**INVITATION TO SERVE**

**For**

# Extension

*Forming and supporting* ***NEW***

*Adult, Young Adult and Youth Conferences*



## **National Council of the United States**

**Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

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Invitation to Serve

Introduction

“The Society is open to all those who seek to live their faith, loving and committing themselves to their neighbor in need.” (*Rule*, Part I, 3.1)

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a Catholic lay organization where the members grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those in need was founded by Frederic Ozanam and named for St. Vincent de Paul.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul serves in approximately one fourth of the parishes in the United States and continues to grow as more and more people answer the call to serve people who are living in poverty.

This handout will provide the recommended steps to form new Conferences and to guide them through the process of becoming active.

Forming New Conferences

First Step – Involvement by the District Council and/or Regional Vice President

There are several different ways that a new Conference may begin but the most important step is that the Arch/Diocesan Council accompanies the formation and development of the new Conferences in their Arch/Diocese. The Regional Vice President or their representative mentors the new Conference located in isolated areas.

The Council Representative or the Regional Vice President will mentor the new Conference members for at least six months to a year to assist in the formation and guidance of the new Conference.

The request to form a new Conference may be made by a Bishop, Pastor, Parishioner or Vincentian. In each case the procedure may vary a little but it is always important to arrange a meeting in person.

The Start-Up Kit is an excellent way to follow the steps necessary in completing the formation of the new Conference.

Second Step – Meeting with the Bishop/Pastor

Forming a Conference in a new Arch/Diocese

If the possibility of forming a Conference in a new Arch/Diocese either at the request of the Bishop or from someone else, it is best to start by having a meeting in person with the Bishop. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a relational network of people working together for the good of others and it is best to begin with the Bishop who is a key factor in the extension of the Society. The Council or District President may be the one to arrange the meeting in a (Arch) Diocese where the presence of the Society already exists. In an (Arch) Diocese where we have no presence, the Regional Vice President or Representative will make the arrangements for a meeting.

Forming a New Conference at the request of the Pastor, Parishioner or Vincentian

The first step would be to set up a meeting with the Pastor of the parish that the new Conference will exist. It is important to help the Pastor understand the mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the activity that will take place in his parish and the role that he would play. The Diocesan Council President or Representative would arrange a meeting with the Pastor to explain the mission of the Society and the procedure in establishing a new Conference.

The Council representative will present the Rule of the Society, and other materials that help to explain the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

**Preparation**

**What may be discussed?**

1. **The visit to the Pastor is to obtain his agreement to form a Conference in his parish. It is also helpful to share how the Society of St. Vincent de Paul can contribute to parish life.**

It is important to explain the mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and how the works of charity performed by the parishioners will assist the parish in reaching out to those in need. It is also a way that the members will be able to grow spiritually.

1. **It may or may not be necessary to share with the Pastor that there are many people in the parish area who are in need.**

The Pastor will probably be well aware of need in his parish, since the poor often come to the church to ask for help. Explain how the SVdP Conference will take over the function of providing this help and the Conference may also share in supporting other needs.

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

* The Pastor may submit some parishioners’ names that may be potential members and a place to begin is by contacting each individual with the permission of the Pastor.
* Ask for permission to make a pulpit appeal on a particular weekend to the congrega­tion to explain the works of the Society and to invite interested parishioners to an orientation meeting.
* The District Council Representative along with the Pastor will set a time and place for the first meeting. The mission of the Society and the works of the Society would be explained to the potential members along with the opportunities for spiritual formation. The representative of the District Council will help facilitate the meetings until the Conference is firmly established.

The following points will also need to be made clear to the Pastor.

1. **Spiritual Advisor**

The Spiritual Advisor is a very important member of the Conference. In the United States we are finding that the demands on the priests in the Parish prevent them from regular attendance at our meetings. In the spirit of our heritage where Emmanuel Bailly, a lay man, served as the spiritual advisor of our founding members, it is recommended that a member of the Conference be invited to serve in this role.

The Spiritual Advisor attends all meetings and participates fully in the Conference activities and discussions. If they are a deacon/religious it is important that they understand Vincentian spirituality. Spiritual Advisors should be specifically requested to help in the spiritual formation of members, principally by using the Vincentian Formation materials from the National Office. The National Office has a Spiritual Advisor Handbook for training and formation.

1. **Finances**

* Sources of income for the Conference come mostly from the parish.
* Some parishes have a monthly collection by the SVdP members
* Some parishes have a special monthly collection for the SVdP and include envelopes for this purpose in the parishioner's envelope box.
* The parish may provide "up front" funds or hold a special collection to assist with the home visit cases before regular funding is estab­lished for the Conference
* In keeping with the spirit of Frederic Ozanam, a secret collection may be taken up at each Conference meeting which is intended to involve a meaningful sacrifice for the members.

Third Step – Inviting Potential Members to the Preliminary Meeting

Representatives of the District Council will call the parishioners recommended by the Pastor and invite them to the Orientation Meeting and explain the following:

1. Your name and that you are a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the diocese.
2. Your Pastor (Use Name) is considering organizing a SVdP 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 may be interested
5. Would you be willing to attend and hear more about ways to assist those in need in your parish?

Potential members from the Pulpit Appeal may also be contacted and invited to the same Orientation Meeting.

Fourth Step – Preliminary Orientation Meeting Agenda

The meeting should be conducted by the District Council President or Representative. The following agenda may be followed:

* Opening prayer and spiritual reflection
* Introduction of Vincentians and potential members
* History of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (9 minute DVD)
* Mission of the Society
* Requirements of members
* Attending meetings twice a month
* Participate in spiritual formation
* Describe the structure of the Society
* Conference in the parish conducting home visits
* District Council
* Diocesan Council
* National Council
* International Council in 149 countries
* Describes the works of the Society
* Home visits and Confidentiality
* Thrift Stores
* Food Pantries
* Other works
* Explain how the Society works
* Finances – How the money will be collected
* Needs in the Parish
* Procedure for the intake and request for assistance
* Publicize the Society to the parishioners
* Follow the recommendation of the Arch/Bishop on the policy for the Safe Environment for Children. This program needs to be completed before home visits.
* Arrange for the first meeting – day, time and place
* Have potential members fill out sheet with contact information
* Close with Prayer
* Social gathering with refreshments

Fifth Step – Arranging the First Meeting

The District President or Representative will provide the following:

1. Secretary's Minute Book
2. Treasurer's Handbook and Journal
3. The Rule
4. The Manual
5. Spiritual Readings for Conference Meetings
6. Prayer Cards, at least one for each

The Spiritual Advisor is given an understanding of their responsibilities for the meeting. It is important for them to be familiar with the SVDP Rule and Manual. The Opening and Closing Prayers as well as the Vincentian Reflections are shared for use at the meetings. The *Handbook for Spiritual Advisors* may be shared with the Spiritual Advisor for more explanation of their role.

The District President or Representative will help discern the selection of the President along with the Pastor and members of the Conference. This position will be made more permanent after several months when an election will be held.

The schedule for the next Ozanam Orientation will be explained and encouraged.

Sixth Step – The First Meeting

The first meeting will be chaired by the District President and the acting President. One of the prospective members may be asked to take the minutes until it is time for the election of officers.

1. The agenda for the Conference meeting will follow as closely as possible the meeting agenda described in The Rule, Part III, and Statute 7.

1. Instructions given for home visits. Using the Home Visit DVD would be a way to begin. Mentoring the new Vincentians with experienced Vincentians may be planned.

Seventh Step – The Next Few Meetings

The acting President and District Council President or Representative will 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 acting President should aim for duration of an hour.

A Conference roster will be prepared by the acting Secretary, showing the names, addresses, and home and work telephone numbers and email addresses of all Conference members, the Spiritual Advisor, the District Council President and representative. Copies will be provided to all listed on the roster.

After the first few meetings and after the home visit procedure has been explained, it is time to begin to identify people in need and respond to their requests. A system will be established to receive calls and a process has been determined on how to process the call. Funding is in place and all members have completed the Safe Environment Program for their (Arch) Diocese.

Now, the new members may be paired with an experienced Vincentian to make a home visit. Once home visits begin, a report is to be maintained for the families or individuals visited and the help that was provided.

It is now time for the acting President to take over fully in the position of President or it may be possible that another person is appointed. The new President will be responsible for the next meeting with the possibility of the Council President or Representative present for support and encouragement.

The Council President or Representative will see that the application for the new Conferences has been completed and submitted to the National Council office. The members and leadership roles will be entered into the National Database so the information will be received by the new members. The local Council will invite the new Conference members to the District Council Meetings as well as Council activities.

Invitation to Serve

Invitation to Serve in September is an ideal time but it can be done whenever the parish Conference sees the need. Permission from the Pastor to initiate an Invitation to Serve is required.

Bulletin Announcement Samples

**Sample 1**



Are you looking for ways to experience God?

Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul invite you to share in their ministry of experiencing God in serving people living in poverty.

We see Christ in the poor and when we see Christ we experience God.

Contact the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference President.

**Sample 2**

Do you consider yourself a naturally caring, compassionate and giving person?

If so, come and share your gifts with people in need by joining the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

In the coming weeks more will be share about the spirituality and works of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul at the Parish Masses.

If you are interested, contact \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Sample 3**

You are invited to serve people in need in our (name) Parish by joining the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Your assistance to people in our Parish area needing food, clothes, rent assistance, utility assistance and other needs will be a rewarding experience. Is it time for you to live your religious convictions and give something back for all you have received? Come join us next (Thursday) at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(time) in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(place) to learn more.

#### Involvement of the Young

A parish that has a school or a religious education program may also be interested in forming a Youth Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul sometimes referred to as “Minnie Vinnies”. This is an excellent way to begin forming our young people with a spirit of service, develop their spirituality and to involve them in the works of the Adult Conference. There are many resources found on the youth website at [www.svdpusa.com/youth](http://www.svdpusa.com/youth) .

#### Sample Talk from the Pulpit

Good Morning, My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I am the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul conference here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church.

I would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ our pastor and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

for allowing me to take a few minutes of your time to share with you about the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a Catholic lay organization that helps those in need or those living in poverty. We grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to people in need. Because we see “the face of Christ” in those we serve as Jesus taught us when he said, “whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do to me.”

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is an international organization founded in 1833 by a young student, Frederic Ozanam. The Society was founded in the United States in 1845 and is located in 149 countries.

Today, the need to serve those who are living in poverty is very great even in our own parish. (It is important to share some of the local needs that the Conference is experiencing and the works that the Conference does: food drive, clothing drive, home visits to assist in utilities or rent, etc.)

Our Conference is a small group of dedicated women and men who are inviting you to consider joining us and making a difference. Not only will you be helping those in need but you will also find yourself growing in God’s love and the desire to share that love with others.

After Mass, there will be members of the parish conference in the back of church to provide a sign-up sheet and answer your questions about our orientation meeting on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

May you take some time to reflect in your heart, God’s calling to you to serve those in need through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Thank you for the generosity you have shown to the works of the Society by your financial and material donations to our work.

God Bless

**Sample Letter to Bishop in New Arch/Diocese**

Date

The Most Rev. …

…

Dear Bishop …,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I am the District Council President or (Regional Vice-President for the … Region) of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Society ministers to those in need in parishes throughout the country. We are currently in 149 countries worldwide and in 4,400 parishes in the United States.

Our Society is not present in your Diocese, but there has been some interest shown in one of your parishes for us to help them form a Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We would like to set up an appointment with you to explain the mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and how it can help respond to the people in need in the parish.

The Society has a formal process for inviting people to join as well as a formal process for training them. The Society allows people to fulfill their personal needs to be involved with a ministry that goes to the very heart of Christ’s teaching to love and care for our neighbor. Our ministry is truly a journey in the spiritual growth of our members. The primary activity of our Conference is aiding those in need, and our main emphasis is on the spiritual growth of our members.

I look forward to the opportunity to share the mission and works of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the asset it will bring to your arch/diocese

Yours in the spirit of our founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and patron St. Vincent de Paul, I look forward to hearing from you.

(Signature and Title)

Sample Letter to Conference Presidents

Date (September is the recommended time.)

Dear President,

The Council Office is coordinating, in association with Districts, Parish Conferences and Special Works Conferences, the (first) annual Diocesan-wide recruitment drive.

It is called an *Invitation to Serve for Recruitment*. The goal is to obtain new members dedicated to the Vincentian mission. The drive will assist in the raising awareness of our Conferences, solicitation of Pastoral involvement, identification of candidates, initial contact, orientation, training and development of ways to recruit and retain new members. A number of aids have been developed for your use and are enclosed.

We plan to complete the drive prior to our busiest time in late Fall still allowing time for orientation and basic training. The new members will then be available to assist in activities such as annual food drives, special holiday programs, Christmas programs, etc. Their involvement in these annual events will help initiate them into our Society’s work.

The drive will be your choice of any weekend in September, following within a couple of weeks by an orientation meeting. A series of Ozanam Orientations will be scheduled in October in various locations in the Diocese.

Your Conference will be asked to participate in several ways.

1. Communication with the Pastor for his support and encouragement.
2. Assist in getting notices in the bulletin.
3. Give a short talk at each Mass.
4. Provide and staff information tables at each Mass.
5. Secure a meeting room for the week of the talk from the pulpit.
6. Conduct an orientation meeting.
7. Have new members complete the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese.
8. Require the new candidates to attend an Ozanam Orientation.
9. Report back the results of your *Invitation to Serve*.
10. Offer suggestions for next year’s drive to make it even more successful.

Our goal is to develop an effective annual increase in our membership by attracting those who wish to live their faith by service to Christ’s poor.

We need your help and the help of your Conference to fulfill our mission to serve those in need and give others an opportunity to serve as well.

In the name of St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic,

(NAME),

**Sample Letter to Pastors**

Date

Dear Pastor,

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul ministers to the poor in parishes throughout the Diocese. As our Diocese has grown, the need for our Society’s assistance has grown. We are inviting Catholics in all parishes to live their religious convictions by serving Christ through His poor and through our Society.

We are offering this invitation because of our need for help. Perhaps more importantly, it allows people to fulfill their personal needs to be involved with a ministry that goes to the very heart of Christ’s teaching to love and care for all people.

Our *Invitation to Serve*will be offered during the early Fall. All of our parish Conferences will participate in inviting, informing and educating parish members of the opportunities to serve.

We would like your support to allow an article in your parish bulletin, a short announcement from the pulpit by a Vincentian at each Mass, and any further assistance that seems appropriate to you.

After the Invitation to Serve we will be holding informational orientation meetings at each parish. After the orientation those who feel inclined to follow this ministry will be given basic training called an Ozanam Orientation (named for our founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam). Each new member will work with experienced Vincentians in visiting and assisting those in need and be included in our Diocesan service.

This ministry is not for everyone. Most Vincentians realize we were not the ones to choose this work for Christ. We were chosen, perhaps because of a deeper need within us to serve. To give others the opportunity to do this work is one of our primary responsibilities. We are trying to fulfill this responsibility with this *Invitation to Serve.*

Can we count on your support?

Yours in the spirit of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

Sign

**St. Vincent de Paul**

**Invitation to Serve**

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Invitation to Serve

Initial Response Report

**Date Number Number Number**

**District Conference Contact of of of at**

**Invitation Masses Signups Orientation**

**Meeting**

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By \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_