5 nominators

1.2 QUALIFICATIONS

Candidates for the election for president, at all levels, shall meet a number of requirements and should possess certain desirable qualities and skills.

1.2.1 Requirements:

A candidate must be:

- a Full Member¹ of the Society;
- a practicing Roman Catholic²;
- a volunteer, which means that he or she does not hold any paid position within the Society, including a position in any of the Special Works³;
- no more than 65 years of age when elected president of the National Council.

¹ See Section 1.4.1.1

² See Section 4.21

³ See Section 4.8

1.2.2 Desirable qualities and skills

Each section of the Canadian Statutes dealing with the Duties of the President at the different levels provides guidance concerning the basic qualities and skills required for a member to assume the responsibilities of a president.

1.2.2.1 Qualities

A candidate must have:

- a deep attachment to the Rule and Canadian Statutes and Spirituality of the Society;
- great dedication to the spiritual and temporal welfare of the poor;
- experience in the service of the poor, particularly in relation to home visits;
- a personal interest in social issues;
- the ability to lead by consensus whenever possible;
- good communication and listening skills;
- sound judgment.

1.2.2.2 Other Skills

The candidate should also possess:

- knowledge of and appreciation of financial matters, for example, budgeting;
- experience in organizing and chairing meetings and committees;
- experience in fund-raising.



C.3 NOMINATION FORM FOR THE ELECTION OF A PRESIDENT SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

We, the undersigned, nominate

_____ ,
print name

a full member of the Aggregated Conference or Instituted Council,

for the position of President of the Conference of _____

or the _____

Council of _____ .

I accept the nomination _____
signature

Dated this _____ day of _____ , 2 _____

NOMINATORS

1. _____
print name signature

name of Conference or Council

2. _____
print name signature

name of Conference or Council

3. _____
print name signature

name of Conference or Council

4. _____
print name signature

name of Conference or Council

5. _____
print name signature

name of Conference or Council



C.4 INSTALLATION CEREMONY FOR A PRESIDENT DURING MASS

The installation takes place following the Creed. The Past President and the President Elect stand before the Celebrant.

The Past President goes to the microphone and introduces the Society and the President Elect to the Celebrant and the Congregation as follows:

Past President: The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is an international Catholic charitable organization of lay people, founded in 1833 by Frédéric Ozanam and his companions. It is made up of conferences and councils, the members and the presidents of which are at the service of those in need.

Presidents:

- are responsible for ensuring that the spirit and Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society are observed in all activities;
- guide and assist members in their personal service to others;
- are the necessary link with other conferences and councils by their attendance at meetings;
- cooperate with other organizations as the official representatives of the Society;
- direct the preparation of reports and see that they are sent to the higher instances of the Society for recording.

The office of President is a responsibility, not an honour.

_____ has been elected President of _____.

Father (or Your Grace), I present to you _____.

PRESENTATION OF THE CANDLE

Priest: _____, receive this light, may it be a sign of the light and joy which the Charity of Christ brings to those in need.

PRESENTATION OF THE RULE AND CANADIAN STATUTES

Priest: _____, receive the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. May your observance of the Rule and Canadian Statutes and your dedication to its spirit bring blessings to you, to the members of the Society and to the whole Church.

EXPRESSION OF COMMITMENT

Priest: _____ you have received the light and the Rule and Canadian Statutes. Are you willing to commit yourself to spreading this light and encouraging the observance of the Rule and Canadian Statutes in order to bring relief to those in need, to foster holiness in your fellow members and yourself and to bear witness to the greater glory to God?

President: Yes, I am willing to make this commitment.

INSTALLATION

Priest: _____, you are hereby installed as President of _____ Conference (or Council) of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. May God bless you and may God's work prosper.

PRAYER

Priest: Let us pray,

Holy and everliving God, your providence reveals the glory of your name and your works to us. Look with love on all the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and guide them in their good works, lead them to holiness and prepare them for eternal life. We ask this through Christ Our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

All: Amen.



C.5 INSTALLATION CEREMONY FOR A PRESIDENT WITHOUT A MASS

This brief ceremony may be used for installing a new President without a Mass. It may take place at a meeting of the conference or council. If the Spiritual Advisor is not present, the Past President or another officer will assume the role of Leader for the installation.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Holy and everliving God, through the lives and works of Saint Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, you have taught us to follow your example in caring for those in need. Look now with love on this Society and bless the work we do in your name. We ask this through Christ our Lord who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1st Reading: Eph. 4:1-7, 11-13, or Rom. 12:3-13, or Psalm 16, or Psalm 23

Gospel: Luke 4:16-24, or John 21:15-17

HOMILY OR REFLECTION

PRESENTATION OF THE PRESIDENT

The Past President (or another Officer if the Past President is the Leader) presents the President for installation with these or similar words:

The members of _____ Conference/Council have carefully chosen _____ to be their new President. The members of this Conference/ Council, relying on the help of the Holy Spirit, ask you to install him/her as President.

The Past President (or the other Officer) passes candles, then a copy of the Rule to the Leader.

PRESENTATION OF THE CANDLE

Leader: _____, receive this light, may it be a sign of the light and joy which the Charity of Christ brings to those in need.

PRESENTATION OF THE RULE AND CANADIAN STATUTES

Leader: _____, receive the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. May your observance of the Rule and Canadian Statutes and your dedication to its spirit bring blessings to you, to the members of the Society and to the whole Church.

EXPRESSION OF COMMITMENT

Leader: _____, you have received the light and the Rule and Canadian Statutes. Are you willing to commit yourself to spreading this light and encouraging the observance of the Rule and Canadian Statutes in order to bring relief to those in need, to foster holiness in your fellow members and yourself and to bear witness to the greater glory to God?

President: Yes, I am willing to make this commitment.

INSTALLATION

Leader: _____, you are hereby installed as President of the _____ Conference/Council of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. May God bless you and may God's work prosper.

RITE OF PEACE

Leader: Let us share with one another a sign of the peace of Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Let us pray,

Holy and everliving God, your providence reveals the glory of your name and your work to us. Look with love on all the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, guide us in our good work, lead us to holiness, and prepare us for the eternal life. We ask this through Christ Our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

All: Amen.



C.6 INSTALLATION CEREMONY FOR A NEW MEMBER

After at least six months in the Society, new members may take part in a Commissioning Ceremony to express their commitment to the spiritual dimension of membership. The ceremony may be conducted during a Mass, or at a conference meeting, with other members present. The Conference President and the Spiritual Advisor (or a Priest) preside over the Ceremony. During Mass, the ceremony takes place following the Creed.

COMMISSIONING AT A CELEBRATION OF MASS

Priest: The needs of the Church are many and varied, but God shows his goodness by sending people to bear witness to his love in the community. Today we will be asking God to bless our brothers and sisters (as applicable) who have declared their willingness to serve the Church as full members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Conference President: This is a very significant occasion for the Society. _____ has (have) been welcomed among us for some months, and has (have) now expressed a desire to make a formal commitment to membership and its spiritual dimension. In Christ's name, we are gathered together to commission our brothers and sisters as committed new members, to be channels of peace, hope, love and practical help to the poor.

PRESENTATION OF THE CANDLE

Priest: _____ receive this light, may it be a sign of the light and joy, which the Charity of Christ brings to those in need.

PRESENTATION OF THE RULE AND CANADIAN STATUTES

Priest: _____ receive the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. May your observance of the Rule and Canadian Statutes and your dedication to its spirit bring blessings to you, to the other members of the Society and the whole Church.

Priest: _____ you have received the light and the Rule and Canadian Statutes. Are you willing to commit yourself to spreading this light and encouraging the observance of the Rule and Canadian Statutes in order to bring relief to those in need, to foster holiness in your fellow members and yourself and to bear witness to the greater glory to God?

Each New Member: Yes, I am willing to make this commitment.

Priest: Holy and everliving God, your providence reveals the glory of your name and your works to us. Look with love on the new members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, guide them in their good works, lead them to holiness and prepare them for eternal life. We ask this through Christ Our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

All: Amen.

End of Ceremony.



COMMISSIONING AT A CONFERENCE MEETING

The same ceremony is held at the beginning of the meeting, presided over by the Spiritual Advisor and the Conference President. If the Spiritual Advisor is not present, the past President or another officer, and the Conference President may lead the ceremony.



C.7 MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR DECEASED VINCENTIANS

Leader: Let us continue in the Father's name and call on the Holy Spirit to be with us in the name of Jesus.

All: Amen.

Leader: We are gathered today as a Vincentian Family to honor the memory of our Vincentian Brothers and Sisters who have passed from this life to rest in the arms of the Lord.

In our world today, the Church needs enlightened and faithful servants of Saint Vincent de Paul. Vincentians are called to befriend the poor, thus discovering Christ in their midst.

Today we recall the service of our deceased Vincentians and their work and service to the poor. We pray that God our Father, who is our strength has opened His arms wide and has joyously welcomed them into the fullness of life.

Song: On Eagle's Wings (or hymn of choice)

Proclaimer: Isaiah 49:13-18

Leader: Heavenly and merciful Father hear our prayers on behalf of your faithful servants whom you have called into the light of your Presence. May they be joyously welcomed into your loving, caressing arms. We ask this through Christ our Lord and Redeemer.

All: Amen.

Leader: God our Father is the glory and joy of each of our departed members whose memory we celebrate today.

Each Conference or Council honoring a deceased member comes to light a candle as a light to the rest of us. Please call each Vincentian by name.

Leader: Compassionate God, Saint Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Mary our mother gave of themselves. These are our heavenly mentors. They are blessed and so are our Vincentians who spent their lives serving your poor and proclaiming your greatness. We thank you for allowing them to be in our lives and we thank you for giving us life through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

All: Amen.

Leader: Eternal rest grant unto them Oh Lord,

All: And may perpetual light shine upon them.

Leader: May they rest in peace.

All: Amen.



C.8 PRAYERS FOR VARIOUS OCCASIONS

The secret is to “tune in to God” as often as you can throughout each day. Things around you and people will help. See something beautiful and think of God, thanking Him for His creation. See people and see Christ in them, marvel at His goodness, treat them as you would treat Him, and thank God for another reflection of His glory. Situations will arise when prayer comes easily: in trouble, in temptation, in a difficult situation. PRAY for this almost constant awareness of the presence of God around you - then you will pray hundreds of times each day.

PRAYER FOR THE POPE

Lord Jesus, cover with the protection of Thy Divine Heart our Holy Father the Pope. Be to him Light, Strength and Consolation.

V. O Mary! Help of Christians.

R. Pray For him.

V. Saint Joseph! Patron of the Universal Church.

R. Pray for him.

PRAYER FOR HOSPITAL VISITATION

O Lord, best sufferer of all time, help me understand the sufferings I am about to witness around me. Teach me to offer the help most needed, to say the right things, to sympathize and console, to strengthen and encourage, to say the word of comfort and cheer. Teach me to spread Your love in this place of sickness, to listen to suffering, to explain suffering, to reassure and turn pessimism to optimism, to see You in suffering humanity, You crucified, You at Your best, You at Your strongest. These are poor souls, yet privileged and noble souls, these are called to imitate You more intimately. These are Your special friends. Give me strength to pass on some strength to them. Use me as the instrument of Your love, and enrich and ennoble me through contact with those who share Your cross. Sword-pierced Mary, tender and understanding Mother, be with me as I try to give myself to your suffering children. Amen.

PRAYER FOR HOME VISITATION

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 give me confidence. I am perplexed - You can give me the answer. I am useless - You can make me useful. Above all, make 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 us love them together. I will 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. Amen.

PRAYER FOR PRISON VISITATION

Lord, You fell three times under the cross, but You got up three times; teach me to help prisoners to rise up again! I may never have been in prison, Lord, but I often wonder what I have done to merit the freedom I have. At least I have something in common with the prisoners because I too have often yielded to temptation. Give me the light to see the dignity in each human being, even in those men and women who have lost the esteem of others. Give me the wisdom to comfort, to counsel and console without seeming self-righteous or patronizing. Help me, Lord, to be genuine and sincere, to be understanding and humble. If I can help, show me how. If I cannot help, at least I can befriend. If I cannot befriend, at least I can show I care. No matter how I am received, even with cynicism and resentment, give me the strength and courage to bring you closer to those men and women who need you in their loneliness. Amen.

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

Direct, O Lord, our actions by Your holy inspiration, and carry them on by Your gracious assistance; that every prayer and work of ours may begin always from You, and by You be happily ended: this we ask through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF OFFERING

LORD JESUS,

I give You my hands to do Your work,
I give You my feet to go Your way,
I give You my eyes to see as You do,
I give You my tongue to speak Your words,
I give You my mind that You may think in me,
Above all, I give You my heart,
that You may love in me Your Father and all mankind.
I give You my whole self that You may grow in me,
so that it is You, Lord Jesus
who work and live and pray in me. Amen.

PRAYER IN SICKNESS

Dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I hold up all my weakness to Your strength, my failure to Your faithfulness, my sinfulness to Your perfection, my loneliness to Your compassion, my little pains to Your great agony on the cross. I know that You will cleanse me, strengthen me, guide me, so that in all ways my life be lived as You would have it lived, without cowardice and for You alone. Show me how to live in true humility, true contrition and true love. Amen.

THOUGHTS FOR MEDITATION

Saint Vincent de Paul

Our Lord is in perpetual spiritual communion with the soul that does His will. The paradise of earth, like that of heaven, consists of charity. Do you wish to find God? He speaks to the simple. He assists them and blesses their labors. The soul filled with charity is a sanctuary where God delights to dwell. Teach me, O my savior, by both Thy grace and Thy example, to be truly humble of heart. Those who have loved the poor during life shall meet the approach of death without fear.

Saint Louise de Marillac

God communicates Himself more fully with the soul deprived of human consolation. The poor stretch out their hands to us, but it is God who receives what we give to them. Remove all obstacles to interior peace, and then await in patience the visit of Jesus.



C.9 COMMISSIONING CEREMONY

WHEN

Any date is suitable for this annual ceremony. However, the beginning of the year or any of the Vincentian Feast Days are especially recommended. The Commissioning is only for full members who have been active members of a conference for at least six months. It is a renewal of members' commitment to serve those in need in the spirit of Christ and of the Society.

The ceremony may also be held during a meeting of the Society. Ideally it should be led by the Spiritual Advisor, another priest or a Deacon, who has a very close connection to the conference, although the actual commissioning is proclaimed by the Conference President, because Saint Vincent de Paul is a lay Society. If no member of the clergy is available, a member other than the President may read the words attributed to the Spiritual Advisor.

If the commissioning takes place during a Mass for the Society, it should take place just before the Offertory. The ceremony should not be celebrated during a regular parish Mass, as this is not in keeping with the humility of the Society.

MATERIAL NEEDED

All the members of the Conference should be informed well in advance which meeting or Mass will include the commissioning ceremony for active members.

Required are:

- a copy of the Ceremony for the Priest (Spiritual Advisor) and for each member,
- either a candle for every member or one candle to be passed to the newest or youngest member to hold on behalf of all the members,
- matches,
- a copy of the Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society.

THE CEREMONY

Abbreviations

SA: Spiritual Advisor (Priest)

CP: Conference President

M: Member(s)

INTRODUCTORY RITES

SA: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

ALL: Amen.

Using the following, or similar words, the SA prepares those present.

SA: God shows His goodness by sending people to bear witness to His love in the community. Today we will be asking God to bless our brothers and sisters who have declared their willingness to continue serving the Church as full members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

THE VINCENTIAN PROMISE AND PRAYER

All stand. The SA says:

SA: I invite you to make the Vincentian promise:

A vocation to bear witness to Christ's love

SA: In response to the call of Christ who invites you to follow Him, do you promise to bear witness to his compassionate and boundless love for the poor, the lonely, the suffering and deprived, those without faith and those who feel unloved?

M: I do.

Vincentian friendship and mutual enrichment

SA: Do you firmly resolve to treasure the warm friendship and unity which from the beginning has been a hallmark of our Society?

M: I do. Grant me, Lord, the grace to grow in humility, and to serve in hope, as the light of faith and the flame of love are kindled among us.

Members light one another's candles or the President lights one candle and gives it to the newest member, who represents the members as a whole. All members still respond together.

SA: Receive the light of Christ, which illumines the path to those who are troubled.

Vincentian love for those in need (see Mt 12:20, describing Jesus)

SA: Do you promise to seek and find those who are forgotten and to devote yourselves generously to the personal service of the poor?

M: I do. Help me, Lord, to be sensitive to their vulnerability, and never to break the crushed reed of the broken-hearted, nor to quench the smouldering embers of human dignity and faith.

SA: Do you promise to respect and not to judge to empower and not to impose, and most of all, to try to understand the deeper needs of those you serve?

M: I do. Help me, Lord, to sow seeds of faith and hope, and to bring comfort and solace, aware that a smile is the sunshine of Your love.

Commitment to social justice

SA: Do you promise to support the Society's modest work for social justice,
and to help build a civilisation of love and a culture of life?

M: I do.

Our frailty and need for inspiration and support

SA: Do you promise to persevere in regarding your visits as a sacred trust to be carried out faithfully each week, in the name of Christ, so far as family and other duties permit?

M: I do, but I know the depths of my own needs, my frailty and failings. Lord, make me ever more aware of the blessings I receive from those I visit, and of my need for the support of my Vincentian brothers and sisters. Never let me forget that whatever good I do comes from You and You alone. Amen.

THE BLESSING OF THE RULE AND CANADIAN STATUTES: LOYALTY TO THE RULE AND CANADIAN STATUTES

The President of the Conference holds the Rule and Canadian Statutes with outstretched hand for the SA to bless.

SA: Let us pray:

O God, by whose word all things are made holy, pour down your blessing upon this Rule and Canadian Statutes of the Society, and grant that those who read it with a receptive mind in the light of the Gospels and with the help of the Holy Spirit, may come to know Jesus better, to see with His eyes and love with His heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF BLESSING

The SA says the prayer of blessing, with hands outstretched over the members.

SA: Lord God, our Father, bless all our members as they renew their commitment to membership of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. May the Holy Spirit strengthen their resolve, fill their hearts with joy, an ever more vibrant faith and an ever deeper love for You. Bless also all auxiliaries, benefactors, all their families and those whom the Conference is privileged to visit We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

COMMISSIONING

The Conference President says:

CP In the spirit of Jesus,
and in the name of our Patron, Saint Vincent de Paul,
and our principal founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam,
I renew the commission of all the full members of the Conference
“to go to the poor with love”
and share their burdens and joys as true friends,
with the help of God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

ALL: Amen.



C.10 ANNUAL CONFERENCE REVIEW MEETING

SUGGESTED AGENDA

Conferences may adopt the suggested agenda or develop one they feel is more appropriate for their needs.

MEETINGS AND ADMINISTRATION

- Is the meeting weekly and at the best time and on the best day for members?
- Is the meeting too long or too short? (Complex projects could be discussed first by the Board (key officers) or by a small sub-committee, to save time in the Conference meeting).
- Are essential records in place, such as names, addresses and phone numbers of members (with copies to each member), names and addresses of families or individuals visited (kept most confidentially), minutes, treasurer's records, a Conference Diary so that there are reminders of key Vincentian meetings and events and of the birthdays of those we visit?
- Is a record of visits made which enables the Conference to be aware if someone has been overlooked, with a total each week of the visits in each category required for the Secretary's Annual Report?

VISITS

- Is the discussion about the visits adequate?
- Do members have the right attitudes to those in need? (See Rule and Canadian Statutes 1.1)
- Does the Conference actively seek and find those in need? (See Appendix 5.1)

SPIRITUALITY

- Is there a Spiritual Advisor?
- Is sharing of opinions always invited after the spiritual reading?
- Are the prayers said slowly and reflectively?
- Do we feel and act like a spiritual community?

UNITY

- How much harmony and friendship (or friction) is there within the Conference?
- Are decisions reached by consensus (or, if necessary, by vote)?
- Is enough help provided to the President?

COMMITMENT

- Is there an adequate sense of commitment to attend the meetings and to carry out the allocated visits or tasks?
- How comfortable do we feel with the degree of our commitment towards the poor and the Church?
- Are the contributions to the secret collection a meaningful sacrifice?

RECRUITMENT

- Is enough being done to recruit new members (including the young and those from various ethnic groups)?
- Does the timing of the meeting make recruitment difficult?
- Are we aware that if the Conference does not grow it is giving the impression that it is not fully alive?

LINKS

- Is the Conference isolated or involved?
- How many Particular Council meetings were attended in the last year by the President, or by the Vice-President in the absence of the President?
- Could feedback from the Area Council meetings be significantly improved?
- Is there a good attendance at Festival Meetings and Retreat days, etc.?
- What kind of Annual Report to the parish would be the most useful?
- Is the Conference twinned?
- Does the Conference receive sufficient copies of the Society's newsletter?
- Does the Conference ever submit interesting items for publication in the Society's newsletter?
- Have members attended the available Training and Formation sessions?
- Have members their own copies of the main document provided to assist them? (This may be a Members Handbook, Rule and Canadian Statutes Booklet or Manual, etc.)



C.11 ANNUAL COUNCIL REVIEW MEETING

SUGGESTED AGENDA

Councils may adopt the suggested agenda or develop one they feel is more appropriate for their needs.

MEETING AND ADMINISTRATION

- What is the approximate average attendance/absence by Conferences?
- Is the meeting at the correct frequency, and at the best time and on the best day for the voting members?
- Is the meeting too long or too short?
- Is the location the most convenient? Would there be an advantage in holding it in different parishes within the area, inviting all local Conference members to attend?
- Is there any other way to achieve nearly 100% attendance?
- Are essential records in place, such as names, addresses and phone numbers of voting members (with copies to each member), minutes, treasurer's records, a Council Diary so that there are reminders of key Vincentian meetings and events and other relevant events?
- Is the current written Agenda the most appropriate for this Council? Are the matters on which the Council spends the most time, of significant interest to the Conferences?
- Annual Reports: how can we better support Conference Treasurers and Secretaries to ensure they produce these reports on time?
- What are the most interesting points which have emerged from an analysis of the Annual Reports? Has this been mentioned to the next higher Council?

SPIRITUALITY

- Is there a Spiritual Advisor?
- Is sharing of opinions always invited after the spiritual reading?
- Are the prayers said slowly and reflectively?

UNITY

- How much harmony and friendship (or friction) is there within the Council?
- Are decisions reached by consensus (or, if necessary, by vote)?
- Is enough help provided to the President and other officers of the Council?

COMMITMENT

- Is there an adequate sense of commitment to attend the meetings and to carry out the allocated tasks?
- Do Conference Vice-Presidents (or other representatives) attend when the Conference President cannot?

LINKS

- Does the President or Vice-President always attend the meeting of the next higher Council?
- How can the feedback from that Council to the Particular Council and Conferences be improved?
- How can we ensure that the Conference members receive an adequate feedback of the key results of the Particular Council meeting?
- Are there any interesting aspects of the Council's work worth writing up for the Society's newsletter?

