



## GLOBAL TRAINING

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# 16 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE CONFERENCE

❶ ***“I will show you my faith through my works” (Letter of James 2:18).*** It was in 1833 that a group of young French students, including Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, formed the first Conference of Charity in Paris, with the aim of increasing the holiness of its members through the practice of works of mercy.

❷ Faithful to the insights shown by the first group, today’s Conference remains *“a community of faith, prayer and action”*. (Rule, art 3.3). Today, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is defined as *“a network of Friends who seek their personal holiness through service to those in need and through defending Social Justice”*. (Assembly in June 2017)

❸ It is composed of lay faithful, women and men, children and teenagers, young and old, of all conditions in life and of all cultures.

❹ The Conference is led by Catholics, but Membership is open to all people of good will. It is essential for the President, Vice-president and Spiritual Adviser to be Catholics. (Rule art. 6.4 and 6.5).

❺ The Conference is independent of the Church. However, its work must always be in accordance with the teaching of the Church in matters of faith, doctrine and morals. (Rule art. 5.3)

❻ The Conference is attached to the nearest Council which represents the link uniting it to the structure of the Society.

❼ Conferences are identified by their chosen title, which may be the name of a saint or a Catholic invocation, meaning the kind usually accepted by the Catholic Church.



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- 8 There are three aspects to Conference activity (Rule, art 2.2)
  1. Service of those most in need, traditionally, the home visit, personal contact with those who are suffering. This contact may be during the home visit, or wherever the person in need is found, in the street, in hospital, in a residential home, in a chance encounter. The important thing is that the charism of the Society is personal contact, listening and detecting the suffering of another human being. This service is a concrete expression of a living Christian faith.
  2. Life of prayer
  3. Life in community with brothers and sisters in the Conference
  
- 9 The charitable work of the Conference is the opportunity for a personal encounter with those most in need, in whom we see the face of the suffering Christ (Rule, art. 1.8). *“The poor are our Lords and masters”* as St Vincent de Paul said.
  
- 10 No work of charity is foreign to the Conference, which is called to relieve not just material poverty, but also spiritual and moral poverty (art. 1.3).
  
- 11 The Conference normally meets every week, or at least every two weeks (art.3.3.1).
  
- 12 Conference meetings are characterised by:
  - simplicity, friendship, joy and close family relations among the members;
  - a spirit of community, poverty and sharing
  - dialogue and collegiality in decision-making
  
- 13 The values lived out by the members in their daily work as Vincentians are: service, spirituality, humility and charity.
  
- 14 Leaders of Councils, Conferences, Special Works and other services, and of departments and committees within the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul who are members of the Society, are not exempt from participating in Conference activities.
  
- 15 The Conference acts independently in managing the resources at its disposal, and in the administration of its work, always seeking the best decision for those for whom it cares, both materially and spiritually.
  
- 16 The Conference is united to the Conferences through the work, sharing with them the same spirit and spirituality, as defined by the Rule. The Society is a single, unique, worldwide Community of friends (art. 3.3).