

Introduction
to
The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
and
The Holy Family Conference in Anchorage
for
Prospective Members

To Begin: Most people readily associate the “Society of Saint Vincent de Paul” (SVdP) with Catholic Charity. But without some knowledge of how SVdP conducts business, things can quickly become confusing the first time a prospective member attends a meeting. This paper is intended to help alleviate initial confusion with basic information on SVdP Structure, Processes and Terminology.

A Vincentian Vocation: Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (or Vincentians) seek to follow Christ through service to those in need. They are men and women who strive to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to individuals in need. They come from all age groups, in every shade of skin color, some are wealthy, some financially poor. But all are blessed with an awareness that our blessings (time, talent or treasure) are to be shared with our brothers and sisters in need.

Membership: There are three types of SVdP Memberships: Active (or Full), Associate and Contributing.

Active (Full) Members are those who participate regularly in prayer life, meetings and charitable activities through personal contact with the poor of the Vincentian Conference or council into which they have been received.

An Active Member accepts the Rule and Statutes of the Society, belongs to the Catholic Church, and is received as a Vincentian Brother or Sister into the Society’s Conference or Council with which he / she is affiliated.

[Admission Process for Active Members](#)

The names of persons proposed for active membership are to be submitted to the President of the Conference or Council concerned. The President will provide information concerning the recommended person to the Conference or Council. If approved, the candidate will be admitted as a member and given a Vincentian welcome at the next meeting. If a prospective member wishes to test their Vincentian vocation, that person may defer for a time formal admission into the Society. A candidate for active membership is afforded a period of training and discernment which includes formation in the essential elements and core values of the Society as well as its Rule.

Before being commissioned as a member, the Conference President or the Spiritual Advisor consults with the candidate to discern readiness for active (full) membership. The Conference

then takes formal action, normally by a resolution, to accept the candidate into active (full) membership.

Associate Members are those affiliated with the Society by formal action of the Conference or Council with which the member will be joined. Associate Members include those who sincerely and publicly accept the Society's Rule but may or may not belong to the Catholic Church and may or may not attend Conference Meetings or engage in the works of the Society on a regular basis. Associate Members are kept informed of the developments and activities of their immediate groupings, as well as the general progress of the Society, particularly in the local area or diocese. They are invited to attend the general meetings and special observances of the Society and to participate in its charitable activities.

Contributing Members are those who regularly or in a substantial way provide in-kind or financial support but who do not engage directly in the Society's work. These members also are invited to the Society's general and festival meetings.

(Worth noting: Pope Gregory XVI approved the Society in 1845; both he and Blessed Pius IX enriched the Society with Indulgences. Members may gain a plenary indulgence on the day of their admission to the Society, and when participating in a Festival Meeting, provided they make their Confession, receive Communion, pray for the intentions of the Pope, and promise to observe faithfully the Rule of the Society.)

Organizational Structure:

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is an International Organization founded by Blessed Frederick Ozanam in Paris, France, in 1833.

The Society was built under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul who spent his life in 16th century France serving the poor.

SVdP "Conferences" are the basic "field" organizations of the Society, are usually parish-based, and are organized under various levels of "Councils," usually covering a larger geographic area. Conferences function as the primary interface with those in need. In the US, Conferences are normally registered within their respective States as non-profit corporations. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Holy Family Conference, in Anchorage, is an Alaska non-profit Corporation.

Efforts of three or four Conferences are normally supported and/or coordinated within local "Councils," typically formed within a Diocese or Archdiocese.

The next level up is the National SVdP Council, headquartered in St. Louis, MO. To keep things manageable, the National Council is broken into eight Regions. Due to the limited size of SVdP Holy Family Conference, it reports directly to the National Council's Western Region.

SVdP Holy Family Conference operates in accordance with the aforementioned "Rule" (and associated Statutes) as the basic document governing the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It is further governed by Statutes of the National Council of the United States and operated in accordance with Corporate Bylaws approved November 18, 2013, as amended, and the Laws of the State of Alaska.

Meetings are normally held on the first and third Monday of each month during which time Members pray and undertake Conference business.

Addressing need: Most (but not all) needs are addressed by a process of investigation and validation. Generally, the process begins with a client calling the SVdP Holy Family Conference phone line and leaving a message, or by referral from a Parish or other organization. Basic information is gathered during this initial contact. Two Vincentians follow up with a home visit to assess overall need and determine whether SVdP is the appropriate source to assist. Every request for assistance, every situation is different. When making calls, Vincentians determine first immediate needs, which frequently involve food, clothing, shelter or similar needs. Material assistance can be given on the basis of the needs determined by the visiting Vincentians. As appropriate, Vincentians follow up attempting to eliminate the underlying cause of distress.

Summary: All Catholics share concern for those lacking basic resources. Such concern may be addressed individually when need is identified, more often need is not recognized or is ignored and suffering continues. SVdP uses an established process to identify and validate need, ensure the right type of assistance is provided, and address underlying issues.

If you feel called to serve the poor as a Vincentian, the process of Formation begins with an application, a background check and an on-line course in recognizing Child Abuse. Formal Acceptance follows a period of training and discernment.