

**Society of Saint Vincent  
De Paul,  
St. Michael's Conference**



**Members Handbook**

**Revised version  
2022**

## HELPING THE POOR IN CANADA SINCE 1846 THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

The correct acronym is SSVP "The" is silent but part of official title. The first S is for Society and often you will see the word Society capitalized to represent The Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The word *of* like the word *the*, is silent in the acronym. The second S is for Saint. The French word *de* as in the words "*the*" and "*of*" in English language is also silent in the acronym.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP) figures prominently among those apostolic institutions which owe their beginnings to the free decisions of lay people. *The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul* is dedicated to helping those less fortunate. With essential care and guidance, struggling families and individuals can build self-confidence and positive opportunity. The *Society of Saint Vincent de Paul* helps people replace a sense of despair with a sense of dignity.

It is an international lay organization, founded in Paris in 1833 by Frédéric Ozanam and his friends. A Catholic Society, it is open to all those who desire to live their faith in love and service of Christ who is in the poor. The only requirement for help is need. The poor we serve are at all times treated with dignity in a non judgmental manner. We serve them as friends, neighbours, family and not clients or numbers. Numbers or codes used to protect the identity and sacred dignity of the person we serve; they are children of God. There is no membership fee or initiation for the Society although membership is a calling. Once you agree to be a Vincentian, you must undergo screening which includes an interview as to your knowledge base of the Society, to serve those in need in the best way possible. This is for your protection and the protection of those we serve.

Under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul, the organization draws its inspiration from his thoughts and his works. Members strive, in a spirit of justice, charity, mutual help, solidarity with the poor, and through personal commitment, to ease the hardships of those who suffer.

Founded in Paris in 1833 by Frédéric Ozanam and his friends, the SSVP is a worldwide organization of lay Christians. A Catholic society, it is open to all those who desire to do good work in love and service of their neighbour.

### **Frederic Ozanam (1813 – 1853)**

Our founder Frederic Ozanam was born on April 23, 1813 in Milan. Frederic's father served the poor who could not afford to pay for a doctor. He often worked late into the night. Frederic's mother often joined the good doctor and



sat with his patients, wiping their brows, feeding them the soup she brought. Frederic at a young age witnessed the need to serve the poor through his parent's example.

In 1815 the Ozanam family moved to Lyon where the father had secured a position in the Hotel-Dieu hospital. The youth of France were in a seething frenzy with ideas and intellectual debates. The young men of this time were rather well read and after arriving from their provinces were ready to discover the world as they discovered Paris. Paris this hotbed of culture born from the uproar within the university as much was obviously exhilarating.

Frederick Ozanam and his friends were no exception to the rule. They had a taste for romantic quarrels and rhetorical jousts. with the exception that they received a Christian education. As a young man and dedicated university student, Ozanam was profoundly Christian and pursued his studies assiduously, attending all the lectures of the history conference where literature and philosophy received equal appreciation. In Paris the misery of the poor haunted Ozanam, and his dream was to see harmony among social classes. He campaigned for justice and charity. "The blessing of the poor is that of God ... Let us go to the poor!" cried Ozanam.

At the start of the turbulent 1830s they were seven young men and only one was older than 20. Distraught by a world that, little by little, renounced Christianity, they came together with the desire to support each other in their faith and to grow together in their faith. But how does one shine forth with only words taken from the gospel while living in an unchristianized society? They quickly saw the need to translate their faith into action. His faith enabled him to see Christ in the poor, and in the evening of his life, he repeated very clearly: "Our aim is to keep the faith and to spread it among others by means of charity." In 1833, anxious to respond to the attacks formulated by his colleagues - followers of Saint-Simon - Ozanam and some of his friends founded the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The founding members developed their method of service under the guidance of **Sister Rosalie Rendu**, a member of the Congregation of Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, who was prominent in serving the poor in the slums of Paris.

Ozanam received the degrees of Bachelor of Laws in 1834, Bachelor of Arts in 1835 and Doctor of Laws in 1836. His father, who had wanted him to study law, died on 12 May 1837. Although he preferred literature, Ozanam worked in

the legal profession in order to support his mother, and was admitted to the Bar in Lyon in 1837.

Still, he also pursued his personal interest, and in 1839 he obtained the degree of Doctor of Letters with a thesis on Dante that then formed the basis of Ozanam's best-known books. A year later he was appointed to a professorship of commercial law at Lyon, and in 1840, at the age of twenty-seven, assistant professor of foreign literature at the Sorbonne.

In June 1841, he married Amélie Soulacroix, daughter of the rector of the University of Lyon, and the couple travelled to Italy for their honeymoon. They had a daughter, Marie.

Upon the death in 1844 of Claude Charles Fauriel, Ozanam succeeded to the full professorship of foreign literature at the Sorbonne. The remainder of his short life was extremely busy, attending to his duties as a professor, his extensive literary activities, and the work of district-visiting as a member of the society of St. Vincent de Paul.

His naturally weak constitution fell prey to consumption, which he hoped to cure by visiting Italy, but on his return to France he died in Marseille on Thursday, 8 September 1853, at the age of 40. He was buried in the crypt of the church of St. Joseph des Carmes at the Institut Catholique in Paris.

To beatify someone does not mean to erect a statue of the person. On the contrary, according to the Latin etymology (*beatificare* = *beatum facere*), it means "to make happy".

Indeed, in beatifying Frederic Ozanam, the Church solemnly proclaims in the light of God and for all eternity to all of Christendom, and all youth in particular, the sanctity of the principal founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. At the same time we are all "made happy" because this admirable witness given by one of our brothers in Christ and in humanity fills us with joy, hope and courage.

Over the centuries, the Church has raised men and women to the altar; many have been adults, some elderly, and others vowed to celibacy as a result of their monastic or priestly vows.

But now we are offered a young man as a model, whose life though brief (April 23rd 1813 to September 8th 1853) was nonetheless exceptionally blessed. This young man elevated family, conjugal and fatherly love to a great height. His many and varied commitments, all sustained with the same spiritual vigour, were dedicated to faith and charity, to the Church, to the poor, to science and to democratic spirit. Last but not least, he was a man of flesh, blood and spirit just like us, who incarnated a type of Christian with whom we can identify. He also

incarnated an ideal which was nourished by the Gospel and provided answers both to the questionings of his contemporaries and to the concerns of our generation.

We can never forget that the 19th century, in which Ozanam lived and worked, was the preparation for our 20th century which has now ended. In a similar fashion to the last century, this century is moved by new ideas and technological, economic, social and spiritual change.

Yet one can say quite truly that Ozanam's life was unique. To insensitive eyes and heart his existence can seem to resemble many others. In fact, it has a more and more powerful influence over our world, this modern world which is so eager for light.

He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris in 1997. His feast day is 9 September.

When we call upon the Blessed Ozanam for help, it should not be first and foremost to obtain some favour, but above all to ask that our lives as men and women, especially the youth of the world, be invigorated by his example and his witness.

### **Blessed Rosalie Rendu, Daughter of Charity (1786 - 1856)** **"Good mother of all"**

As we celebrate the 169th anniversary of the death of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and the 189 anniversary of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul it is important to remember the role that Sr. Rosalie Rendu played in the formation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, back in 1833.

Rosalie, born Jeanne-Marie Rendu, was the eldest of four girls born at Comfort in France in 1786. Her father died when she was only 10, leaving her mother with three surviving girls to care for.



It was during the time of the French Revolution that her family experienced danger by giving refuge to priests. This aid extended to the Bishop of Annecy, who took refuge in the Rendu house and became for Rosalie "Peter the gardener" - her friend and mentor. It was from his hands that she received her first Holy Communion.

From an early age, Sr. Rosalie, with the help of her family, cared for the sick and needy who called at their home. She became a member of the community of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul (a congregation of lay women

who assisted the poor) founded by St. Vincent and St. Louise de Marillac in France.

Upon leaving the seminary (noviciate) Sr. Rosalie was sent to the Mouffetard neighbourhood. It was one of the most miserable and poorest districts of Paris. Here she served the poor for 53 years. While there, she practised nursing, was a justice of the peace, a catechist for the street children, and at the same time, at the risk of her life, she came between the revolutionaries who intended killing a military person saying: "Here there is no killing!"

Sr. Rosalie was the 'good mother of all' without distinction of religion, political persuasion, or social status. With one hand, she received from the rich, with the other she gave to the poor. To the rich, Sr. Rosalie gave the joy of doing good works. Often one could see her in the parlour of the house with bishops, priests, and prominent members of society. Students of law and medicine at the great schools came seeking information from Sr. Rosalie, tapping into her significant experience with, and love for, the poor.

Frederic Ozanam, the principal co-founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was one of these students. Frederic, putting his faith in action, sought Sr. Rosalie's guidance before visiting the poor. It was Sr. Rosalie who encouraged Frederic and his friends, to not only provide material assistance to people in need, but friendship and love. This practice remains fundamental to the Society today.

Sr. Rosalie said to Frederic: **"God has already given you spiritual wisdom or you would not be sacrificing your precious free day. Because you see Christ in the poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility, as his servant. Always remember, messieurs, that if we had been through the hardships they had to meet - if our childhood had been one of constant want - perhaps we too, would have given way to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter. Be kind and love for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you can give them."**

Sr. Rosalie was an extraordinary woman: "bright, sensible, dynamic, strong, cordial, loving, delicate, blessed with a good character and a good dose of humor...."

Sr. Rosalie died on February 7, 1856. On her tomb at Montparnasse Cemetery, which is always covered in flowers, are the words: "To Sister Rosalie, from your friends the poor and the rich." We remember her wisdom and love for the poor.

On Sunday, 9th November, 2003 the Vincentian Family celebrated the beatification of Sr. Rosalie Rendu, D.C.

Memorable words of Blessed Rosalie Rendu:  
 "Hunt down poverty in order to give humanity its dignity"

"Let us love the Good God very much. Let us not be sparing with our duty; let us serve the poor well, always speaking to them with great kindness. If you do not act in this way: the poor will insult you. The ruder they are; the more dignified you must be. Remember, Our Lord hides behind those rags."

### **Frederic Ozanam: His Vision and Practice**

In 1833, at the Sorbonne University in Paris, France, Frederic Ozanam was challenged by his fellow students to translate his faith into action. His response was "Let us go to the poor." He joined with a small group of friends to form the Conference of Charity that two years later became the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Frederic envisioned an organization that would:

- **Engage with the issues of society and address inequalities**

The problem that divides men in our day is no longer a problem of political structure; it is a social problem; it has to do with what is preferred, the spirit of self-interest or the spirit of sacrifice, whether society will be only a great exploitation to the profit of the strongest or a consecration of each individual for the good of all and especially for the protection of the weak. There are a great many men who have too much and who wish to have more; there are a great many others who do not have enough, who have nothing, and who are willing to take if someone gives to them. Between these two classes of men, a confrontation is coming, and this menacing confrontation will be terrible: on the one side, the power of gold, on the other the power of despair. We must cast ourselves between these two enemy armies, if not to prevent, at least to deaden the shock. And our youth and our mediocrity does not make our role of mediators easier than our title of Christian makes us responsible. There is the possible usefulness of our Society of St. Vincent de Paul. (Dirvin 1986, pp.96-97).

- **Expand to become a universal community of charity while maintaining simplicity and unity**

- **Build and sustain the faith and commitment of its members**

By drawing closer to the poor, we draw closer to God....Through uniting in a formal organization we can strengthen one another in close companionship as we work together to alleviate the poverty that we cannot hope to cure. We'll



become better friends of Our Lord as we become more understanding friends of His poor. (Derum 1995, p.79)

- **Continually pray and reflect on its service and activities in the context of the Christian gospel and religious tradition**
- **Have personal and regular face-to-face contact with the poor by visiting in their homes**

Certainly we must endeavour to go to the root of the evil and by wise and social reforms try to reduce the widespread distress. But we are convinced that a knowledge of reforms.... is to be learned not so much by pondering over books or by discussions among the politicians, as by going to visit the garrets in which the poor live; by sitting at the bedside of the dying, by feeling the cold which they feel, and by learning from their own lips the cause of their woes. When we have done this, not simply for a few months, but for many years, when we have studied the poor in their homes, in the schools and in the hospitals, not only in one, but in many cities, then we really begin to understand a little of this formidable problem of poverty. Then we have a right to suggest reforms which, instead of putting the fear of God into their hearts, would bring peace and hope to all. (cited in McCarty 1996, p. 11, 12).

- **See and love Christ in the poor**

Can we remain passive in the midst of a world which is suffering and groaning?.. The poor, we see them with our eyes of flesh! They are there before us and we can place our finger and hand in their wounds and the marks of the Crown of Thorns are visible on their foreheads. Thus there is no possible room for unbelief and we should fall at their feet and say to them with the apostle: "My Lord and my God! You are our master and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred image of the God that we cannot see. Since we know not how to love him otherwise, we will love him in your persons." (Ransom, Tarrazi, eds., p. 22).

- **Serve with humility**
- **Demonstrate respect for individual dignity**
- **Display tactfulness and exercise discretion**
- **Avoid all misplaced proselytizing**

"Let us only introduce religion into our conversation when it comes up naturally." (Ransom, Tarrazi, eds., 1997, p. 24).

- **Provide assistance beyond material needs**

- **Recognize the gift of reciprocal benefit / salvation**

" Help is humiliating when it appeals to men from below, taking heed of their material wants only, paying no attention but to those of the flesh, to the cry of hunger and cold, to what excites pity, to what one succours even in the beasts. It humiliates when there is no reciprocity... But it honours when it appeals to him from above, when it occupies itself with his soul, his religious, moral, and political education, with all that emancipates him from his passions and from a portion of his wants, with those things that make him free, and may make him great. Help honours when to the bread that nourishes it adds the visit that consoles.; when it treats the poor man with respect, not only as an equal but as a superior, since he is suffering what perhaps we are incapable of suffering; since he is the messenger of God to us, sent to prove our justice and charity, and to save us by our works. Help then becomes honourable because it may become mutual... (cited in Sickinger 2010, p. 86).

- **Practice both charity and justice**

The order of society is based on two virtues: justice and charity. However, justice presupposes a lot of love already, for one needs to love a man a great deal in order to respect his rights, which limit our rights, and his liberty, which hampers our liberty. Justice has its limits whereas charity knows none.

Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is justice's role to prevent the attacks. (Ransom, Tarrazi, eds., 1997, p. 35).

In addition to his work with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Frederic promoted justice for workers in his writing. He proposed the concept of the "natural wage," which later was described as a living wage, and the formation of labour unions. He published lectures on the dignity of work, condemned slavery, and spoke of the importance of empowering people so they could speak and act for themselves. (Ryan 2010, p.3).

### **Vincentian Spirit**

It was thus that in April 1833, the first Conference of Charity was born. Its principle was simple: a group of young Christian men gathering to pray, reflect, and work together to bring relief to the poor. Quickly the work grew with new members. Soon the group placed themselves under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul. What could be more natural than to place oneself under the protection of a saint who knew so well how to join prayer and action in fervent charity? St. Vincent de Paul united in his person all the characteristics that should pertain to a Conference: prayer, first of all, because he said, "I can do all things in him

who supports and comforts me;" then action, which invites us, through his example and words, to "do more" unceasingly to bring relief to the poor. All the poor must be served without distinction, and in considering again that one must be forgiven for the good that one does for them. Finally, by the intellectual concern, which animated Monsieur Vincent in many directions, but always with the desire that humanity grow in goodness in the Conference.

Thus he encouraged better formation for priests. He applied himself to the building of hospices and other works that humanized, after a fashion, the conditions of the poor; he turned his influence of being close to the "greats" of society to, slowly but surely, bring the government, and thus society, to be concerned with the fate of the poor and to provide more relief to them. Finally, Monsieur Vincent was not content to pray and act alongside the poorest, he reflected on the causes of the evils of poverty to eventually attempt to improve their standard of living.

The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul had no other ambition than to walk in the steps of their patron: to pray, reflect and act. That is why, throughout the world, groups of Christians come together guided by the founding desire to "serve Christ in the poor." Assembled together in lay communities, the Vincentians have no other ambition than to proclaim the Word of God by their actions and words. Nevertheless, these small communities do not lose sight of the fact that, in order to shine forth from without, joy must reign from within. Friendship towards all and caring for one another, therefore, constitute the foundations of the Conferences of St. Vincent.

## **MEMBER ROLE DESCRIPTION**

### **SSVP National Council of Canada**

#### **Overview**

Members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul provide service to the poor and others in need, as a result of life's challenges. This ministry is about giving of yourself and allows you to both answer God's call to service and to respond to needs within our immediate or wider community. Although home visitations have traditionally represented the core work of the members, Vincentians and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul continue to respond to new needs and realities. ("No work of charity is foreign to the Society", International Rule article 1.3)

#### **Mandatory Activities / Responsibilities:**

The Vincentian is a member of a Conference (generally parish-based) and, as such, commitments include:

- Serving those in need through activities as determined by the local Conference. These activities currently may include home visitations, a Christmas Hamper program, food drives on a regular basis and Sharing Sundays during Lent and Advent;
- Actively and regularly participating in the activities of the Society, according to the principles set forth in the Canadian Rule, and faithfully attending the meetings of the Conference;
- Contributing to the spirituality of members, simplicity and Christian joy which are the hallmark of Conference meetings. Each member being an active participant in the process of collectively striving to improve services to those in need;
- Responding to the need for involvement on various committees, or, in an Executive position, as your talents and interests lead you;
- Meeting and continuing to abide by the National Council policies and procedures of the Society in Canada, as well as local policy and practices as approved by the Conference or Council.

#### **Qualifications:**

- 18 years of age or older (unless approved in certain circumstances with regards to recruitment and training of youth);
- Any persons 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 Canadian Statutes, the

Rule and the Mission and Values of the Society in Canada, may become members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

- Successful completion of all elements of the Screening procedures for all members.

### **Personal Traits and Qualities:**

- A deep desire to develop one's own spirituality, serve the poor, as well as others in need, and to commit some of your time, talents and self to this ministry;
- The ability and the commitment to see Christ in those whom you will serve;
- A genuine spirit of humility and generosity;
- A deep sensitivity to, and respect for the person and his or her range of needs;
- A sense of humour, especially about yourself;

### **Orientation and Training:**

Completion of an orientation program for new members and mentoring by experienced Vincentian;

- Familiarity with the Canadian Statutes and Rule;
- Commit to ongoing training, as available.

### **Client Group:**

People with a range of needs will welcome or seek out the assistance of the Society. Some will require financial or material assistance, others a compassionate ear or some advice. Assistance will usually be provided through home visitations. In other cases, those in need might receive support and assistance at another appropriate location, such as the church hall.

### **Support, Supervision and Evaluation:**

The most substantive support and supervision is provided by the president and other members of the Conference. It is through attendance at regular meetings, sharing of experiences and expertise as related to the cases of those served, that member is better able to self-evaluate. Throughout this process as well, the group is also better able to assist and guide the member.

When, in the opinion of the Conference president and members, a member is not providing appropriate service to those in need, or is behaving contrary to the principles of the Rule in spite of efforts to address the concern, the President of the Conference will address the issue according to National Council policy and procedure (ADM 003, FIN 002, ADM-PR 003).

**Length of Appointment:**

A person may remain a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul as long as he or she continues to be a member in good standing with a Conference. He or she must always abide by the requirements for membership including screening and renewal procedures and adherence to the principles of the Rule, the Mission and values of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Canada and its statutes.

**Benefits and Working Conditions:**

You are provided with the opportunity to answer Christ's call to serve and to respond to the need of the less fortunate. In order to do so, it will be necessary for you to be available to visit homes as the need arises, to attend regular meetings and to assist in other ways. You, as a Christian volunteer, must be prepared to be generous with your time, talents and compassion.

**Screening Measures:**

Before becoming a full member, each candidate must:

- Submit a completed Volunteer Information Form.
- Provide three references.
- Submit an appropriate Police Records Check report.
- Successfully complete the interview process.
- Read and sign the Code of Pastoral Conduct Accountability for Volunteers Agreement.
- Complete the Presidium online Safe Training modules.

**SAINT MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE GUIDELINES**  
**Saint Vincent de Paul Society (SSVP)**

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is comprised of Vincentians working together in the joy of helping the poor. The SSVP provides an emergency service and is not an income support agency. Our primary area of assistance is in lovingly, graciously and respectfully packing a food hamper and visiting with our friends to deliver it. We want clients to be on the road to self-sufficiency and to take responsibility for managing their incomes to the best of their ability.

Our financial resources are donated by the people of St. Michael's parish in order to help those who are facing a personal emergency. All of our members, including the board of directors, are unpaid volunteers. Our conference is aggregated and has a GST number.

The biggest project the St. Michael's Conference runs and funds is the Christmas Hamper Program. Throughout the year, our members conduct home visits to those in need.

**Home Visit Information**

- Calls for assistance from people within our parish boundary come through the church office at 249-0423. Our own line is 249-0423 (ext. 122). Every SSVP conference has a designated boundary.
- The SSVP *Phone Coordinator* daily retrieves the calls left on our SSVP phone line and assigns a primary *Home Visitor* to do the call.
- *Home Visitors*
  - *Home Visitors* ALWAYS work in pairs (there is no problem with more than 2 *Home Visitors* to a call).
  - *Primary Home Visitors* (one who has been on a minimum of 3 calls and is comfortable with the responsibility) are paired up with a *Secondary Home Visitor* (usually a new member).
  - *New Client*: As availability permitted, the first *Home Visitors* to visit a new client will be the SSVP contacts for any future dealings with this client.
  - *Previous Client*: For clients that we've helped before, the original *Home Visitors* that had initially worked with this client would be called.
- At the end of the month, our president prepares a report summarizing all hamper deliveries carried out for that particular month.

## Circumstances of Clients

The circumstances of all our clients are unique. Sometimes they need help to pay bills in order to avoid eviction, having the lights or gas turned off, or having their phones disconnected. Other needs may be damage deposits, new glasses, medications, or bus passes to enable a client to attend a job interview or job. Sometimes transition between welfare and student finance or a first paycheque can leave people in a tight spot. For many such clients, one simple call for help is all we receive. For others, the problems may run much deeper. Lack of literacy skills can compound the problems clients have in seeking employment. We commonly come across lack of cooking skills also. Such problems increase the cost of living for clients who come to depend on processed or prepared foods. In some families, alcoholism or other addictions compound existing problems. Other clients yet just become overwhelmed by circumstances such as, sickness, poverty, unemployment, the stress of being a single parent, abusive relationships, or child custody battles. Sometimes what our clients are most in need of is someone to talk to, someone who will listen and just be there.



Our mission is to reach out in great love to all that call on us for help. Though we do need to determine if needs are legitimate and the requests are genuine, we are called to be non-judgmental. Most importantly, we are called to pray for those we serve.

## Home Visitor Responsibilities and Acknowledgments

- It is imperative that you notify the *Phone Coordinator* if you are going away or if you are ill and are unable to receive calls for a home visit.
- It is also important that you voice any concerns regarding a client or a home visit to the president/vice president or bring up the case for discussion at monthly meeting.
- **“Once a Vincentian, always a Vincentian”**; whether you are an active member or not!
- You are required to attend a SSVP meeting once per month on the last Tuesday of the month, excluding December, July and August.
- Be familiar with the *Rules and Statutes* found in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul book.
- "Never be condescending, treat everyone with equal kindness, make real friends with the poor" (Romans 12:16).



## How to Do a Home Visit

- The *Coordinator* will have already established the client's basic need and will then phone the *Primary* to carry out the home visit. The *Primary* will phone their home visitor partner to discuss availability to do the home visit.
- The *Primary* will phone the client to arrange for them to be home for the visit and food delivery, if that is what is needed. If the client does not have a phone, it may be necessary to stop at the client's home to set up a time, or have them leave a message at the church office telephone regarding availability.
- Arrange to meet your home visit partner at the larder.
- Prepare and pack the hamper generously and do not forget to document it in the log book located in the SSVP office.
- Say a prayer prior to the visit.
- Ring the doorbell or knock BEFORE bringing groceries to the door. If a client is not at home, do not leave a hamper on the doorsteps or with a neighbour. Return it to the larder, unpack the contents, phone the *Coordinator* and document the missed visit in the record book.
- On the first call to each clients home, an informal assessment should be done. The real needs/lack of need will be determined on subsequent visits. Sometimes clients who have sufficient income lack the ability to budget. Upon subsequent calls, a budget plan may be discussed and drawn up for them. It is also important to determine if the client is receiving all their entitlements (e.g. Canada Child Benefit, GST rebate, etc.). If necessary, we refer them to other organizations that may be able to also help.
- The clients CONFIDENTIALITY is **always** of utmost importance. The clients permission is required if other agencies are to be contacted regarding their needs.
- If it is decided by the home visitor team that a client has sufficient income and no particular circumstances that lead us to believe they should be helped, then the home visitors will tell the client of this decision (realizing that if circumstances change, we may help them at a future date). If a client is discovered to be miss-representing themselves or their circumstances, the home visitors may decide to put a client on a terminated list in which case they will no longer be offered assistance.



- IF YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE with any situation, leave immediately and notify the president / vice president.
- After the home visit, finish documenting the remainder of the visit details in the client's file.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is dedicated to helping those less fortunate. With essential care and guidance, struggling families and individuals can build self-confidence and positive opportunity.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul helps people replace a sense of despair with a sense of dignity.



St. Vincent de Paul  
(1581-1660)

## Home Visitations

- **As a Vincentian we offer gifts of charity to those in need.**

We do this on a person to person basis in their homes. Each person is a unique individual. The greatest gift we offer them is the gift of time; listening to their story and bringing them the compassion of Jesus. We need prayer and support for these visits. We never judge and are patient with their weaknesses and failures. We help them make better choices in a non threatening way, as one would for a friend. For, in Jesus' name, we are a friend of the poor. Never forget Jesus' role as servant at the last supper. We are the servant, they are the master. We must be prepared to symbolically (if not physically) wash the feet of each person as servant.

We do home visits promptly and regularly. We must follow up, even if they do not call back. Follow up your visit with a call to make sure things are okay. We are generous with our time, talent, and resources. We support one another in our mission.

- **A spirit of humility and cordiality characterizes Vincentians.**

We treat one another and those whom we serve with respect and friendship. We do not look for recognition but are self-effacing and acknowledge God as the source of all goodness. In the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, "Humility

does not consist in leaving good undone... It consists in...attributing to God... the good which God accomplishes through one. The humble person is not afraid to do and dare in God's cause..."

- **Vincentian home visitors have certain abilities.**

These gifts from God include the ability to listen and observe. When you visit, listen for what is not being said. If you are going to heal a hurt, you must listen for clues. They may not always be evident. You must be attentive to the story teller. You must enter into the feelings of another and to move at the pace of the person in need.

- **Vincentians do not judge.**

The best advice for a home visitor is to be free from bias and prejudice and be accepting of the people as they are. We try to understand and help others to look at their situation for ways that they can make some changes. It may not be in our time, we must meet them at their level. We can't expect others to be like us. If they were like us, there would be no need for our work. The world would be perfect, right? Wrong!!! Examine that thought and pray. If this is what you think, then home visiting may be the wrong role for you. It is also perfectly wise to recognize when personalities are clashing. You may not be the best home visitor for a specific person. Pray for discernment.

- **Typically Home visitations have the following characteristics:**

- Once the call for assistance is received it should be responded to within 24 hours.
- Familiarize yourself with the client history.
- The main client's records should never leave your office because of the confidential nature of our work.
- The home visitor folder might contain client sheet and any resource material needed.
- The two Vincentians say a prayer before the visit.
- The Vincentians will treat those we serve with dignity, respect, and joy.

- **All client information will remain confidential.**

## **Whom do we Serve?**

We are called to serve all those in need. There are no boundaries, the only requirement is need. No work of charity is foreign to the Society. These are all stock phrases, but what do they mean.

- **We are here to serve the needy not the greedy.**

There comes a time when you may have to do an evaluation on those you serve. This is a Conference decision and is not the rule of thumb. Many Conferences do this to protect their resources for those that may need more. Guidelines can be set. If someone is in need they should be served, even if they have abused before. We are called to meet their needs. These situations have to be talked about, prayed about and decided by the Conference. If people are going hungry and we know them to be abusers, we must still bring them food. We may do it differently, by bringing a cooked meal to the door and prepared lunches for the children, or any other creative method you come up with, but we continue to serve Christ who is hungry.

- **There are no boundaries the only requirement is need.**

Of course we sometimes have boundaries within our area of service. This is necessary to avoid duplication. The boundaries here refer to service. We may be called to provide work boots for a person beginning a job. We may need to provide transportation for someone to return to their home city. In fact this has been done across Canada where a relay was set up to help a family travel from Vancouver to Halifax to be home after tragedy struck her family. We may even be called upon to help someone pay their fines so that they may go to work. Our ultimate goal is to help people out of their poverty and they sometimes need a hand out to give a hand up. The ways to help people are limitless.

We are not enablers, but we look for a variety of ways that those in need of direction can help themselves with a little kick start from us. Home visiting will soon teach you how you can help and where you are needed. Many times, Vincentians need to give of themselves to be a mother or father figure to a single mom who has been abandoned by her parents. Sometimes we just need to be a friend, someone to listen to the story. If we carry groceries, visit the sick, lonely, imprisoned, drive people for food, groceries, jobs, appointments or help them move, providing furniture and space. Whatever we are called to do and whatever we are able to do is the work of a Vincentian.



- **No work of charity is foreign.**

This is the same vein as the above paragraph. Some of the most unusual stories I have heard, I will share. The most dramatic was a case of sitting with a girl who was planning suicide. Listening to her story, one would wonder if they would not do the same. This young 20 year old had spent a life of physical and sexual abuse. She was working the streets as a prostitute and had just found out that her grandfather, who had been sexually abusing her, was actually her father. She did not want to live. Two Vincentian women attended to her. She did not trust men. These Vincentians helped her get into job training, befriended her by

taking her to movies, going on walks and just hanging out. The first night they had no time clock they sat with her through the night. They took her to the hospital and one of them sat in the hospital all night. She was truly serving Christ.

Another young mother (17) with a four year old boy needed help in parenting, a Vincentian team went to visit and the man became a grandfather figure, teaching the boy to throw a ball, telling him stories, playing games with him, teasing, joking, and teaching him to pray. The woman taught the young mom how to care for her child. She gave her recipes. This young girl was only 13 when her child was born and the victim of rape, abandoned by her family. She needed family. The two Vincentians were able to meet that need. The mother figure was present to Christ as they cooked together and did mother daughter things.

Taking an older person whose spouse died without insurance, putting her in computer training, taking her for a job interview and providing a wardrobe for her new job and new life is another Vincentian act of Charity. They didn't say why, or talk about poor planning. They taught the woman how to cope with paying a few dollars for a course with the help from EI and brining her clothes to wear for a job interview. They even sat and pretended they were the interviewers so that she would be more relaxed at the interview. This was servicing Christ.

Sitting in prison, listening to the story of a young person, praying with him and assuring him that his family was well and that he need not worry about them, is another role. . Sometimes Vincentians are just listening to his anger against God and against all human kind because of upbringing or deception of trusted people and sometimes just because of his lack of understanding or mostly lack of God. These Vincentians are visiting Christ in jail.

- **Vincentian Charity is smiling so wide it hurts.**

Smiling so that the person you are helping will forgive you for their poverty. Praying for the people we serve. Each person is Christ asking for help and each person is a prayer. Celebrate and bless what God puts before you.

### **Meet New Needs As They Arise**

Programs may not exist for some of the needs we encounter. This is where Vincentians are challenged to have some vision and foresight. It may be up to us to create the alternatives that will help. We are a versatile and open-minded Society and we exist to help others to the best of our ability. Building soup kitchens, opening furniture and clothing stores and building housing units are

all part of the history of the Society. When we can do this, we work together so that we may serve Christ, better.

**Social Justice:** The voice of the poor is not always heard in our society. There are times when we may have to speak out against the injustices that we see hurting the people we serve. For example: large profitable corporations cutting off necessary services to the poor with little or no compassion; governments slashing budgets to the poor; high cost housing; gambling and other addictions and; no adequate legislation to protect the poor. We are non partisan and we do not attack governments or individual politicians, but it is our duty to make them aware of the poor in an honest, non threatening way.

With reference to Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the preamble to the text of the Rule states, "**Once they had made personal contact with the poor, they saw that charity is inseparable from the demands of justice. To the best of their ability, they claimed justice for the poor.**" During these difficult economic times, we too must reflect on the demands of justice.

- **Assessing Needs**

When people call the Parish looking for assistance, it is essential that a good system is in place whereby callers' needs are met within a reasonable amount of time and they are treated with dignity and respect. If Parish staff answers the phone, make sure that they handle the calls in a manner that reflects the Society's desire to assist people in need. It is better if a member of the Society can answer the phone at specific times; in this way, we are properly represented from the first contact with the person who is in need. It is also essential that calls are properly referred to the duty Vincentians so the response time is kept to a minimum. Callers should be told when they will be contacted so that they do not have to impatiently wait for us to get to them. Some Conferences use cell phones and pass the cell phone to Vincentians who are able to take the calls. This works well and often discounts can be negotiated through many of the cell companies.



- **Visitation**

The visitation of local people in their homes is the fundamental work of the Society. They may be in need of food, clothing, furniture, or other emergency assistance, advice or friendship and a listening ear. **Members always visit in pairs** to help people overcome their difficulties by practical assistance and encouragement.

Obviously friendship is only achieved after a number of visits are made on a regular basis. This is your ultimate goal. Some help is only needed once; but there should always be more than one visit, or a follow up phone call.

This is what you would do for a friend if tragedy struck them. You would call and say how can I help and once the help is given you would call them to see how they are doing.

*"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing: And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me'". (Matt. 25:37).*

### • Practical Visitation Suggestions:

Know the purpose of the visit:

- To be friendly and listen.
- To provide emergency help.
- To acquire needed information.



Friendly Visits:

- Develop a warm and natural relationship.
- Chat about ordinary things; avoid controversial or depressing topics
- Be a good listener; allow a person to talk about things that are important to them.
- Be kind and gentle.
- Take the time needed; don't rush, but don't over stay your welcome either (generally 15 - 20 minutes on the first visit, but there is no set time, you must be the judge.)
- Encourage development of hobbies.
- Encourage positive self-image (affirm and encourage).
- Share a little of yourself.
- Admire and notice achievements or special items in the home (be positive)
- Stay positive, if you anticipate fraud, laziness or abuse, that is all you will see; bring hope not despair to your callers.

### Providing Emergency Assistance

Providing Emergency assistance is our first response. But it doesn't end there. Our main goal is to lift others out of poverty.

When coming into someone's home remember to understand your own feelings toward the situation. Examine yourself by asking these questions:

- Can I accept people with addictions?
- Can I accept healthy people not trying to help themselves?
- Can I accept this people living in abusive situations?
- Am I willing to understand why the person acts the way they do?
- Can I accept the disorder and confusion in the home?

Once you understand yourself and know that you can put your own feelings aside you are ready to provide better service. Negative judgment will show through and this will not help anyone. Now you are ready to introduce yourself to your new friend, Jesus. "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a member of St. Vincent de Paul from (your local parish) and I am interested in talking with you about your needs and concerns. Be relaxed, be natural, maintain eye contact and follow what the person is saying. Do this in a conversational way. You are not drilling them. You are there to see if you can help. Be careful of offering help too quickly, listen, and try to understand the person you are visiting and what is causing the problem. Observe and listen, you will then hear the needs. Be empathetic. You are ready.

### **Guidelines for the Coordinator**

**First:** The calls from our friends the poor are usually received at the office. They may also be received by voice mail. The Dispatcher then receives the calls, (usually one or two share this job).

**Second:** The dispatcher will get the name and phone number and then will call the Coordinator.

**Third:** If the friend in need is new, the following procedure can be used:

- a) Coordinator will phone the friend at the individual's earliest convenience.
- b) Obtain the following information from the friend in need:
  - Full name.
  - Number in household, their names, and ages.
  - Address including apartment number and name of building if applicable.
  - Any further information needed. (Are they working? On assistance?)
  - What kind of help they need.
  - If the help is for food, determine size of hamper. Do they need food for 2 weeks, a couple of days, etc. Do they have food allergies or in need of special foods.

If our friend is not new, the following procedure can be used:



- a) Coordinator will phone the friend in need at the individual's earliest convenience.
- b) Notify the friend that someone will be giving them a call that day or the next to let them know when they will be coming.
- c) Ask the friend if they know when the last visit was made. If an emergency hamper is needed, find out details of amounts and special needs.

**Fourth:** The Coordinator will then:

- a) Call one of the Primary Home Visitors of SSVP to visit the new family at their earliest convenience.
- b) Give the Vincentian the friend's name, phone number and address and have them call the friend in need at their earliest convenience. If you know the name of the Vincentian that visited the friend before, that is the best call to make. If they are not available, then call an alternate.
- c) The visiting Vincentians decide if groceries are to be taken and what other help may be needed and acts. They would also conduct an interview with new families and make them feel welcome and loved by the Society.

**Fifth:** Vincentian workers, friends of those in need, record all information on the friend. Use the form provided. Please note the gift certificate number if one is given. This should include the amount of rent paid or utilities, etc. Make sure your visit is non-threatening and a positive experience for our friend in need.

## **Addressing Needs**

Once the need of the caller has been determined, it is now time to address those needs. Together with your visiting partner, you must decide the best way to help. Pray for discernment. Most visits are simple, the needs may be simple; food, clothing, bus fare, etc. Others may be more complicated, require more time, large financial assistance or professional help. After assessing this, you can now address the needs.

## **Providing Emergency Assistance**

- Understand your own feelings toward situations in which you will find yourself. Do you have difficulty accepting people with addictions or people who do not try to help themselves? Try to understand why a person acts the way they do and this will help you to provide better service. Remember, you are the servant, they are the master. A negative judgment will show through and this will not help anyone. If you cannot overcome your feelings, remove yourself and assign another Vincentian visitor.

- Begin by introducing yourself. "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is my partner \_\_\_\_\_, and we are members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in (Parish name). We are here to help. May we come in and talk to you about your needs."
- Be relaxed, maintain eye contact for some of the visit, follow what the person is saying.
- Do not offer help too quickly. Listen and try to understand the person you are visiting. What is causing the problem? Observe, listen and let the caller talk first. Be empathetic. Let the person know you understand what they are experiencing. Do not be condescending.
- Try to help the person focus by asking questions aimed at assisting the person understand their difficulty. We are not gathering this information for our benefit, but to help the person out of their current misery and to help them problem solve.
- Use open ended questions which give room for the person to express themselves. For example: "What brought you to call us today? Can you tell me more about this? Can you give an example? How has this made you feel?"
- Keep interjections to a minimum. Nod your head, and ask how the person feels and only ask questions for clarification. Let the other person open up and do the talking.
- Know what you can and cannot do for the caller. You do not have to do everything for the person yourself (in many cases this would not be wise). It is better to know so they can call for appropriate assistance. There are many agencies that can meet any number of problems, do not duplicate their services. A good home visitor is knowledgeable about community resources and alternatives. Most of us are not professional counsellors or social workers. It is very important that we know our limits and not to go beyond them. We must refer cases to the appropriate services required. Your role may be advocate and friend.
- Be attentive to the following basic human needs:
  - To be treated with dignity and respect.
  - To be treated as an individual, not lumped as a statistic.
  - To express emotions.
  - To be accepted and not judged.
  - To be understood.
  - To make choices.
  - Privacy.

### **Role of the home visiting team:**

- Try to help the person focus on the problem to be worked on.
- Focus on the needs of the person served.
- Trust that a person can be helped, even in a small measure.
- Try to understand the behaviour(s) you encounter;
- Repeat back to the person what you have heard them tell you. Make sure all is understood.
- Make them feel good about themselves. Reassure them.
- Do not do things for our friends that they can do for themselves. Encourage them to help themselves and offer any necessary support for them to carry through with the best course of action.
- Remember, sometimes the friends we go to help, have reached their bottom rung on the ladder and now have a fear of never climbing up again. Try to imagine what it feels like to lose all hope.
- Keep all information **strictly confidential**. It is never to be shared outside of the Society.
- See sections on Assessment and Conference Resources for community interaction

### **Acquiring Information**

- We do not acquire information for its own sake, but rather to provide the most appropriate assistance or alternatives that will benefit our friends.
- Ask, "How can we be of assistance?" «Would you like to tell us about your problem."
- Listen to the facts as they are presented.
- Do not write notes, remember what was said. The written information is taken on the call in and you can fill in the notes later.
- Be cautious in your approach. Explain the reason for asking any questions and always leave the freedom to choose whether or not to answer.

- Keep some of your questions on a personal level. Try to show you are interested in them, not just their problem.
- Try to accomplish the purpose of the visit.
- Repeat what you have heard to the friend.
- Offer alternatives, options. Be positive. If you are unable to help, be up front. Do not raise their hopes if you cannot carry through. Let them know your plans; if you can help a little, if you need to get approval for an expenditure, etc. Keep them informed.
- Make plans for the next step and a follow up visit or call.

### **Assessing and Addressing the Needs of our Friends on the Home Visit**

While the preceding may sound like a page from a Social Worker's Handbook it should be tempered with the Vincentian Spirit. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is distinctly different from Government assisted agencies. When we visit the poor, it is because they are our sisters and brothers and they are hurting, we actually visit Christ who is in the poor, as stated in our Mission Statement. We want to be with them in their troubles. We want to help them out of their troubles. In them we see the suffering Christ. In every visit we must not lose sight of that.

While the first visit is very important in the assessment process, it should be conducted by the two Vincentians in a non invasive manner. The information received should be recorded quickly for future reference. On your **first visit** explain the Society and its works of Charity. It is fair to let the friends know the limitations as well.

There is no point in giving false hope. Let them know there will be follow up visits to see how they are doing. Talk to them about possible budget planning and financial restrictions, if applicable to this visit.

On the **second visit** gather a little more information on income and if help is received from other agencies. You may also want to give them a list of agencies that can also help them. Of course it is preferable for the initial two Vincentians to make the second visit. Although you are gathering important information and personal information you must keep it conversational. Ask how the children are doing in school. How is work going? How is the injury coming along? When you leave the home, complete a visitation card on your impressions (gut feeling) of the visit and the people. Record any information relating to particular problems. All relevant information should be recorded on the cards. You can also keep personal records such as, mother likes angels, father likes sports, son

collects hockey cards and daughter loves Barbie, baby likes Thomas the Engine. In this way you can include a little treat on your next visit if funds permit.

By the **third visit** you should be deciding whether this is going to be long term assistance. What is the cause of it? Should other agencies be called? This is when your advocacy role kicks in.

Other Considerations for long term assistance:

- Has the person been calling and if so, how often?
- Is there anything else that can be offered to this person? (furniture, budgeting course, advocacy, job search, training)
- How much can the Conference give at this time?
- Calls should be limited per evening to allow for this assessment time. Four calls would be a maximum, if you want to keep each call fresh and be fair in your assessment.



It is important that we as Vincentians have a clear vision of what it is we are doing and trying to accomplish. There are a number of questions that we must constantly ask ourselves in the course of carrying out our daily ministry.

- What resources does the conference have at this time?
- Are we just another "social agency" or traveling food bank, handing out money and food or vouchers?
- Are we seen as just another agency?
- How do we see ourselves?
- Do we have more to offer than money or food vouchers?
- Is there a better way to execute real change given our resources?
- Are we helping, or are we contributing?

### • **Regular Visits**

Individuals or families that call SSVP for help monthly or regularly in less than a six month period. We know that there will always be poor among us. Sometimes, for many different reasons, we find people who are totally dependent on others and cannot help themselves. Although we will try to help the up from their poverty, the reality is that we will have people who need help on a very regular basis. In many cases we are their survival.

### • **Periodic Visits**

Individuals or families that have not called SSVP for help in the last six month period and or only call a maximum of 2-4 times per year. These are still regular,

but not dependent totally on us. Sometimes special expenses, like school start-up, car insurance or health problems, put a dent in the budget and they need help occasionally. More than likely they will be on your Christmas list.

- **Special Needs Visits**

Individuals who have one or more of the following unique problems: physical or mental disability; physical or mental abuse in the home; shut ins; trauma of divorce, death, or other experiences; medical concerns; legal complications, with themselves or family members; unsafe environments; homelessness, eviction; disaster such as flood, fire; drug or alcohol abuse addiction; child abuse, These are example of the types of problems that require special attention by SSVP and they often cannot have advance planning.

These special needs' visits need assessment and follow up just as our regular calls do. You may need special help, such as an interpreter, signer, etc. Each situation should be carefully looked at and treated in the most practical way. If other agencies are involved you may want to network with them so that together you may serve the person better. You can be a friend, but do not try to solve a serious problem with armchair psychiatry. It is better to work with the professionals.

There are many people who do not fit into these slots and boxes. Each Conference and Vincentian Home Visitor has to decide. These are just guidelines. Prayer is your number one weapon, friend, and support. We must take the Holy Spirit with us to every visit and assessment.

### **Assessment - Conference Budgeting**

Meetings and reports of visitations are important at the Conference level. The two visiting Vincentians can give their reports and recommendations for assistance.

It is becoming more apparent that many of our "problems" relating to Assessment stem from a lack of budgeting on the part of the Conference. The following suggestions would make conferences more responsible for at least some of the funds required, making assessment a reality:

- Conferences are required to raise a certain percentage of their operating funds. If a conference cannot meet this goal, a twinning program should be established. Conferences cannot spend money they do not have. Money from twinning goes through Particular Council or through Western Regional Council for isolated conferences.

- Particular Council's transfers will be limited to planned budget maximums. Funds to conferences are transferred on emergency basis, except in Councils who have a larger budgeted amount. The conferences' budgets will determine Particular Council's budget.
- Conferences should present a budget to Particular at the start of the year. This is to establish what the Conference needs are. The budget will be based on the previous year's requirements and will include a small percentage for increase in areas of high needs.

Sharing this budgetary information at the Particular Council level helps us to help each other. It can be seen at a glance the high needs' areas and high income areas. When this information is shared, we can also share our resources so that we are helping the poor, wherever they are.

### **Assessing and Addressing the Needs For Rental Assistance**

Rental Assistance, like the high price of gas can be all consuming. It is necessary to address this need and you as a Conference should address guidelines for paying damage deposits and rent.

As always the first thing is that you must have the resources. You cannot give what you do not have. So know what your budget is and your income. It is also okay to decide on a case to case basis rather than a monthly or yearly basis, because sometime we have more money than at other times.

#### **• Establish Priorities**

- Single with children, single or married fleeing from abuse.
- Married with children - health problems - loss of job etc.
- Single woman - no kids.
- Single man - no kids.

The above are generally in a priority order, but you have to establish this or something else which suits your community. Everyone can get hit with an emergency. Evaluate each case with prayer. Sometimes losing a job suddenly leaves a person drained, emotionally and financially. They may not fit into the above criteria, but upon visiting you decide the need should be met. That should always take precedent as God speaks through our hearts, if we let Him and take the time to discern.

#### **• Information to Help you Decide**

- Why is there a need? (injury, loss of job, fleeing from danger, unexpected expenses).

- Is it short term? (What will they do next month?)
- Are they living within their means? (Do we need to find a cheaper place?).
- Can they help with any portion of the rent or deposit?

The above are samples and you may have more to add. You should always check if they will be okay the following month. If not, then an alternative solution must be found as you cannot keep someone supplied with rent on an ongoing basis. Also, if it is unexpected expenses, it may be more prudent to pay the unexpected expense, even if it is more. This is for two reasons. One is that it is a one time expense and two is the sense that we can let our rent go because SSVF will pay for it. We serve the emergency situation whenever possible. If the furnace breaks down and needs repair, we may have someone who will fix it, or the car or other emergencies. It is easier to get someone to help in those cases than to pay rent.

On the rare occasion, you may want to subsidize a rent in an extreme case of illness, accident or unusual circumstances. This should be weighed by the Conference and made clear to Vincentians that it is unusual and requires consensus. I can site one such case I was involved in. During a housing crisis and increased rents a young single cancer patient was put on a wait list for subsidized housing and would be forced to move. She was terminal and we decided to subsidize her rental increase until she no longer needed it.

- **How Much do We Pay?**

There of course is no rule on how much you should pay, but a good rule of thumb is one third to one half. You should attempt to have our friend the poor come up with a portion and try to collaborate with another agency, even social services if applicable.

You should also set a maximum amount based on your resources. In high rental areas of our area that amount can be \$1000.00 and in rare cases more. I hesitate to put an amount because things change, up and down. So set your common fee which could be to a maximum of 2/3 of the going rent in your area or any portions up to the maximum rent cost.

- **Rental Agreements ~ Rental or Deposit Recoveries**

We as a society do not try to recover monies given to the poor. We do of course accept donations. So if they do give the rent back, make sure they get a tax receipt. We give freely without expecting re-payment. (Based on Scripture, Deuteronomy chapter10).

Some Conferences have arranged for repayment and they have not met with success.



Other Conferences have made agreements with property owners for recovery of damage deposits and have had better success. This is usually done with a letter asking for the damage deposit to be given to the conference when the person moves.

You can also negotiate with the landlord to have the renter pay a portion of what they owe each month in addition to their rent in an effort to make them responsible. Perhaps they could add an additional \$20.00 a month until their back rent is paid. Anything that allows the poor we serve to keep their dignity. Remember it is Christ we are serving.

- **Other Solutions**

We are here to serve the needy and not the greedy. We also do not want to be enablers. We often do not know why someone falls on bad times, but we know we must catch them. We should try to budget with them so that they do not face this problem next month. Once we do a budget with them, we can get a clearer picture of why they can't meet their responsibilities. If their "outgo" is greater than their "income", then we have a problem and we may have to help that person find more reasonable lodging. This can be traumatic, but necessary for the well being of our friend.

We can get help from Social Services, Red Cross, Salvation Army and other agencies and should try to form partnerships with them. Use all the resources available to you. Work with the friend to help them to help themselves.

Remember giving them a clean slate, free from debt which can be overwhelming could be the start of a whole new page or even a chapter in their book of life.

Pray through the whole process. If it is not the other solution, it is the first.

**When we visit the poor we go as Vincentian with the Vincentian Spirit and Spirituality.** We take the Society with us. Know who you are. Our logo is a symbol of love for the poor. The logo is a circle representing the world and the omega a never ending love of God. It contains the fish which is an early symbol of Christianity and in this case represents the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It is also to show that we are fishers of people. The eye of the Fish is the vigilant eye of God seeking out to help the poor and underprivileged in our midst. The colour red in the logo represents the passion of Christ in his love and compassion for us all but especially the poor. The crossing at the tail or a tie-knot represents unity and oneness among members and also in union with the poor. The loop (round circle) signifies the global or worldwide stature of the SSVP, an international Society. This symbol says a lot to us. Wear it proudly.



**Prayers:** This is how you prepare for a home visit and this is how you end a home visit. In fact praying always is the most important activity you can do for those you help. Pray for them in your family, at your dinner table, ask others to pray, keep them in intercessory prayers. Just take a moment during the day to say. Lord help Peter, Mary, Betty or whoever and Lord help me to love them and serve them like you.



Prayer is one of the things that makes us different. If we hold people up in prayer we are truly bringing them into our family. We should acknowledge that prayers are necessary. If Jesus had to pray, why wouldn't we?

**"The street and the stairs will be long and unfriendly, the poor often ungrateful. You will soon find charity a heavy burden, heavier than the jug of soup or the full basket. But you will still be pleasant and smile. Distributing soup and bread is not everything. The rich can do that. The poor are your masters and you will find them terribly exacting masters. So the more unattractive and dirty they are the ruder and unfair they are, the more you must lavish your love upon them. It is only by feeling your love that the poor will forgive you your gifts of bread."** St Vincent de Paul.

## **Apostolate of the Laity**

Wherever there are people in need of ... Food, drink, clothing, housing, employment, education. Wherever men lack the facilities necessary for a truly human life, afflicted with serious distress, illness, suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian Charity should seek them out and find them, console them with great solitude and help them with appropriate relief. The obligation is imposed above all on every prosperous nation and person.

## **Activities and Responsibilities**

Be willing to respond to the need for involvement on committees or on the executive as your talents and interest lead you.

- In order to share the load, Conferences should have full executives. Conferences without complete executives can not perform properly and burn out.
- As members we must continue to abide by the membership requirements and the rule and the rules of the local conference.

We must be willing to set and meet high standards for ourselves and our conferences. Standards such as:

- All calls are answered within hours, not days.
- People are not "Cut off" except in most unusual cases and only after all facts are gathered. It is so hard to judge that we must judge on the side of caution on the client's side. If we are to err, it is better to err on charity's side.
- And we must be able to objectively look at ourselves and our conference and say: How can we serve our clients better?

### **Is Everyone called to be a home visitor?**

We know that each of us has different gifts. It is not easy to go in to someone's home for the first time to visit and even sometimes for the tenth time. A few Conferences have specific home visitors and some have teams for every role. You could have a group:

- Visiting.
- Distributing hampers.
- Doing research.
- Buying the groceries.
- Treasury and fundraising.
- Executives, making quick decisions.
- Education and formation.
- Events within the conference.



What we should be working towards is the ideal Conferences with the above in place; however we are limited to our resources. There are all the road blocks and stop signs, but it is worth achieving. There are Conferences that are overwhelmed with calls. These areas definitely need more workers in their vineyard. We all need to pray for them and of course others. When was the last time you called for people to act as your prayer team? Sometimes when you are on the front lines you are overwhelmed, tired and you feel hopeless. We have to look at what we can do with the resources we have.

### **Qualifications and Personal Traits of a Home Visitor.**

- 18 years or older with exception approved by conference president.

- Screening measures are required due to the vulnerability of our clients. This includes a Volunteer Information Form and a Police Records report.
- As an expression of your faith and beliefs you will have a deep desire to serve the poor and others in need and to commit some of your time and talents to this.
- You must have the ability to see Christ in those whom you serve.
- You must have a genuine spirit of humility and generosity. And rightly so that we do since we are privileged to have the opportunity of serving our fellow man.
- You must have a deep sensitivity to, and respect for, the person and their range of needs.
- A good sense of humour always helps .... Especially about yourself.
- You must be able to use good judgment but not be judgmental.
- Often we aren't quite sure what to do. The simple test is to ask yourself what the donor of the gifts you are bringing would think. The donor gives with a good heart. We are only the stewards privileged to be able to pass this generosity along. If we do what we feel is kind and generous we will never go wrong.
- Finally yet importantly, you must be compassionate, non-judgmental and be willing to recognize what the person needs rather than what they do have.

### **Serving Christ in the Poor**

- We visit the home in pairs offering our gift of charity to those in need. Ideally you would visit with male and female. Jesus sent his disciples out two by two and this action is a National Rule. It gives us an opportunity to see two perspectives on the problem and gives us double the opportunity to find a solution. Four eyes and four ears are better than two.
- We bring them the greatest gift we can give, the gift of ourselves. It takes great courage to make a call for help, so many are overwhelmed at our visit. It should not be clinical. It is a friendly visit with a purpose and we should give the most precious gift of all, our time.
- Approach all visits with dignity! This sometimes is not easy. The road will be long and sometimes the poor are not thankful. We have to remind ourselves

that we are serving Christ, who is in the poor. Treating every person with dignity is the servant serving the Master, our Lord.

- We are not the judge of those we serve. We of course discern in order to lift them from our poverty, but be cautious of our natural human nature to judge and criticize. Always remember we don't know the whole story and we are different because we have walked in different shoes. Leave the judging to God, it is not our job. We are there to bring Christ's love and to try to find a solution.
- Doing Christ's work is really hard when we are alone. We need the Holy Spirit with us to be non judgmental and to visit with someone who appears to have lost all dignity and respect for themselves. It is not easy to serve someone who is bitter and demanding and blames you for their poverty. Think about the words of St. Vincent de Paul. A pretty tall order. Why do I have to be forgiven? Gee, I've just come to help, you are so ungrateful. Well, I won't be helping you again, until you clean up your act. This is not the Vincentian attitude. We need to clothe ourselves in the Holy Spirit, so we can serve as Vincent did and as Ozanam did.
- We, as humans cannot possibly give and love like Jesus without His presence.

## Visitation

- The home visit is the basic reason we are different. We are the only group that continues to do home visits for the purpose of visiting and not just getting information or checking up. This is the fundamental purpose of the Society.
- Of course you know we always visit in pairs. We repeat this often. Ideally it is male and female, but realistically this cannot always happen. The purpose of a home visit is to get to know our friend in need better and to bring them the Gospel by our service and love, you need not even mention the word God (you don't have to if you go in His name.) They will know Him by your love.
- Try to develop a friendship. Now we know that friendships don't just happen they must be developed. Our questions are always non invasive and for the purpose of serving better.
- Follow up is important. Sometimes just a quick call to see how they are doing. This is what a friend would do.
- Keep this family or person in your daily prayers and the prayers of your Conference and Parish.

**Matthew 25:37**

**Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing: And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the King will answer them. "Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me."**

**Tips on Home Visitation:**

- Pray, Pray, Pray! Use any prayer you like but do not attempt to visit without prayer. Pray with your partner. Pray for discernment, patience, and wisdom.
- Know the purpose of your visit. Know the purpose of your visit. Do your homework. Find out all you can ahead of time.
- Minister to our friend's needs, not our own. Stay on the topic of their life as it is their story that needs to be heard. That is not to say that you should not share, but your needs are secondary at this time.
- Relate to them warmly. Be cheerful when you enter, but be aware of their mood, if they are too down, your cheerfulness may be an insult.
- Look around you. Know the physical layout - get oriented - so you feel more at home there.
- Be ready for any sight, smell, or sound. Try not to show alarm or disgust if things are unruly or the home is unkempt. Sometimes the odours are not what you are used to. Look for Jesus always and say a silent prayer.
- Be careful about your own grooming. Look good but not great. Be scent free.
- Greet the friend and introduce yourselves. Introduce yourself as being from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish.
- Sit or stand so that you are easily seen. Position yourself as an equal. When talking, be at their level.
- Remember you are not a professional. Do not give any advice that is of a professional nature (Medical, legal, etc.). It is better to direct them to the professionals. Come armed with phone numbers to give them.
- Don't stay too long, but stay long enough. **Be Careful you don't get too attached.** Generally a normal home visit should not be longer than a half

hour, but would normally be 15 to 20 minutes. Of course this could vary. The first visit should be short and pleasant.

- Remember to provide empathy, not sympathy. Feeling sorry for someone and letting your speech reflect that is very hard to deal with. Being empathetic is rare and very uplifting. Knowing their story is heard with loving ears is part of the healing.
- Discuss ordinary things. Stay clear of controversial, depressing, or alarming topics. Be gentle!
- Be a good listener. Allow them to talk about things that are important to them. Some may make insulting and outrageous comments - be charitable and don't take it personally. Smile and silently pray.
- Wear different and uplifting clothing for each visit. This may be minor, but your clothing sometimes shows your personality and is helpful and stimulating for the people we serve.
- Always maintain confidentiality, it is important for us, and those we visit. No one wants others to know their business.
- Non verbal communication is important. Remember do not cross boundaries. A smile expresses your love and concern. If you are a hugger, ask permission before you hug. Before you touch, know it is safe and acceptable. Be happy with a smile. Never invade their space or comfort zone. **You are there for their good, not yours.**
- Be friendly. Develop a warm and natural conversation. Share a little of yourself.
- Be positive. Admire special achievements or items in the home.
- Stay Positive! If you go into the home with pre conceived negative notions, that is all you will see. Bring hope, not despair.
- Keep the goodbye simple.
- In the car. After leaving, write down notes and continue to pray. If this is done right away together there will be no confusion and your memory will be clearer.

## **No rule for help is written in stone**

### **Assess each visit:**

- You will find other visits that do not fit in these categories. No rule for help is written in stone and no act of charity is foreign to the Society, You can only do what you have the resources for. Always remember that. You need both the human resources and financial resources.
- Treat each one individually. Because you have helped someone in the past with a similar situation does not mean you cannot do so again. An example would be if you have a rule that help for rent is given once, but help can be given again in an unusual situation, like illness or other circumstances. Sometimes using a little more creativity if financial help is needed works. For example pay the rent or utilities, but give it over a period of two or three months so that they are responsible for part of it. You be the judge after each visit.

### **Holy Spirit**

We need to have the fire of the Holy Spirit in us, so that we can share God's greatness as we go and light our world.

### **Summary of Our Mission to Serve**

- As a Vincentian we offer gifts of charity to those in need. We can only offer the gifts we have. Do not make promises we cannot deliver. There is no blank cheque.
- We do home visits promptly and regularly. We try never to put the poor on hold. We often put aside our personal agenda to serve, especially in an emergency.
- Through prayer a spirit of humility and cordiality characterizes Vincentians. We often hear the Vincentian way and there are as many explanations for its meaning as there are Vincentians. Serving Jesus is the simplest answer. The calling is to serve like Jesus. It is our Vocation.
- Vincentian home visitors have certain abilities but are not necessarily professional. Remember we are not professional. Even though we could be in our regular work. In our position as home visitor we are Vincentians and the advice we give should never be professional advice. We should always refer our friends for professional help.



- However, we may have programmes set up that would use our professional skills (tutoring, budgeting etc.) and we can refer to these programmes. We have to make sure we know where the available help is, or find it for them.
- Vincentians do not judge. Never, never. We hear again, "Never, never judge." We constantly need to remind ourselves and pray. We must make discerning based decisions, but no judging.
- Know who we Serve. This is a must. How can we serve if we do not know?

*Go forth and serve the poor in  
justice and charity*

## Office of Readings

### SECOND READING

From a writing by Saint Vincent de Paul, priest  
(Epist. 2546: Correspondance, entretiens, documents, Paris 1922- 1925, 7)

*Serving the poor is to be our first preference*

Even though the poor are often rough and unrefined, we must not judge them from external appearances nor from the mental gifts they seem to have received. On the contrary, if you consider the poor in the light of faith, then you will observe that they are taking the place of the Son of God who chose to be poor. Although in his passion he almost lost the appearance of a man and was considered a fool by the Gentiles and a stumbling block by the Jews, he showed them that his mission was to preach to the poor: He sent me to preach the good news to the poor. We also ought to have this same spirit and imitate Christ's actions, that is, we must take care of the poor, console them, help them, support their cause.

Since Christ willed to be born poor, he chose for himself disciples who were poor. He made himself the servant of the poor and shared their poverty. He went so far as to say that he would consider every deed which either helps or harms the poor as done for or against himself. Since God surely loves the poor, he also loves those who love the poor. For when one person holds another dear, he also includes in his affection anyone who loves or serves the one he loves. 'That is why we hope that God will love us for the sake of the poor. So when we visit the poor and needy, we try to be understanding where they are concerned. We sympathize with them so fully that we can echo Paul's words: I have become all things to all men. Therefore, we must try to be stirred by our neighbours' worries and distress. We must beg God to pour into our hearts sentiments of pity and compassion and to fill them again and again with these dispositions.

It is our duty to prefer the service of the poor to everything else and to offer such service as quickly as possible. If a needy person requires medicine or other help during prayer time, do whatever has to be done with peace of mind. Offer the deed to God as your prayer. Do not become upset or feel guilty because you interrupted your prayer to serve the poor. God is not neglected if you leave him for such service. One of God's works is merely interrupted so that another can be carried out. So when you leave prayer to serve some poor person, remember that this very service is performed for God. Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity. Since she is a noble mistress, we must do whatever she commands. With renewed devotion, then, we must serve the poor, especially outcasts and beggars. They have been given to us as our masters and patrons.

From a Sermon of by Saint Gregory of Niazanzen, Bishop:

*Serve Christ in the poor*

*Blessed are the merciful, because they shall obtain mercy, says the Scripture. Mercy is not the least of the beatitudes. Again: Blessed is he who is considerate to the needy and the poor. Once more: Generous is the man who is merciful and lends. In another place: All day the just man is merciful and lends. Let us lay hold of this blessing, let us earn the name of being considerate, let us be generous. Not even night should interrupt you in your duty. of mercy. Do not say: Come back and I will give you something tomorrow. There should be no delay between your intention and your good deed. Generosity is the only thing that cannot admit of delay.*

*Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the needy and the homeless into your house, with a joyful and eager heart. He who does acts of mercy should do so with cheerfulness. The grace of a good deed is double when it is done with promptness and speed. What is given with a bad grace or against one's will is distasteful and far from praiseworthy.*

When we perform an act of kindness we should rejoice and not be sad about it. *If you undo the shackles and the thongs, says Isaiah, that is, if you do away with miserliness and counting the cost, with hesitation and grumbling, what will be the result? Something great and wonderful! What a marvellous reward there will be. Your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will rise up quickly. Who would not aspire to light, and healing.*

If you think that I have something to say, servants of Christ, his brethren and coheirs, let us visit Christ when ever we may; let us care for him, feed him, clothe him: welcome him, honour him, not only at a meal, as some have done, or by anointing him, as Mary did, or only by lending him a tomb, like Joseph of Arimathaea, or by arranging for his burial, like Nicodemus, who loved Christ half-heartedly, or by giving him gold, frankincense and myrrh, like the Magi before all these others.

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