



RECRUITMENT MANUAL

For

VINCENTIAN SERVICE

Strengthening Existing Conferences
Forming New Conferences
Recruiting Young Members

Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Vancouver Island

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Table of Contents

FORWARD	Page 1
INTRODUCTION	Page 2
HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL	Page 4
RESPONSIBILITIES	Page 5
IDENTIFYING NEW VINCENTIANS	Page 6
PULPIT APPEAL FOR NEW MEMBERS	Page 10
BUILDING UP EXISTING CONFERENCES	Page 12
FORMING NEW CONFERENCES	Page 14
First Step -Particular Council Decisions	Page 14
Second Step -Meeting with the Pastor	Page 15
Third Step -Inviting Prospects to the Preliminary Meeting	Page 18
Fourth Step -Preliminary Conference Meeting Agenda	Page 19
Fifth Step -Arranging the First Meetings	Page 21
Sixth Step -The First Meeting	Page 22
Seventh Step The Next Few Meetings	Page 23
RECRUITING YOUNG MEMBERS	Page 25
Young People and the SSVP – A Mutual Need	Page 25
Work for Young Members	Page 27
Talks to Young People	Page 28
ACTION PLANS FOR RECRUITING YOUTH	Page 29
A. Recruiting Young Members for Adult Parish Conferences	Page 29
B. Relationship between Generations in Parish Conferences	Page 30
C. Forming Separate Youth Conferences	Page 30
D. Forming Conferences in Catholic Schools	Page 31
THOUGHTS OF SCHOOL CONFERENCES	Page 34

FORWARD

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was founded by Frederic Ozanam in France in 1883, in the United States in 1845, and in Canada in 1846.

Over the many years of its existence it has survived and flourished because its membership has constantly been renewed by dedicated people desiring to follow in Ozanam's footsteps.

New Conferences have been formed, and within existing Conferences, new members have been added as generation after generation has passed. Today, more than ever, the need to revitalize existing conferences and to start new conferences has never been more urgent. In addition, Vincentians in recent years have made a pronounced effort to bring more youth into the Society, and guidelines and ideas to make this possible and very much needed today.

In 2007 this manual was adopted by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Vancouver Island from the United States version of the manual, "Recruitment Manual for Vincentians Service." (1991) reprinted (2000).

Using this earlier book as a template, the new Canadian "Rule" (2007) and Canadian practices were incorporated into this latest book with the result being a manual that will serve a very important role in continuing the presence of the Society in Canada for many years to come.

Special thanks go to the National Council of the United States of St. Vincent De Paul for their generosity in sharing their manual with the Society on Vancouver Island.

Introduction

Whether forming new Conferences or strengthening existing Conferences, eventually an effort must be made to persuade members of the parish who are not now Vincentians to join the Society. Even strong Conferences must recruit. A healthy Conference will have a slow but steady turnover of membership. Attrition is inevitable because even good Vincentians move out of the parish, become heavily involved in their ministries and have family or work conflicts. New members bring fresh ideas and fresh energy to the Conference and reinforce older members in their commitment.

Unfortunately, some Conferences stagnate. They do not reach out in the spirit of the Rule and invite others to join. They give the impression to the parish community that they are a closed group with admissions by invitation only. Such invitations are rare. When someone does join and they are not welcomed, they become disillusioned and quit, and then they carry their message of discontent convinced that there is not one “out there” with the necessary commitment to become a Vincentian!

If a Conference is open to new members and its works are well known in the parish, new members will be attracted. Little active recruiting is required. But even such Conferences must periodically reach out so that the congregation knows that they are open to new members. They must also reach out to seek diversity within the conference—men and women, young people, members of the various ethnic groupings in the parish. A Conference composed largely of elderly white men cannot easily relate to a client population composed largely of young single mothers. Nor can an English only Conference truly serve the poor in a largely French-speaking community.

Basically there are two approaches to recruiting, whether for a new Conference or an existing one. A **public appeal** attempts to reach a large audience in search of anyone who might be interested in learning more about the Society. Public appeals may be made through pulpit announcements, parish bulletin announcements, talks to parish or school groups, parish open houses, or brochures in a rack. A **personal appeal** is an individual effort to persuade someone to join the Society who has either expressed an interest or who has been identified as a potential Vincentian by the Pastor, another Vincentian, or anyone else. This may be done by a letter to the

prospect, but more often it involves a face-to-face discussion, possibly in the prospect's home, in a prearranged appointment.

A personal appeal is usually more effective, but it requires more effort and is limited in scope. Not all potential Vincentians can be identified by those who make recommendations. Further, relying solely on personal appeals creates the impression of a closed rather than an open Society. Best results are usually obtained by a combination of both public and personal appeals. The public appeal is used to identify those who are interested. These people are then approached on a personal basis in an effort to persuade them to join.

The messages used to persuade people to join the Society are simple and few. Most boil down to the following:

- You will be serving God.
- You will be helping the poor.
- You will be working with a dedicated group of Vincentians.
- You are needed.
- You will be helping yourself to grow spiritually.

Frequently a mere description of the works of the Conference is enough to persuade some people to join. Others may be more susceptible to one of the messages above.

This manual describes action plans for recruitment to form new Conferences, to build up existing Conferences, and to bring youth into the society. It may be used at Central Council, Particular Council, and Conference levels and is designed to be of practical help at all stages of recruitment. The suggestions are based on both common sense and experience. The procedures described have been successful.

The steps for forming a new Conference are presented in considerable detail because they represent a specific plan. Alternative ideas are presented elsewhere in this publication. The key point here is that there should be a specific plan prepared before a campaign is launched to start a new Conference or to recruit additional members for an existing Conference or to bring youth into the Society. After all, if recruiting is to be done at all, it should be done well. We hope that this manual will be useful to that end.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

It is not intended to be read through at one sitting, although that would give a general idea of the contents. It is only of real value when put into action.

Most sections will be useful for discussions and reference immediately before a particular phase is put into action, e.g., "*Meeting with the Pastor.*"

The sections headed "*Central/Particular Council Decisions,*" "*Preliminary Meeting Agenda,*" "*Arranging the First Meeting*" –all of these are intended to be **used at the actual time of action.**

The "*Agenda for Conference Meetings*" is offered for *practical use at every Conference meeting* throughout the life of the Conference. It will be a constant reminder to the Conference President of the essential points and also of possibilities for extending the influence and effectiveness of the Conference in the parish.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibility for forming new Conferences lies with the Particular Council, which must be firmly behind any efforts in this direction.

The responsibility for building up existing conferences lies with every Conference member, especially the Conference President. But conferences that really need building up, those in danger of collapsing altogether, with only two or three members, simply don't have the resources to engage in a major recruitment drive. This is where the Particular Council comes in. It can supply the resources to make a success of the drive. Some Conferences will not ask for help because they think that they will sacrifice their independence. In such cases it is surely the duty of the Particular Council to take the initiative and to approach the Conference President with an offer to help. After all, the ministry of the Society is to the poor and suffering, many of whom will clearly be neglected if the number of active members in the Conference is small.

The responsibility for forming Conferences in Catholic schools also lies with the Particular Council in consultation with the local Conference. The full and active help of the Extension Committee members is needed, if it is to have a reasonable chance of success.

IDENTIFYING NEW VINCENTIANS

The first step in recruiting is that of identifying individuals who may be interested or who may be persuaded to join the Society. In any parish there are probably many potential Vincentians but it is not necessarily easy to identify them. The Church today is increasingly dependent on the laity to carry out functions that in the past were performed by clergy or religious. This fact provides both opportunities and obstacles in recruiting. Opportunities, because the laity is increasingly aware of the responsibilities that they must now shoulder. Obstacles, because in any given parish there are many ministries seeking dedicated lay persons to carry out their works. We must compete!

Many Vincentians are involved in a variety of ministries in their parish. A busy person can be a Vincentian, but there are practical limitations on how much they can be called on to do. Still we must recruit them, for many good leaders come from busy people! But there are also many people in every parish who are not now involved in any ministry or only lightly involved. We need to reach these people too.

This section will discuss several ways for identifying potential Vincentians. Once they have been identified, it will, of course, be necessary to persuade them to actually join the Conference. Later sections of this manual will lay out specific plans for organizing and conducting recruiting campaigns in a variety of situations. Included will be ideas for approaching those who have been identified and persuading them to join. Keep in mind that although plans for the recruiting campaign may mention only one way of identifying potential recruits, any or several of the following methods may be appropriate.

1.Recommendations by the Pastor

In starting new Conferences, the Pastor is the first source for identifying potential recruits. The Pastor will probably know enough people in his parish that he can identify at least a few potential Vincentians. When an existing Conference needs new members, the Pastor may be able to provide some good leads. Anyone who knows that he has been recommended by the Pastor is

likely to listen to the message and may be more likely to join. Perhaps the recruiter and the Pastor can go through the parish roster together and pick out the likely candidates.

There is one drawback to depending on the Pastor for potential recruits. Those he knows well are likely to be heavily involved in other ministries. They may have little leeway to become involved in Vincentian work. Still, they should be pursued.

2. Recommendations by Other Vincentians

The members of an established Conference have friends and acquaintances throughout the parish. They may be able to identify prospects who are not active in other ministries or only lightly involved. Periodically members can be asked to bring in names of potential Vincentians.

3. Parish Census

Many parishes make a periodic effort to update census information on their parishioners. Often this involves filling out a card which provides information about the family. This is an excellent opportunity to ask parishioners to indicate on the card which ministries they are interested in joining.

The Conference President should ensure that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is shown as one of the options on the census cards and should check the cards to ensure that any who have indicated interest are contacted. Similarly, a system should be established so that any new parishioners who indicate an interest in SSVP when they register are promptly contacted.

4. Pulpit Appeal

An open invitation to join the Society of St. Vincent de Paul delivered from the pulpit at the weekend masses is an effective way to reach potential Vincentians who are not known to the Pastor or current members of the Conference. Such an appeal may be used in starting a new Conference or adding members to an existing Conference. It may be used as part of a homily on charity or in the announcements at the end of Mass. When it is presented near the end of Mass, parishioners are more likely to remember it as they leave. The appeal will be most effective if made by a Vincentian with backup comments by the celebrant and repeated at every Mass for the weekend.

The Pastor should be contacted several weeks in advance to arrange for the delivery of the appeal. He should be provided with a draft of the message to be presented as well as an announcement

backing up the appeal to be published in the parish bulletin that same weekend. A common script can then be finalized and Vincentians designated to make the appeal at each Mass.

The message should be short and clear

- Why there is on should be a SSVP Conference in this parish.
- The need for new members.
- An invitation to learn more about the Society.
- Specific instructions for those who are interested in what they must do.

The appeal can be followed up in a variety of ways to obtain the names of interested parishioners. There can be an exhibit in the parish hall following Mass as will be explained below.

Alternatively, Vincentians can be stationed outside the church after Mass to take the names and phone numbers of interested parishioners. Those interested can be invited to a meeting during the coming week. It is a good idea to get the names and phone numbers of those who are interested but cannot make that particular meeting so that they can be contacted later.

A sample of a pulpit appeal for new members of an existing Conference to be presented with the announcements at the end of Mass is attached at the end of this section. This can be modified to appeal to members to start a new Conference and to meet local circumstances.

5. Bulletin Appeals

Appeals published in the parish bulletin can also be used to reach a wide audience of potential Vincentians. They are less effective than pulpit appeals because some people do not read the bulletin and because they lack the human touch of a pulpit appeal. However, many people do read the bulletin, and a well worded statement will reach some who will respond. They are most effective when used as a backup for a pulpit appeal.

The appeal should be typed on a separate sheet and placed as an insert in the bulletin rather than being included in the bulletin announcements. The message should contain the same basic points as spelled out above for a pulpit appeal. The following sample (pages 10 &11) for a pulpit appeal can easily be modified as a bulletin insert, with instructions for those interested to call a Vincentian at a given number, leave their names and phone numbers at the parish office, or attend a meeting on a particular night.

6. Holding an Exhibit

Several Particular Councils have a portable display which can be used by any Conference as the centerpiece of an exhibit to promote recruitment. Some Conferences have made their own photographic displays. The techniques for the exhibit are fairly simple:

- a. The Sunday before, the Priest announces that there will be an exhibit next Sunday in the parish hall or other convenient place. The exhibit will also be announced in the parish bulletin.
- b. On the designated Sunday, a pulpit appeal for SSVP members is made at all Masses, together with an invitation for everyone to visit the exhibit. It has been found that the number of people who attend can be doubled by the simple expedient of the Priest's reminding the congregation again at the end of Mass.
- c. SSVP members stand by the most interesting displays, explaining various points. Members from other Conferences may help staff the exhibit.
- d. A couple of SSVP members should stand by the exit door asking visitors, including teenagers, whether they would like to learn more about SSVP, without commitment.

PULPIT APPEAL FOR NEW MEMBERS

Good morning. My name is _____, and I am a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul here at _____ parish. I asked Father to allow me to speak to you today because our parish Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is in need of additional members to carry out its ministry of assisting the needs of the poor.

The society is a lay Catholic organization which seeks to relieve suffering through person-to-person involvement of its members. Vincentians do many things; they make home visits to families who ask for help, they volunteer in the Society's programs, such as the food bank, soup kitchen, visiting the elderly; they serve on various committees, using their expertise to support the Society's special works. They bring Christ's love to those who are losing hope.

Today in our parish area there are families without food. There are families without gas to heat their homes. There are families facing eviction because they cannot pay the rent. Jesus told us that when we feed the hungry and clothe the naked we feed and clothe him. Your St. Vincent de Paul Conference tries to meet the needs of the poor in our parish area using funds which you as a parish have contributed. There are many ways to volunteer your time and talents. The need is great, but unfortunately the workers are few.

Any member of the parish – working people, youth, retired people, men and women – may become a Vincentian. All that is really needed is a commitment to help the poor.

If you are interested in learning more about the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, please leave your name and phone number with a member of the Society who will be waiting outside the church after Mass. We will contact you during the next week and tell you more of what is involved in our work.

SHORTER OPTIONAL PULPIT APPEAL

Those who are interested in learning more about the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are invited to attend a meeting on _____ at _____ o'clock at _____

This information is also in today's parish bulletin. If you cannot make the meeting but are interested, please stop to see me in front of the church after Mass and let me know how we can contact you.

Thank you.

BUILDING UP EXISTING CONFERENCES

Which Conference?

The simple answer is to tackle those Conferences which are really struggling with only two or three members. The offer of help must be made, even when the Particular Council has not been expressly asked for help, because our duty is toward the needy, as we explained at the beginning while discussing Responsibilities.

First of all, the whole matter should be discussed privately with the existing members, either together or separately.

It may be that, in spite of a genuine love for the Society, the members may come to realize that age has rendered them less effective of late, or that new members will not stay in the Conference because it lacks vitality. The officers may be prepared to relinquish office if newcomers join the Conference and to try a new meeting time.

If so, then the same action plan for "*Forming New Conferences*" (page 14) may be followed: visits to the Spiritual Advisor, visits to prospects, the preliminary meeting, the first meeting, and the other few meetings, chaired by a member of the Extension Committee. However, since the current members have presumably already tried to recruit by personal contacts, it may be necessary to make a public appeal to the congregation to identify prospects.

If the existing members do not think it is necessary to step aside to this extent, they should, of course, still be given every help. A particularly obvious occasion on which the Particular Council could take the initiative in raising this whole matter is when a Conference is in difficulties at the end of a Conference President's three-year term of office. The President concerned should be visited and the future of the conference discussed. If the President agrees, and if the other members of the Conference also agree when the situation is discussed with them, the same plan of action may be carried out from beginning to end.

Conferences Building Themselves Up: Other Ideas for Recruitment

For Conferences which are working well but need a few more members and are prepared to make an effort to attract them, the following ideas have been successfully tried in different parts of the country:

1. Meet with the Pastor and the Spiritual Advisor covering the points mentioned in, "*Meeting with the Pastor*" (page 15) and obtaining names of possible new members, including teenagers, and inviting them to the Conference meetings.
2. Conducting a pulpit appeal, a bulletin appeal, or an exhibit as discussed earlier in this manual in the section on "*identifying Prospective Vincentians.*" Those people who indicate an interest are invited to the next Conference meeting. If possible, the prospects should be picked up and brought to the meeting. In lieu of a Conference meeting, it may be preferable to invite the prospects to attend an orientation on SSVP during the coming week. This meeting would be conducted as the preliminary meeting outlined above.
3. Holding a parish meeting, on a Sunday evening perhaps, to which everyone is invited. The attraction may be a film, e.g., the film "*Salvage,*" produced several years ago by the Los Angeles Council, of the United States, or a more recent version put together by the Council of Portland, Oregon, might be purchased or rented. Both movies are in the library at St. Vincent de Paul Vancouver Island. There could be a talk by an experienced SSVP speaker after the film, who would conclude by asking for new members, including teenagers. Those interested could then be invited to a preliminary meeting.

FORMING NEW CONFERENCES

FIRST STEP - Particular Council Decisions

(These notes could be used at the meeting.)

The following decisions are to be made at a Particular Council meeting:

1. To form a new plan of action, by deciding which parish is most in need of a new Conference and then which should have priority after that one has been formed.
2. To tackle one at a time, making sure that the Conference is firmly established, before moving onto the next.
3. To form an Extension Committee: Ask for names, addresses, home and work telephone numbers of half a dozen members of the Society who would be prepared to put in an occasional spurt of action to help start another Conference. This would involve a short-term effort of an extra night a week, for three or four weeks. If absolutely necessary they could be excused from their own Conferences, to undertake this work, so that they would not be committed to more than their usual on night a week. Name a chairperson with a lot of energy.

The Committee should include men and women, younger and older members, and representatives of the major ethnic groups in the area. If the members do not hold any office in the Society, it is probably more an advantage than a disadvantage.

Extension Committee Members:

Recruiters - Teams of two who meet with the Pastors.

Guides – Teams of two who commit to meeting with new Conferences for at least eight meetings.

Every member of the Extension Committee should have a copy of this manual.

SECOND STEP – MEETING WITH THE PASTOR

Who should visit the Pastor?

The visit should be made by Particular Council President and by members of the Extension Committee. It is absolutely necessary that these persons be enthusiastic and have a good understanding of the flexibility and openness of our Society. Without these qualities, even a SSVP member who is friendly with the Pastor concerned would not be the right person for this task.

The Visitor should have a basic understanding of the Rule of the Society and how it functions in the area and should be able to answer any questions the Pastor may have.

Preparation

It is obviously sensible to find out something of the Pastor's likely reaction to the proposal to form a Conference. If you suspect that he may be unaware of the special needs of the community around him (perhaps this is a new parish for him), then you should arm yourself accordingly. Find out the extent of poverty in the area from local welfare agencies and the location of nursing homes and institutions in the parish from the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory. Do not forget that prayer is the best preparation of all.

One of the Council's preparations for this plan of action is to visit all the hospitals, nursing homes or other institutions in the parish, meet with the Director of Social Services and ask if there is anyone that "falls through the cracks" or who no one visits. Then submit a report to the Pastor of the results during the visit.

What should be discussed?

- 1. As the object of the visit is to obtain the Pastor's agreement to form a conference, it is necessary to explain to him that the Particular Council is conducting an extension drive and that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul can contribute immeasurably to parish life.** It can help the parishioners to become better Christians. It expresses a warm Christian love for the community and provides other parishioners with many opportunities to help in this work. It gives expression to Christian commitment.
- 2. It will also be necessary to convince the Pastor that there are many people in the parish area, Catholic or non-Catholic, who are in need.** He will

probably be well aware of this, since the poor often come to the church to ask for help. Point out that the SSVP Conference will take over the functions of providing that help. Unfortunately, there are some Pastors who think that there are no poor in their parish area.

If this is his view, ask him these questions:

- Do you have any lonely people in the parish?
- Do you have any handicapped or blind children or adults?
- Do you have any permanently sick or homebound people?
- Do you have any nursing homes or hospitals?

3. If he agrees to the formation of a Conference, explain the plan of action:

- The key to the whole operation is for the Pastor and his associates to supply a list of twelve or more names and addresses of men and women, including teenagers, as potential members. It may be possible to go through the parish register, there and then, to identify prospects. Otherwise, ask if you can be provided the names within a week.
- Explain to the Pastor that the persons recommended will be contacted and invited to a preliminary meeting the following week at which the Society will be fully explained. Ask the Pastor if he thinks it will help if he mentions to these persons that someone will call them about SSVP. The Pastor knows his parishioners best, and he may think it sufficient if the callers mention that they have the Pastor's backing in making the approach.
- Ask for permission to make a pulpit appeal to the congregation inviting interested parishioners to an orientation meeting. Suggest a weekend when this can be done.
- Get the Pastor to set a meeting time and place for the first meeting, at which the prospective members can make up their minds whether or not to start with the work. The members of the Particular Council Extension Committee will help to run the first six meetings, so that the Conferences can be firmly established.

To save a further visit to the Pastor before the preliminary meeting, we suggest that you also discuss these points:

4. Spiritual Advisor:

Experience shows that the attendance of a priest at our meetings is mutually helpful. Attendance every week is, of course, ideal, but we know that this will sometimes not be possible. Very often the Pastor is so busy that it is unfair to ask him to take this on. If that is so, ask his permission to approach someone else about becoming Spiritual Advisor. If he agrees, discuss all these points with the suggested Spiritual Advisor, and provide him or her with a copy of the SSVP manual.

5. Finance

Explain that, while the secret collection is intended to involve a meaningful sacrifice for each member, other sources of income for the Conference should come from the parish so that the members of the parish can participate. Many Pastors permit a monthly collection by the SSVP members at the side doors of the church and alms or poor boxes located in the church. Others have a special monthly collection for the SSVP and include envelopes for this purpose in the parishioner's envelope box. Ask the Pastor what he would prefer. Also ask if the parish can provide "up front" funds or hold a special collection to assist with the home visit cases before regular funding is established for the Conference.

THIRD STEP – INVITING PROSPECTS TO THE PRELIMINARY MEETING

Members of the Extension Committee call the parishioners recommended by the Pastor and invite them to the Preliminary Meeting. Explain the following:

1. I am a member of the Extension Committee for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the diocese.
2. Your Pastor is considering organizing a SSVP Conference in your parish.
3. A meeting will be held at a particular time and place to explain about the Society.
4. Your Pastor has recommended that you attend this meeting with no obligation.
5. I will be happy to pick you up and take you to the meeting.
6. Do you think you will be able to attend?

FOURTH STEP – PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE MEETING AGENDA

(These could be used at the actual meeting)

The meeting should be conducted by the Particular Council President or the Extension Committee Chairperson.

1. Welcome and introduce everyone.
2. Explain the nature of this meeting: to explain about the origin, spirit and methods of the SSVP to answer any questions and to start a Conference. Nobody is, however, committed by attending this meeting.
3. Explain the SSVP. It may be best to develop this by asking the prospective members what they think the SSVP is and correct misunderstandings. However, it would be a good idea to touch on a least the following points:
 - Ozanam and the first Conference.
 - Motives: to help fellow human beings in need; to answer Christ's call to help others, and to grow in Christian Love.
 - Any need, involving person-to person relationships, falls within our scope.
 - We visit anyone, regardless of creed or color
 - We must treat what we discover as strictly confidential among ourselves.
 - We seek no publicity for ourselves, but every publicity for the work, to get more help.
 - We are a lay Society, but nevertheless find good relationship with the clergy essential.

It will be better if several experienced members take part in the explanations, as a long monologue is not desirable.

4. Finances: Explain the way the Conference is to be financed and the idea of the secret collection can be explained again
5. Needs of the parish: Explain in general terms local poverty, loneliness, nursing homes, other institutions, etc.
6. Explain the procedure for the conduct of home visits: Utilizing the "Home Visit Manual" or the video on Home Visits, show how a team of Vincentians conducts a home visit.
7. Invite prospective new members to carry out one visit in the next week:

After answering questions on visits, invite prospective members to volunteer for home visits in pairs, if at all possible pairing a candidate with an experienced Vincentian. If there are not enough experienced members available, one solution is to send the candidates in pairs to people who have been told by letter or by the Spiritual Advisor to expect a visit. Alternatively, arrangements can be made with an adjacent active Conference to take members of the new Conference along on home visits in their area.

Note:

It is not feasible to send visiting teams to the homes of poor who have material needs unless some arrangements have been made for money and food to meet these needs. Many of the Councils provide funds from their own resources to help new Conferences. Otherwise, arrangements need to be made with the Pastor for a special collection or “up front” financing of the Conference, or twinning arrangement must be established with another Conference or the next higher Council.

8. Who should be visited: Persons needing assistance can be found through parish sources or from welfare or other agencies.
9. Who should visit with whom: the pairings can now be decided and one or two visits allocated to each pair.
10. Introduce all the available person to person volunteering opportunities available in the Society; such as the Food Bank, programs for people with disabilities, housing for the homeless, retail stores, committees, etc. Encourage the “best fit” for the potential new member and refer them to the contact person in their area of interest.
11. Meeting nights: The best evening for meetings can be decided by finding out which night suits the greatest number. Try to avoid the Spiritual Advisor’s day off.
12. Communications: The Chairperson should obtain the names of the prospective members, their addresses and any home and work telephone numbers.
13. Confirm date, time and place of the first meeting and go briefly through the form it will take: From the agenda, for instance, explain about prayers, spiritual reading, etc. Explain that members of the Extension Committee will attend and chair the first meeting and that one or two will be present at the following meetings, by which time the officers of the new Conference will be selected.

FIFTH STEP – ARRANGING THE FIRST MEEETING

(This could be used as a checklist at the time.)

The Extension Committee Chair should gather the following:

1. Secretary's Minute Book
2. *Spiritual Readings for Conference Meetings*, or some other suitable publication
3. Copies of the Society Annual Report
4. *Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul* - one for each member and several spares
5. Prayer Cards for each prospective member and some spare ones are needed.
6. One copy of this Recruitment Manual

(The above items can be obtained from the SSVP of Vancouver Island. (see inside of front cover for address.)

7. A Treasurer's Bag for the Secret Collection

The Spiritual Advisor should be given a cop of the prayers, *Spiritual Readings for Conference Meetings* book, and a *Handbook for Spiritual Advisors* and should be asked to have ready a reading/discussion for the first meeting, from any source. Discussion of the Gospel for the preceding or following Sunday is often a good idea.

The Extension Committee Chairperson should seek the advice of the Pastor and Spiritual Advisor on the appointment of a President, Secretary and Treasurer who will serve for a short period of time until the Conference elects its officers.

SIXTH STEP – THE FIRST MEETING

The first meeting should be chaired by the Extension members trained and willing. Some of the experienced members who attended the preliminary meeting should also attend. One of the prospective members should be asked to take the minutes, ideally someone who would make a good permanent Secretary.

1. The agenda which follows, can be used for all Conference meetings:

Agenda for Conference Meetings:

(Taken from the Canadian Rule, Article 2.2.9)

1. Opening prayer and spiritual reflection
 2. Adoption of the agenda and the minutes of the last meeting
 3. Reading of an article from the Rule
 4. Financial report
 5. Remarks from the members
 6. Information from higher councils
 7. Visitation reports by members
 8. Planning, development and realization of projects to improve service offered to the poor
 9. Secret collection
 10. Closing prayer
-
2. After the report on visits is made, the prospective members should be asked whether they think the visits were worthwhile. Any difficulties in making the first visit should be fully discussed, as this will be helpful for everyone
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3. Welcome those who have successfully completed visits as active members of the Conference. At the secret collection, someone should be asked to be Treasurer for the time being.

SEVENTH STEP – THE NEXT FEW MEETINGS

An experienced member should chair the first few meetings, to show the method of conducting a meeting and keeping to the point. Although these meetings may run longer than normal, because of the explanations that will be called for, the Chair should aim for a duration of about two hours.

A Conference roster should be prepared by the Secretary, showing the names, addresses, and home and work telephone numbers of all conference members, the Spiritual Advisor, the Central/Particular Council President, and the Extension Committee Chairperson. Copies should be provided to all listed on the roster. Also, a record should be started and maintained by the Secretary of the families visited and the help provided.

During these few weeks it would be an excellent idea to arrange for some members, either paired together or paired with a member of the Extension Committee to:

1. Establish a system to identify people in need and process requests for help.
2. Seek additional members, especially young people, through public or personal appeals. If this meets with success, the ideal conference will have been formed – one striving constantly to find more people in need and more members, one completely alive and viable.

Only one task remains: to appoint the President. It should be fairly clear, after several weeks, who would make a good President. Energy, ability to run a meeting and to organize, are usually more important than experience. The Spiritual Advisor should be consulted. It may then be wiser for the Particular Council President to appoint the person chosen (after securing his/her previous consent) for a limited period of, say, six months or a year, after which the normal election would be held. The new President will then take over the following week and the Extension Committee can go into hibernation until the next effort.

Details of the new Conference and its President should be passed to the Particular Council Secretary, to ensure that the President is invited to council meetings, and that all members are placed on the mailing list.

If members would not mind disclosing their professions, occupations or skills, this information is very useful, both to the Conference President and the Particular Council President.

An application for aggregation should be arranged by Particular Council, after the probationary period of one year. This form is available from the Particular Council Administration Office.

Organizing Conferences in Other Towns

As the Society grows, Particular Councils often find it necessary to organize Conferences in parishes located in towns other than the one in which the members of the Extension Committee live. In such cases it may not be feasible to make more than one committee visit to the town after the initial contact with the Pastor. This visit would be a combination of the preliminary meeting and the first meeting.

It is recommended that the committee conduct two skits. One skit would show the conduct of a home visit. Two committee members would play the role of the people in need of help, and the two others would play the visiting Vincentians. After the skit, the prospective members would be allowed an opportunity to ask questions about the conduct of the visit. This would be followed by a second "case" in which committee members again play the role of a couple in need, and the prospective Vincentians are asked to make the home visit.

The second skit should show the conduct of a mock conference meeting, in which the cases which were previously acted out would be discussed. Again, after the skit the prospective Vincentians should be provided an opportunity to ask questions and clarify their understanding of the meeting.

If at all feasible, the Extension Committee or its chairperson should return to the new Conference after a month or two to observe a meeting and ensure that the Conference is functioning properly.

RECRUITING YOUNG MEMBERS

Young People and the SSVP: A Mutual Need

A Discussion

In many places the Society is facing a real crisis. There are some Conferences which do not have members under the age of 65. How can they possibly face the future with confidence?

A wide distribution of ages is the sign of a healthy organization, for a mixing of the young, middle-aged and seniors produces the best of all worlds. The young members tend to be very enthusiastic, idealistic and often very modern in outlook. They find adaptation relatively easy and are usually more aware of modern innovations. On the other hand, senior people are more reliable, able to see things in a much wider perspective and, due to their much greater experience, are generally more cautious. They find adaptation a little more difficult, even if the advantages are obvious.

These are, of course, generalizations, but the final result is a society which keeps abreast of change without losing its ideals. The first Conference had Monsieur Bailly to add the wisdom and caution of an older man to balance the enthusiasm of youth, he was trusted and respected by the other members of the conference, all of whom were young students.

The modern generation, although often willing to do some community work, do seem very reluctant to join established organizations which require them to conform to the structure, standards and practices of previous generations. They also clamor for more participation and consultation in decision and administration. No longer are they prepared to join a Society which expects them to "sit and listen."

We have no age barriers. The young are expected to speak out at meetings and to participate in all Conference and council works. Youth Committees are encouraged at all Council levels, where they serve to encourage, inspire, and generate fraternity within the Society; many have had much success in recruiting. Their ardor can be a real asset to any council. The representation which they bring can only serve to further young people's willingness to participate.

Enough has now been said about the Society's need for the young; we must now consider the young's need for the society. The whole pattern of today's youth service is to help young people find their place in the world and community. Authorities recognize that the best way of ensuring this is to encourage youth to undertake voluntary service. They recognize the exciting possibility of cooperation between youth and the social welfare services, both voluntary and statutory. This was recognized by our Society well over a century ago, and the general recognition now accorded is a clear endorsement of our methods and of the role of young people in the community. Such work will also help youth to appreciate the true meaning of social injustice and how much suffering it can bring.

Work for Young Members

Youth in the Society must be kept busily involved in worthwhile works of charity or they will lose interest. They may be involved in the same tasks as older members, but their special talents, energy, and enthusiasm can be channeled into their own works as well.

The fact that the members are young does not exclude them from works which may be unpleasant or rather sordid, although it is necessary to inform them of the circumstances in an adult manner. They are far less likely to be corrupted by what they see in real life than by what they see on television.

Young members should certainly be involved in person-to-person visiting in pairs. They should not be left to do only gardening, decorating, shopping for old people and so on, although they rather enjoy practical jobs and would not mind a reasonable proportion of such work. Visiting handicapped children of their own age, taking them to the Youth Club, or out for a walk, is excellent work for them to do. So is making friends with blind children of their own age and helping them to run children's camps.

In some parts of the country, young Vincentians are engaged in visiting homes for the physically or mentally handicapped children, playing games with them, taking them on outings and entertaining them. Elsewhere they visit people with mental disabilities or seniors wards in hospitals and nursing homes, to talk to the patients and play their guitars and sing. Work in soup kitchens, food banks and congregate living facilities for the destitute has also proven to be suitable.

Youth can also be used in baby-sitting for poor families, providing personal care for the elderly, cleaning thrift stores, and sorting and displaying donated items.

Youth conferences cooperate with older members in such projects as raising money for Twinnage, conducting charity walks, preparing and delivering food parcels at Christmas, inviting seniors to a Christmas party, with entertainment provided.

Talks to Young People

Communication with young people is often difficult, even for parents of sons and daughters. So, it is not surprising that very few members are able to give effective talks to young people. Young people are willing to listen for a short time, but, if the subject does not particularly interest them, they soon become very bored. One of the ways to avoid this is to involve them in the talk right from the start. Ask them what they know about poverty in Canada today; have newspaper clippings ready to show them. Give concrete examples. Then ask them what they are doing about it. No doubt some consciences will not be stirred, but most of the audience will appreciate what you are saying to them.

Emphasize not only the work that the Society is doing, but also the work the Society would like to do, if it had more members. Special Works will interest many of them and emphasis on the student origins of the Society will appeal to many.

Visual aids could be used to illustrate every important point whenever possible. Quite simple ones can be effective – a key word in large lettering, perhaps.

In the talks, it is necessary to use the right sort of language. It seems unfortunate that many of the words used in our Society are no longer in fashion. For instance, the word “charity” expresses love and compassion, but in the modern world all it expresses is a collection box under one’s nose. Even on the spiritual side, “Christian responsibility” means more to young people than “spiritual sanctification,” no matter how appropriate the latter may be.

Throughout the talk, constant stress must be placed on “doing” as opposed to mere talking. This is why exhibits seem to have more success than talks. People are often surprised to be shown that poverty still exists. Our presentation should leave the youth with no doubt that poverty does exist, often in quite unexpected places. The confidential nature of the cases we handle should be stressed, while emphasizing that in all other respects our Society is open – to new members, to new procedures and to new ideas.

ACTION PLANS FOR RECRUITING YOUTH

Recruiting Young Members for Adult Parish Conferences

Young adults can easily join and participate in most parish Conferences. Youth of high school or college age, however, often prefer to join Conferences made up of their peers. Nonetheless they can be brought into adult Conferences provided they are readily accepted by the adults and assigned meaningful tasks. If no effort is made to organize a Youth Conference, the adult Conference should attempt to recruit young people directly. There is no minimum age for membership.

1. The first step is for the parish Conference to commit itself to opening up to youth.
2. Once the matter has been agreed upon in principle, the absolutely vital step is to find enough work for the younger members to do, once they have joined the Conference. Ideas for finding work have been given earlier. We suggest that you have in readiness more work than is strictly necessary.
3. If there is no place where the younger people gather together, e.g., within a school or Youth Group setting, then it will be necessary to locate them through some form of outreach.
4. If there is a Youth Group, ask the Youth Leader if you may arrange a talk to the members, for half an hour or so. Preferably several young members of the SSVP from the Central/Particular Council area should give the talk, on the lines suggested earlier, which could be accompanied by an exhibit or a film, if this can be arranged. After the talk, Youth Group members who would like to join the parish Conference are asked to give their names, addresses and telephone numbers to any of the SSVP members present. It will help considerably if you tell them that they will have their own project within the Conference, i.e., visiting the nursing homes or working with handicapped children, etc.
5. Those who have expressed interest should be contacted again and invited to the next Conference meeting. It would be a good idea to invite those young members who gave the talk at the preliminary meeting to attend this Conference meeting to help with the explanations. Visits may be allocated to the new young members, and these visits should be carried out pairing these new members with experienced members, preferably young ones.

6. When young members leave to live in another area, even if going for further education, put them in touch with the nearest Conference.

Relationship between the Generations in Parish Conferences

Unfortunately, young people's enthusiasm soon turns to disillusionment if they are not encouraged. They will feel that they are not getting anywhere and will lose interest. This state of affairs exists when there are no young people in the Conference to support the new members. It is, therefore, usually necessary to recruit two or more young people together.

As soon as they join, they should feel welcome and equal in the conference. The first few weeks are vital. If the young person can be immediately integrated, we are likely to have a good member for a long time. If youth do leave, it is often because of a lack of communication between themselves and the established members. Many younger members complain that when they visit the poor with one of the senior members, they are completely left out of the conversation. This urge to participate, rather than be a spectator, is a healthy sign, and all adult Vincentians need to encourage it.

Forming Separate Youth Conferences

If a separate Conference with only young members is found to be desirable, the procedure can be the same as for forming other parish Conferences, as described in detail earlier in this manual.

The only difference is that it is usually necessary for a youth advisor to be present, as a guide, at all these meetings. The advisor should help and advise but should not be an officer of the new Conference. The young Vincentians should be free to run the Conference themselves.

The President of the Youth Conference should be invited to all Particular Council meetings and have full voting power. There is no discrimination between "youth" and other parish Conferences. All are equal in every way.

Forming Conferences in Catholic Schools

This can be done by the Particular Council President or, with his/her backing, by the Extension Committee, the Youth Chairperson, or the nearest Conference President.

1. The first step is to visit the school Principal. It is essential for success that he or she should be willing to give the Conference full backing. Whoever makes the approach should discuss with the Particular Council President or with other experienced members, the points mentioned earlier in paragraphs "*Visiting the Pastor*" and the points set out below.
 - a. SSVP is flexible in its organization and operations.
 - b. There is a need in the local area: get some ideas from the local Conference and a list of institutions and nursing homes from the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory, so that you can be specific.
 - c. Perhaps the local Conferences or the Particular Council will agree to initially fund the Conference.
 - d. It is very important to involve not only high school students, but also middle and elementary school students to ensure continuity in subsequent years. Many students can become Auxiliary Members.
 - e. Meetings would be held as often as necessary to ensure efficiency. Meetings should last half an hour.
 - f. The work should be found and allocated by a committee working with the Spiritual Advisor and the Youth Advisor.
 - g. The Conference would be run by the members themselves, giving them a real sense of responsibility, which helps them to become mature persons. The Spiritual Advisor and the Youth Advisor provide the essential guidance, help and continuity.
 - h. Ask the Principal to suggest a teacher who may be willing to take on the job of guiding the Conference as Youth Advisor.
 - i. The plan of action should be discussed with the Youth Advisor and Spiritual Advisor, in case he or she can suggest a better plan for the particular school.
2. The teacher suggested by the Principal should be seen next and asked to take on the work of Youth Advisor. All the above points should be discussed.

3. It is advisable to ask the School Chaplain or Campus Minister to serve as Spiritual Advisor. He or she should be asked for suggestions and support and kept informed on progress in forming the Conference.
4. If the Principal has agreed to the formation of a Conference and the teacher has agreed to be the Youth Advisor, the next step is to find plenty of work. Now is the time to secure names of people the Conference members can visit, possibly from the local Conference, from the Pastor in the vicinity of the school, by contacting nursing homes or other institutions in the area, or by contacting all of the SSVP Special Works Projects. If the Conference is to start in a small way, you should be able to find enough cases (at least a dozen) so the effort involved is not too great.
5. A talk should be given to at least the middle and high school students, preferably separately or in even smaller groups, to provide more direct and personal contact. The talk should be given by an SSVP member who is able to communicate with young people. This need not necessarily be a young member, although it is obviously easier for the younger to communicate with the young. The content and style of such talks has been discussed in an earlier section. Visual aids, a portable exhibition, posters, slides or tape recordings will all enhance the probability of success of the talk.
6. The Youth Advisor of the Conference can then take the names of those interested and decide with them the best time of day to hold the first meeting, e.g., immediately after school. A preliminary explanatory meeting is probably not necessary for a School Conference because the talk will have achieved that objective.
7. If possible, a young, experienced member should conduct the first meeting, making sure that all the required items are on hand, as listed earlier in this manual. Someone should take the minutes. Service work to be performed should be discussed and a plan of action outlined.

If no experienced member can attend the first meeting, the Youth Advisor should be seen and given the necessary material, and the Agenda for Conference meetings should be carefully gone through. (see page 19) It would be better still if the Advisor could attend a Conference meeting to see how meetings run in practice. Indeed, this may be essential. Later the format of the school meeting may become more like that described previously.

8. At the next meeting a President, Secretary and Treasurer should be appointed to serve for a short period of time, after which the new Conference should elect its own officers. The Conference will then be self-running. It should be possible to build up membership steadily, as additional needs are discovered, by a constant attempt to do so. Later on,

institutions such as nursing homes could be visited by units of 10 such members, an idea which seems to work well.

9. The names, addresses and telephone numbers of the Conference President, the Spiritual Advisor and the Youth Advisor should be given to the President and Secretary of the Particular Council, so that invitations to attend all Particular Council functions and meetings will be issued.
10. After one year, aggregation should be applied for, through the Council.
11. As mentioned before, when young members leave to live in another area, even if going for further education, put them in touch with the nearest Conference. The Youth Advisor may volunteer to do this. Otherwise, the Particular Council should ask its Youth Chairperson to undertake this task at the end of each school year.

THOUGHTS ON SCHOOL CONFERENCES

School conferences function exactly like parish Youth Conferences. They are likely to become our most fruitful source of young members. Many schools now include community service in their syllabus: they are actively encouraging their pupils to become more involved with social services, voluntary and statutory, some times within school time. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity of introducing ourselves to schools, not just to obtain recruits, but to help the pupils in their quest for their place within the Vincentian community.

During holidays and summer vacation it might be possible to carry on as usual. However, if this is not possible, vacations provide an excellent opportunity for school Conferences members to temporarily assist their own parish conferences. The Particular Council President or the Youth Chairperson should help encourage this kind of liaison as the ideal way to ensure that many members, when they leave school, continue in the Society.