

THE YOUNG VINCENTIAN HANDBOOK

**A GUIDE TO
YOUTH CONFERENCES OF
THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

**SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
OF VANCOUVER ISLAND**

Additional copies of this Youth Handbook may be obtained by contacting the Society's Office on Vancouver Island, British Columbia:

Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Vancouver Island
4349 West Saanich Road
Victoria, B.C.
V8Z 3E8
Phone: 250-727-0007
Fax: 250-727-0771
E-mail: info@svdpvictoria.com

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Developed By:
Society of St. Vincent de Paul U.S.A.
National Youth Committee
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Revised with Permission by:
Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Vancouver Island
Youth Committee
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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended to be a **guide** for the establishment and operation of a “Youth Conference.” It should not be considered as an extension of “The Rule of the Society”.

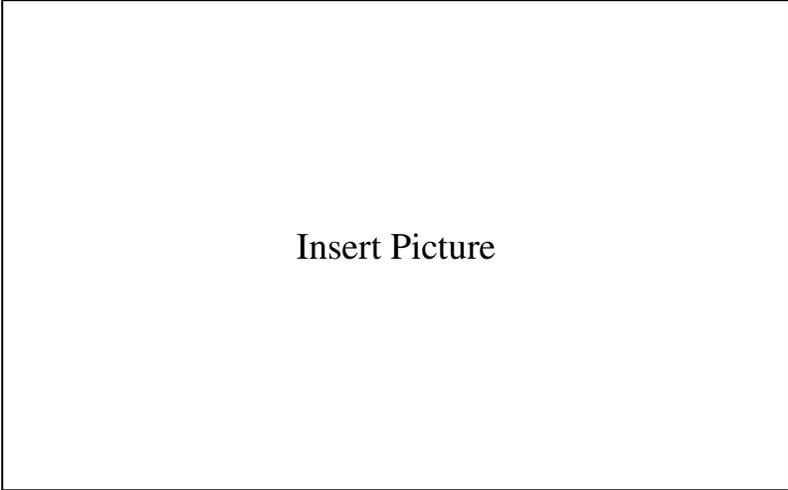
Through years of actual experience by Vincentians from all over Canada and the U.S., information has been gathered here to assist anyone who is involved with or interested in youth and the Society. Much of the information can be used as a “how to” guide for Vincentian Youth Conferences.

It is recommended that this book be used in conjunction with the **CANADIAN RULE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**, and the **RECRUITMENT MANUAL FOR CHRISTIAN PERSONAL SERVICE (SVDP)**. Along with the aid and advice of the local Council or Regional Youth Representative and the grace of our Lord, the probability of establishing or maintaining a Youth Conference will be greatly enhanced.

This handbook is divided into two main sections. The first section describes information that is pertinent to all levels of youth. The second section highlights important considerations for the various age-groups. Simply, it will be easier to consult the section on a Grade School Conferences’ interest and considerations without having information that is applicable only to a Young Adult Conference.

This handbook should be used by the Council, Youth Committee and/or Adult Conference involved with the youth. Furthermore, the Advisor to the Youth Conference should be provided with this book to aid them in working with the Youth Conference.

GENERAL MISSION



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The Mission of the Society today is virtually identical to the original principles set forth by Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his followers in 1833. By meditation, prayer, reflection on the scriptures, and the teachings of the Church, Vincentians seek to: develop their awareness of God, develop their relationship with the poor, bear witness by acts of kindness in the spirit of Christ.

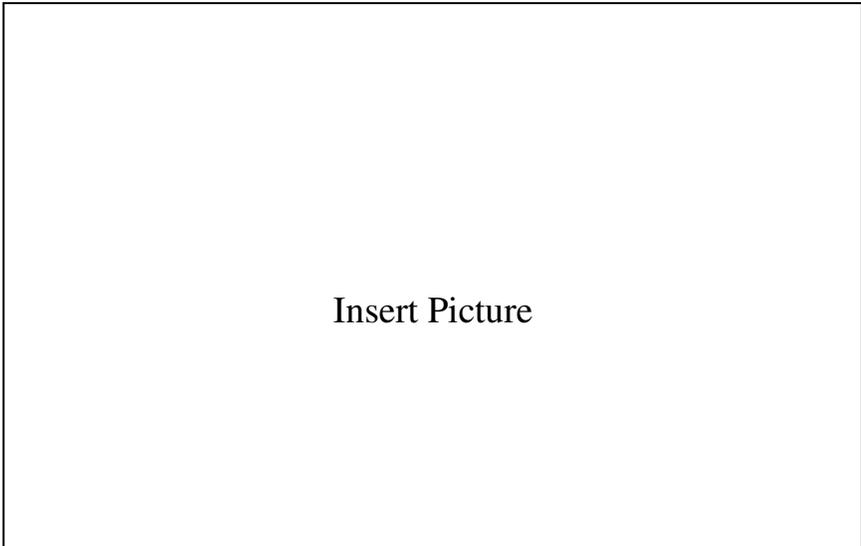
The **Mission Statement** of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's National Council of Canada is:

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

The **Value Statement** of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's National Council of Canada is:

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

WHO ARE THE POOR?



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

- the homeless,
- immigrants and refugees,
- inmates and their families,
- those with no source of income,
- those searching for employment,
- those living alone with few resources,
- those suffering physically or mentally,
- those who are going through a strike or a lockout,
- those abused physically, sexually or psychologically,
- the working poor who have problems making ends meet,
- those enrolled in governmental financial assistance programs,
- those who have a problem of dependency on drugs, gambling, alcohol etc.
- this list is open ended and not limited to the groups of people mentioned.

SPIRITUALITY FOR YOUTH IN THE SOCIETY

The challenge to “live our faith” confronts every Catholic ... every Christian. The Lord’s greatest commandment is, “Love the Lord Your God.” The second is like it, “Love your neighbor.” Wanting to grow closer to God and the desire to serve Him are two of the most common reasons that Vincentians give when asked why they joined the Society.

Every person who joins the Society can develop a deeper love of the Lord through their efforts to love their neighbor, especially God’s poor. Becoming more Christ-like is the result. Our spirituality is strengthened; our love of God is enriched.

Young people are struggling with the “enticements” of the world they live in. Often times, they would be equally attracted to the opportunity to follow the Lord but are never given the chance unless someone like the members of the Society invite them to “Come, Follow me.”

There are very few worthwhile alternatives that appeal to young people today who are looking for ways to “live” their faith. They want to get involved in work they believe in. They want to commit themselves. They want to grow spiritually; they want to grow closer to the Lord.

The availability of Youth Conferences, and youth involvement in Adult Conferences, provides an excellent organization within which young people can grow Physically, intellectually and spiritually. Many groups can offer social, physical and intellectual involvement for their members, but few can offer spiritual growth and the chance for individuals to work together to make a difference in others’ lives.

In giving the opportunity to extend the experience of service, we build better people by letting them build themselves. With the assistance and interaction of a Spiritual Advisor and other Vincentians the young member has experience resources from which to draw and learn.

Specific activities which may enhance the spiritual development of the younger Vincentian are discussed later in this manual.

STRUCTURE

Typically, a Youth Conference should be structured similar to that of an Adult Conference.

The Conference's members should consist of Christian young men and women who desire to grow in the spirit of the Gospel. They should show a willingness to accept the responsibilities that the Society places on them. They should be ready to share their resources, be it financial, time or talent in nature on behalf of the needy. And they should exhibit an abiding good toward all and a real giving of self for others.

The Conference should have an elected president. The vice-president, secretary, and treasurer may be appointed by the president or elected by the Conference members. This group would be collectively known as an Executive Committee. The President and Vice-President of the Conference must be Catholic.

The members of the Executive committee of an Adult Conference hold office for a three year term. However, in the case of a Youth Conference, one year terms may be more appropriate. The duties of the Executive committee members include:

President: The president presides over the Conference meeting and represents the Conference at the Central or Particular Council level, of which they may be a voting member. (Provincial law prohibits minors from serving in a fiduciary capacity on the Board of Directors).

Vice-President: The vice-president takes over for the president when the president deems necessary. The vice-president works in collaboration with the president on activities of the Conference. One activity that the vice-president may be responsible for is that of recruitment.

Secretary: The secretary carefully prepares the minutes of each meeting, maintains an accurate listing of the Conference members, maintains an attendance roster, and assists in completing the Annual Report. (This may require the assistance of the Conference Advisor.) The secretary also maintains an accounting of the activities that have been completed by each member of the Conference.

Treasurer: The treasurer is responsible for the Conference funds, preparing the Conference's budget and maintaining an accurate record of all the receipts and expenditures.

Spiritual Advisor: The Spiritual Advisor's role is to provide for the spiritual growth of the Conference members, individually and collectively. In particular, the Advisor should instill Christian attitudes towards those in need and encourage a charitable practice that is consistent with the Vincentian ideal of seeing the faces of the poor and troubled in the visage of Jesus Christ.

Allowing Youth Conference members to function in an Executive committee position provides the member with an opportunity to develop leadership skills, further increasing the self-worth of the young Vincentian.

Central and Particular Councils who maintain a youth member on their council may want to develop a leadership training program for these young Conference executives. This program includes topics such as leadership, ways to develop Vincentian spirit, public speaking, and focus groups describing the duties of the Executive committee and how to carry them out.

The Canadian Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has a more in-depth discussion of the purpose and functioning of a Conference Executive Board (Article 2.2.7 Appointment of Role of Officers).

Aggregation of Conferences

Just as individual members of the Society are formally incorporated into the Vincentian family, so also Youth Conferences must go through an application process which results in their being approved by the International Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and officially recognized as part of the Society.

This incorporation or aggregation of Conference links and identifies each Conference and member with the visible symbol of unity in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul – the International Council-General in Paris, France, birthplace of the Vincentian movement.

ORGANIZING A YOUTH CONFERENCE

When establishing a Youth Conference, the following considerations should be reviewed before an attempt is made to start a Conference.

AGE: Consider the range of tasks that an age group can perform.

ADULT ADVISORS: Who are likely candidates and how flexible are they to the needs of the youth?

TRANSPORTATION: How will the members get around and who will bear the responsibility for liability?

SCHOOL: How will one's involvement with the Young Vincentians affect his/her school work and school activities?

MEETINGS: How often will the Conference meet and where?

FINANCES: How will the Conference be financed?

A Youth Conference can exist in a parish with or without an existing Adult conference. It would be ideal for both types of Conferences to maintain a relationship with each other because the members of today's Youth Conferences are the future members of tomorrow's Adult Conferences.

Whether a young person joins an existing Adult Conference or a separate parish/school Conference, the invitation needs to be extended to young people to join the Society. Experience shows that the best place to get youth involved in the Society is through the establishment of a **Youth Committee** on the **Central or Particular Council**.

This committee should consist of experienced Conference members who have strong working knowledge of both the Society and of youth. This committee would be responsible for planting seeds about the Society to a parish or school. This may be done in the form of a letter to the Adult conferences, directors of religious education and school principals.

If there is no St. Vincent de Paul Conference in a parish, the Pastor should be visited. He should be presented with a description of the Society, where active, as well as the benefits that the young people of the parish would receive by joining the Society. Most Pastors would be pleased with the opportunity to extend an invitation to the parish's youth to join such a worthwhile program.

Oftentimes, some form of "social justice" or "community service" organization may already be available to the parish/community youth. In these situations, a Pastor may be reluctant to bring in

“another” organization that would replicate and dilute the parish’s already existent programs. It is imperative to present the Pastor with a vision of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as a worthwhile ministry for the parish that will promote spiritual growth and well as a sense of Christian and community responsibility for the needy.

With the support of the Pastor, the following should occur:

1. Find a Youth Advisor: Keeping in mind a particular age group and their needs.
2. Determine where and how to recruit the youth.
3. Set a time and place for the first meeting. It will help to have experienced members attend the first couple of meetings.
4. Publicize the meeting using: posters, flyers, pulpit talks and person to person invitations. Also, invite parents to this first meeting.
5. Hold the first meeting. An agenda for the first meeting might include:
 - a. Introduction to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul
 - Basic Principles
 - Founding of the Society
 - Mission
 - b. Why are you here?
 - Spiritual Aspects
 - Giving and Receiving
 - What are you willing to give up?
 - c. Structure of Young Vincentian Conferences
 - Relationship to established Adult Conferences
 - Parish Pastor
 - Adult Advisor(s)
 - d. How does a Young Vincentian Conference fulfill its ministry?
 - Developing your own action plan (the mission of the conference)
 - e. Where do we go from here?
 - Plan next meeting

- Election of president and appointment of officers

6. Hold subsequent meetings; continue to invite potential new members and begin to implement the action plan.

The recruitment Manual for Vincentian Service contains a seven step process for forming new Conferences. This should be reviewed by the Particular/Central Council Youth Committee members and potential Youth Conference Advisors. This manual also contains a step by step discussion on forming Youth Conferences in Catholic schools.

HOW TO RUN A YOUTH CONFERENCE MEETING

The following paragraphs contain information on the typical agenda for Conference meetings. Keep in mind, however, that the needs of a particular Conference may require some changes in this agenda to a format that would best suit them. It is understood that the structure of youth meetings may differ.

It is important to address the spiritual and fraternal needs of the members. For example, the meetings should begin with prayer and end with prayer. The meetings should also include a spiritual reading or meditation and allow for the exchange and sharing of ideas or beliefs. The discussion could also address a social justice issue or current event that is important to the Conference.

Lastly, a secret collection among the members would enhance the idea of making a most personal sacrifice. The emphasis here is on **sacrifice**. For some young people this may translate to the pennies they find while others may be able to contribute a portion of an allowance or other income source or savings.

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

Remember, this is the generally accepted format for Conference meetings. Use this as a guide for your particular Youth Conference's needs as it strives to fulfill the mission of the Society.

THE YOUTH ADVISOR

Recruitment of a Youth Advisor

The importance of a dedicated, qualified and spiritually-oriented Advisor can not be overemphasized with regard to the success of a Youth Conference. Young people, with the many distractions inherent to their age group, need an “adult” Advisor to POINT them in the right direction as the progress on their journey, searching for spiritual meaning and fulfillment within their lives.

For many of these young people, their experiences within the Society oftentimes represent their first taste of responsibility; they will grow under the guidance of an Advisor, one who does not act in the capacity of a “parental” figure. They will, however, welcome the input and suggestions of a friendly, empathetic “Advisor” who will let the Youth Conference members decide how they want to fulfill their Vincentian vocation.

The type of individual who is going to make a good “Vincentian Youth Advisor” will, in all likelihood, be in high demand by many other types of groups as well. The Society is going to have to stand out from all the rest to attract such a competent person. They will be attracted to the Society if they believe that a well-thought out plan has been conceived and implemented throughout the Society. They will not respond to a general request to “come on board” and help the Society start and run a Youth Conference. They probably wouldn’t have the time or the ability to create a Youth Conference that would be compatible to the mission of the Society.

Youth Advisor Recruiting Ideas

A good starting point for the establishment of a high school Youth Conference would be to find a willing and capable individual that could be appointed as the Advisor. To generate interest in the Advisor-candidate, it would be worthwhile if a thumbnail sketch of the program could be presented to an Advisor-candidate. Particular Council groups interested in forming several Youth Conferences in their area may want to produce an Advisor-candidate recruiting brochure. Individual Conferences (without a Region or Council-wide effort available to them) may find it more practical to develop a one page flyer (typed or handwritten).

In all probability, Advisor-candidates are searching for ways to satisfy their own call to holiness. Call it what you will, but these people need to be “sold” on the merits of a Society of St. Vincent de Paul Youth Conference. The Society is going to have to come across to these candidates as worthy and capable of meeting their needs. The brochure or flyer, therefore, will have to show an Advisor-candidate the building blocks that he/she could use in the Youth Conference. The answers to the following questions are the building blocks given to an Advisor-candidate.

A Youth Advisor Recruiting Brochure Should Answer These Questions

...

What would attract them to “the call” to participate in a Vincentian Youth Conference? What kind of support could an Advisor and his/her Youth Conference expect from the Society? What does the Society expect of a Youth Conference? These are questions that should be answered before a search can be initiated for an Advisor.

This handbook (Young Vincentian Handbook) would serve as the blue-print for the Advisor as he/she begins to build a Youth Conference.

Where does one look for a Youth Advisor?

The best answer to that question is to look where the youth are. See who takes the time to talk to them, who keeps abreast of what the youth are doing. Who are the person(s) that the youth seem to turn to when they need help? Who is available anytime the youth need sponsors, financial assistance, or just available for whatever?

These people are generally the best candidates for the role of Youth Advisor. They should be the first people to approach to work with the youth. That person may be young or old, male or female and preferable a Vincentian (if they are not, then recruit **them** into the Society!). They must be persistent, patient and, most importantly, have a vision The **vision** to see what the youth can accomplish.

Some of the more likely sources that a Youth Advisor may come from would be:

1. Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul!!!!
2. Educators or school staff
3. School board
4. Development and Peace Coordinator (may have names of interested parents)

5. College students (affiliated with social action program)
6. Parish and/or school Religious Education personnel
7. Parish Youth Ministry
8. Diocesan Youth Director
9. Campus Ministry
10. Deacons

What to stress when recruiting an Advisor

The role of the Advisor is to guide the Conference, not lead. The job of leadership comes under the Conference officers' responsibilities. In many ways guiding is much more difficult than leading.

Important attributes of the Advisor would include:

- Listening to both sides of an issue and respecting both sides.
- Considers the motive behind the action.
- Working to increase the strengths of the members as well as improving the weaknesses.
- Recognizing that youth want to be treated like adults, and allowing for individual/group decision-making.
- Emphasizing a person's good points instead of dwelling on the bad.
- Enjoying the Youth Conference.

We've recruited an Advisor, now what?

Once the Advisor is recruited, they should continue to get support from the Conference or Council which solicited them for the position. The Advisor should not be expected to "go it alone" once they are in place. Each Advisor will need guidance to obtain their goal of establishing a Youth Conference.

The Central or Particular Council Youth Coordinator or Council President should be available to assist a Youth Advisor. Some Advisors will need great amounts of reassurances and some will need very little. It is the responsibility of the recruiter to provide that reassurance. As soon as possible, provide the Advisor with training on leadership, Conference guidelines, coping with problems, etc.

If there are several Youth Conferences established, schedule the training classes so that the Advisors can mingle with each other. There is no better reassurance than to know that there is someone else in the same boat as you are. Encourage networking between the Conferences and especially between the Advisors and the Conference leadership. The old adage, "two heads are better than one," hold true here, too.

ESTABLISHING THE MISSION OF THE YOUTH CONFERENCE

The first meeting of the Youth Conference (meeting formats are described in an earlier chapter) should include the establishment of a mission that the Conference would like to pursue.

There are some general points that should be kept in mind by the Advisor as the Conference formulates its mission. The mission (and the specific projects that will be undertaken to accomplish the mission) should be:

1. **Specific** (“Obtaining Christmas presents for needy children” would be a specific goal versus “Helping poor kids at Christmas” which would be too general).
2. **Measurable** (Success can be easily gauged if there is a quantifiable aspect to the goal of the project i.e., giving gifts to **30** needy children at Christmas time; this step would also include a time table).
3. **Achievable** (The Lord Himself said, “The poor will always be with you.” The limitations of the Youth Conference should not be burdened by overzealous goals).
4. **Compatible** (The general Mission statement of the Society in the area in which the Youth Conference will operate should be incorporated into the Mission and Goals of the Youth Conference).

The types of potential projects a Youth Conference may pursue are limitless. Some of the most common themes are:

1. Food drives at schools or parish churches
2. Work at food banks
3. Form a retreat team
4. Serve in a soup kitchen

5. Volunteer in a St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop
6. Mission work (i.e.: Mexico or Columbia for example)
7. Sponsor walk-a-thons
8. Gather Christmas gifts for needy families
9. Sponsor Thanksgiving or Christmas basket drives
10. Clothing drives at school or parish churches
11. Housework or yard work for disabled or elderly
12. Babysitting
13. Visit rest homes, nursing homes or retirement communities
14. Clown ministry
15. Tutoring children
16. Work in children's centers
17. Organize Halloween evenings for children's centers
18. Work camps
19. Counselors at camps for handicapped children
20. Any project that helps the needs

RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

Every Christian will be recognized for their good deeds on the Judgment Day. While we are waiting for that eventuality, it would be appropriate to recognize young people for their attempts to "live" their faith. An award (such as a plaque) or a public recognition of our young Vincentians can serve as reinforcement to them and to their peers that their involvement with the Society is appreciated by one and all as well as pleasing to the Lord.

The Society is constantly striving to get new members; the presentation of an award to young Vincentians can provide an excellent opportunity to highlight the Society. In our efforts to quietly serve God's poor, we are rarely presented with opportunities to tell the public about the Society. An awards ceremony is a high profile way of attracting potential new members by showing them how the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has helped other to live their faith.

THE AGE GROUPS

Specific advice for the various age-groups

The individual sections which follow are broken down by age groups. Each age-group section contains information that will be pertinent to that group such as:

- Where to find youth and how to recruit them
- Types of activities/projects which may interest them
- Ways to develop the spiritual aspect of the Society in Young Vincentians
- Funding activities for each group are also included

THE ELEMENTARY AGE CONFERENCE

There are no age restrictions for membership in the Society. This section describes how to involve the energy and talents of the youngest of our Vincentians in the spirit of Blessed Frederic Ozanam. The Society on Vancouver Island, British Columbia has adopted the term **“Mini Vinnie’s”** for this age group of Youth.

Elementary Conference Advisors

The Advisor for the elementary age Youth Conference faces a very youthful challenge. These young people have very high levels of energy and enthusiasm. This is the time to encourage the giving of themselves to help others less fortunate. This age group may require several “Co-advisors” as well as the cooperation of parents to make this Conference work.

Elementary Conference Advisors may be recruited from parish schools, religious education programs, parish St. Vincent de Paul Conferences or from the laity of the parish itself. It is highly recommended that this person should have knowledge and experience in working with this youngest group of Vincentians.

Recruitment of Elementary conference Members

Potential members from the elementary age group (up to 13 years) may be found:

- In the homes of Vincentians, they may have children or grandchildren who are exactly what is needed. What better role model than their family?
- Within the parish: religious education classes, altar servers, children’s choirs, parish families, Catholic schools and public schools.
- Children of families served by the Society.

How Do We Approach Them?

This age group should be approached with a structured plan for activities or projects that are interesting, fun, and provide for hands-on experiences. Collecting food for the needy and helping distribute Christmas food baskets is an excellent program for these children.

This group may or may not be a continually operating Conference. It may be beneficial to work from project to project depending on the mission of this Conference. Keep in mind that the attention span of these Young Vincentians is usually very short. Choose activities and projects that will fit their idea of time.

Possible Activities

1. Make holiday cards to send to nursing homes, prisons, hospitals and substance abuse centers.
2. Send Remembrance Day cards to the Legion's and Seniors Homes
3. Have a school drive to collect items for the homeless or the institutionalized (toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, combs, shampoo, shaving equipment, blankets, sleeping bags, etc...).
Note: An excellent way of collecting these items can be accomplished in the form of a door-to-door scavenger hunt.
4. Annual clothing drives to collect used clothing.
5. Hospital/Nursing home visits; with supervision, the young Vincentians can perform plays, read to the residents, write letters for them (elderly members), plan and put on monthly birthday parties for the residents, etc. (This may or may not be appropriate for the younger age. Again, judgment of the Adult Advisor is prudent here).
6. Hosting picnics for families of children with handicaps or the clients served by the local Conference.
7. Making games that can be taken to shut-ins and nursing home patients and sometimes staying to play these games.
8. Adopt-a Grandparent Program

9. Clown ministry

10. Puppet ministry

Encouraging Spirituality of the Elementary Conference

Youth spirituality begins with caring adults; Adult Vincentians should be the role model for the nurturing of spirituality. The elementary child is capable of spiritual insight, but cannot find it on their own. As they grow older, the spiritual seeds planted by adults will help them be able to seek their own Christian ideals. Some suggestions for encouraging spiritual growth within this age group include:

- Opening all meetings and activities with prayer or reflection.
- Read a story or parable from the Bible and discuss its meaning.
- Celebrate a special youth Mass, involving the Conference members and inviting others to attend.
- Encourage the members to include prayer in the home.
- Hold a family pot luck supper with spiritual reflections utilizing a Bible passage or religious video.

How to Financially support This Conference

Fundraising done by the Conference members is to provide the Conference with funds to serve the needy and to carry out their activities. Adult Conferences may assist the youth with the funds necessary to carry out their activities. Some fundraising activities that can be done by this age group are:

- Bake sales
- Car washes
- Holding a flea market with donated items
- Special collection at a Vincentian Mass

In conclusion, age should not be a restriction when inviting new members into the Society. These younger members can greatly benefit from the experiences the Society has to offer when given a chance.

THE HIGH SCHOOL AGE CONFERENCE

Introduction

Many High School students are like most other Christians ... they wish to “live” their faith by loving and serving their neighbor.

High School students may be very different than any other age group, young or old. Mentally and physically, they are experiencing the effects of growing up as they move from adolescence to adulthood.

In this very important stage in their lives, when they tend to be the most impressionable to the world around them, they can, nonetheless, form a solid Christian foundation if they are blessed with the availability of a Society of St. Vincent de Paul High School Youth Conference in their community. The Vancouver Island Society of St. Vincent de Paul has adopted the term **“Vinnie’s Youth”** for this age group of Youth (potential members would be 13 to 18 years old).

The influence, guidance and experiences they could encounter as members of the Society could mean the difference between their salvation and the outcome produced by the effects of the secular world.

Some of the more significant aspects of a successful Vinnie’s Youth Conference are discussed in the following paragraphs.

High School Youth Conference Advisor

As with the other “age-groups” an Advisor can make or break a Youth Conference. A High School Conference Advisor, though, has special considerations associated with the responsibilities of helping this age group. High school students are developing into adults and they may look at the High School Advisor as an example of how Christian adults live their faith.

Special care should be taken, therefore, to find an individual who can live up to the expectations of these young adults. Please refer to the earlier chapter, **Youth Advisor**, for more detailed information.

Developing a Campaign for the Recruitment of High School Students

The Advisor's job starts with the formation of a Youth Conference. Essentially this would be similar to his/her own recruitment experience. The recruitment process should be executed on two levels, namely the public forum and personal appeals.

Both avenues should contain a similar message highlighting how the Society can help the high school student to:

- Grow spiritually, serving the Lord.
- Meet other Christian young men and young women.
- Help the needy.
- Examples of activities (described more fully in the next section).

The public forum would include posters (depicting the about messages) hung in the high school or parish; flyers placed in the library, lunchroom, chapel, administrative offices or even mailed the homes of each student; pulpit talks at school Masses or student body gatherings; or advertisements or articles in the high school newspaper.

The personal appeal can be pursued directly by the Youth Advisor when someone has been referred to the Society. Additionally, the Religious Education office and/or director may be an invaluable source of high school candidates, especially in those schools where a credit for community volunteer hours must be obtained to graduate.

Activities

The High School Conference is blessed with the young people who are at the peak of discovering their abilities, physically and mentally. And it is because of this, that the activities for this conference may be the most innovative. Their imagination should be given as much freedom as possible to find new ways to solve problems. The more common activities are discussed in the earlier section, **Establishing the Mission of the Youth Conference.**

In addition to these activities, this conference's seemingly endless source of energy should be tapped by such activities as:

- Home rehab projects for needy or elderly people.

- Day-long or week-long summer camps to poor areas for the purpose of rehabbing run down homes or shelters.
- Clean-up sessions of the Society facilities (e.g.: Council Offices, warehouses, stores, etc.)

This age group should not be limited by the suggestions in this handbook. Their creative minds should be engaged to develop their activities. By giving them a theme they should be able to devise a way to deal with the idea or problem.

Spirituality

Peer pressure in this age group is probably the biggest obstacle that must be overcome with respect to how spiritual growth is handled. To be socially acceptable weighs heavily on the minds of most high school students. Spiritual growth should be incorporated into this age group's interest to "better their world". It is important to develop the attitude of these young people – the first step in bettering their world starts with "living" their faith.

It should be emphasized that the Conference's activities are a means to living their faith and they should view their actions as a means of loving God and loving their neighbor.

The Conference's Spiritual Advisor should be selected with great care. The Spiritual Advisor should be someone who is very much alive in his/her own faith. Furthermore, this Advisor should be "user-friendly" in their discussions of faith and spirituality, not just intellectually oriented.

Additional commentary of **Spirituality** can be found in an earlier chapter of this handbook.

“Living Your Faith”

POST SECONDARY CONFERENCES

Enrichment, intellectual growth, career development and social awareness are all some of the more typical aspects of the college/university experience. In addition to these more common interests that are pursued, the students' values, ideals and spiritual attitudes will be influenced by their "college/university" experience. For most, their "Faith" experiences will affirm the ideals they learned at home.

However, it is here that many of these young people will experience the first real challenges to their faith by people who may be their peers. Just as Blessed Frederic Ozanam was challenged to "live his faith", so too will today's college students need a way to live their faith. A Post Secondary Conference can be the answer to many of these students' prayers as they search for ways to grow spiritually.

A Post Secondary Conference can be relatively self-sufficient, requiring only minimal guidance and input from an Advisor. Furthermore, a Post Secondary Conference's relationship with the local Central or Particular Council should be similar to that of an Adult Parish Conference.

The special considerations involving the Post Secondary Conference are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Recruitment: Standing Out In a Crowd of Interests

On most college campuses, there can be more than 100 interests and activities that a student can get involved in. The simplicity and humility of the Society has appealed to Catholic-Christians of all ages. It is this quiet servitude that will stand out from the other groups that may be vying for the students' participation. Humbly, exhibiting a sincere desire to grow in faith and to serve the Lord's poor and needy; the Post Secondary Conference can attract new members in a number of different ways.

The sheer size of a college/university campus represents some special recruitment needs. Namely, the task of disseminating information about the Society can be a challenge. Flyers and pamphlets on bulletin boards and Campus Ministry offices are quite effective in reaching a large number of students.

Student Government or Student Union recruiting events such as Activities Fairs can also reach many students. They give students the chance to see representatives from the Post Secondary Conference and talk with them before joining. This gives newcomers the chance to meet a few members before their first meeting and also in a high profile event that is a good publicity opportunity for the Society within the school.

Other ideas for recruiting include recruitment parties such as a pizza party, a special Mass and pot luck supper or a “Bring a friend” night. This allows current members to personally insure the continuation of the Conference.

Lastly, at least five minutes of each meeting should be set aside to discuss recruitment.

Activities

Although it may be unrealistic to expect all of the Post Secondary Conference members to attend every meeting, there will always be a sufficient number of students who would benefit from the proceedings of monthly meetings. Furthermore, it would probably be very difficult to determine a time when all of the Conference’s members would be available.

The next best alternative is to establish a monthly meeting time and place so that those who can make any given months meeting will be able to do so. The meeting should be held in a central meeting place such as a classroom, office space, Campus Ministry of Student Life center.

An “Apostolic Reflection” meeting should be offered monthly. This too, should be an agreed upon time and place where the Conference comes together to share their experiences and reflect on their work. Examples of this would be a special Mass of celebration of the Conference’s works; inviting a guest speaker to address the Conference; playing reflective music; Scripture sharing or small group discussions.

On special days when the college is closed, the Conference could plan (as many as possible or needed) one-day outings. This may be a trip to a local soup kitchen to assist the staff or serve for the day; having the conference spend a night at a shelter; spending an afternoon at a nursing home; cleaning up yards, or shopping for the homebound.

Most often, Post Secondary conferences will spend most of their time planning and implementing Service Projects. There are several considerations in regards to these endeavors.

First and foremost, there must be sufficient commitment by enough of the individual members that the project can be brought to fruition. Individual commitments are the responsibility of each person who volunteers for the project. However, it is the responsibility of the Board to fulfill any service commitments they made in the name of the Conference.

Information about the various service projects that the Conference is involved with on an ongoing basis should be kept in a Resource Book. This book should contain contact names and numbers for different types of services. These activities would be available to any and all members to pick and choose from.

Additionally, the Conference President should appoint a volunteer placement committee or person to determine any special needs or activities that the Conference may want to address. These are commonly referred to as Special Projects.

It is recommended that the Board appoint a person or persons to assume a leadership role in special projects.

Some of the more popular special projects are listed below:

1. Children's picnics and/or parties
2. Sing-A-Long at Hospitals or Nursing Homes
3. Homeless Walk-A-Thon on Good Friday
4. Hunger Banquet
5. Toy Drive at Christmas
6. Book Drive
7. Food Drive
8. Working with Special Olympics

Spirituality

Each and every Vincentians primary interest is to grow spiritually. College/University students are taught to become thinkers. As they grow in knowledge, they should also be learning how to balance the worldly aspects of their newfound knowledge with the more important pursuit of spiritual growth. While a student in law school, Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the Society, was challenged to “live” his faith. Now, as it was then, the enticements of the world are luring post secondary students. They need the Society to help them keep their focus on the Lord.

Their faith, their church must be alive! If the Post Secondary conference actively attempts to live the basic principles of the Society, its members will find it very easy to keep their focus on their spiritual growth.

Since college/university students are already in a learning frame of mind, it would be wise to make the spiritual pursuits of the Conference in this manner as well. For example, scripture sharing and discussion may be an appropriate activity at the beginning of each meeting.

Awareness of their Christian attitudes and experiences in their everyday lives may help them to live their faith. Encouraging each member to simply “Bear Witness to Christ” through the love and warmth they share with everyone they meet will go a long way in instilling a Christian attitude on the part of each member.

Fund Raising

Post Secondary Conferences are typically very resourceful in coming up with ways to fund their various projects. They will hold fund raising events such as bake sales, raffles or Coin Days (Small change is collected in high traffic areas), in order to fund special events or to add to the Conference’s working funds. Extra monies collected and not used for their specific purposes should be redistributed to another service project or saved and not used for Conference recreation or parties.

Some of the more common fund raising activities are:

1. Bake Sales in cafeterias
2. Raffles or special drawings
3. Send letter to major companies and grocery stores in the area and ask for donations or food contributions for special events.
4. Car Washes
5. Student Government Budgets
6. Secret Collection

Lastly, the local Particular Council can be a source of funding through its “twinning” program. This is a means of providing Conferences with little financial support with the funds necessary to carry out its ministry. This should be considered only if all the other funding activities are ineffective.

YOUNG ADULT CONFERENCES

College graduates and young adults may find it more suitable to begin their Vincentian relationship in a “Young Adult” Conference. These “catch-all” parish Conferences can be a springboard for many young people who are no longer involved with a learning institution to associate with the Society. The suggested age grouping would be for adults ages 19 to 34 years.

The differences from a College/University Conference are few. The Post Secondary Conference section should be consulted for information about this form of Conference. The differences are discussed below.

Candidates for this Conference’s membership are primarily parish based. Some of the recruiting ideas for Post Secondary Conference will work such as “Bring a friend” night. Additionally, this Conference’s recruits can be reached through information pamphlets and sign-up sheets that can be put out in the back of the church or possibly mailed out with a parish mailing.

Advertisements or announcements in the weekly bulletin inviting anyone interest in the Conference to come to the regularly scheduled meetings are effective. They should include the time and place of the meeting.

Many of the people in this Conference will be in the process of beginning a family and a career. It may be very difficult for them to meet semi-monthly (as it suggests in the Rule). Therefore, to remove the pressure from trying to fit another meeting into their schedules, it may be more appropriate to conduct meetings every month.

Meetings can be held in a parish facility such as a classroom or the church/rectory basement. However, it is not uncommon to hold meetings in a member’s home.

The works for this Conference can be similar to the Post Secondary Conference. Again, the demands on the members’ busy schedules should be considered before any projects are undertaken. Additionally, this Conference may want to take on some of the more typical adult responsibilities in a limited nature such as assisting need people with their emergency needs.

Some of the more widely pursued activities of this Conference are listed below:

1. Home visitation (possibly with Vincentians who have already done this type of service).
2. Visitation to the elderly or shut-ins.
3. Visitations to handicapped.
4. Volunteer babysitting.
5. Neighborhood shelters or soup kitchens.
6. Tutoring
7. Literacy Programs
8. Friend to a handicapped child
9. Help in summer camp projects
10. Work on Parish festival staff
11. Facilitate support groups like AA
12. Assist in parish outreach programs
13. Religious Education
14. Leadership in Young Adult Ministry

THE RELATIONSHIP OF YOUTH CONFERENCES WITH THE ADULT SOCIETY

Every Conference, Youth or Adult, should maintain an active relationship with its local Particular Council. To promote fellowship amongst all Vincentians, Particular “Councils” exist through out Canada. A Council also acts as a conduit for the dissemination of Vincentian endeavors from the various Conferences within a Council’s boundaries. Thus a Conference can learn from, and share with other Conferences throughout Canada by their active involvement with the local Particular Council.

This relationship begins in the individual Conference itself. Each Vincentians activities should be reported to their Conference. This allows the Conference to determine how they are effective as well as where the Conference members are focusing their efforts.

The Conference’s information should be reported to the Particular Council at their regular meetings. The Conference President should report to the Youth Committee of the Particular Council. The President of the Conference would bring any questions, requests or problems to the Particular Council President or the Executive Director. The organization chart should be explained to each Conference’s leadership upon the establishment of the Conference.

Nationally, the Society is committed to the recruitment of youth in the organization. Therefore, to keep their fire burning bright in this endeavor, it would be wise to invite them to induction ceremonies of new members or the inauguration of the Conference President and officers and/or any other significant Conference vents.

The Conference members should attend local Society events, such as the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul or the Society Annual General Meeting. Additionally, a representative, usually the president of the Conference, should attend Regional Meetings and National Conventions. The travel expenses should be covered by the local Particular Council.

The Society is just that A Society. The involvement of all Vincentians with each other is encouraged so that together, the members can more effectively: Bear witness to Christ through the fellowship of its members by serving God's poor and needy.

AND THAT'S ALL THERE IS....

Except...

In conclusion, the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Vancouver Island Youth Committee hope that this Manual will assist in the formation of Youth Conferences throughout Canada. It is not intended to take the place of the Canadian Rule of the National Society of St. Vincent de Paul or the Society's Recruitment Manual for Vincentian Service. It is however, intended to answer questions on the who, what, where, when, why and how of the process to get youth involved in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

This Youth Recruitment Manual for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, used in conjunction with the aforementioned manuals, should assist the willing Vincentian who undertakes the task of beginning a Conference of Young Vincentians.

A special thanks is to be given to the present and past members of the United States National Youth Committee for the formation of the original Young Vincentian Handbook and to the Youth Committee and staff of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Vancouver Island who undertook updating the manual to incorporate the revised Rule (2007) as well as adapting the US Manual to a Canadian format.