

**THE RULE
OF
THE SOCIETY
OF
ST VINCENT de PAUL
IN
SOUTH AFRICA**

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FOREWORD

“More things are wrought by prayer than man dreams of”

These words came to mind as I read through the New Rule of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. They came to mind for two reasons:

- a) Prayer is described in the Introduction to the President General as the essence of all activities to be undertaken and practiced by the Members of the Society;
- b) The generosity of both parishioners who donate towards the work of the Society – often themselves not well off – and the members who give not only of their goods and resources but also and especially of themselves and their talents can only be the fruit of prayer.

A second truth that emerges from the opening pages of the Rule is that the strength of the Society comes from its firm commitment to being a community of faith and charity. It is not just a benevolent group but a community of people truly bound to Jesus by faith and living out that bond of faith.

They do this by reaching out with the same openness, sensitivity and compassion as Jesus our Lord to those in need. And this is only right and just for they do this work in His name and under His guidance.

There can be no doubt but that any member who reads, studies and meditates on this Rule will come away not just with more knowledge about the Society, but will be blessed with a spirituality that will enable him or her to understand better the vocation and mission that are described therein. By far the most important manifestation of that spirituality is the insight and strength that makes a member answer the Lord wholeheartedly with these words: “Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will”, and secondly: “Here I am, send me!”

May God our loving and compassionate Father bless each and every single member of St Vincent de Paul Society with the faith, and generosity to be, and to act, always as His instruments of faith, hope, and love.

+Wilfrid Card Napier, OFM
Archbishop of Durban - President of Southern African
Catholic Bishops’ Conference

PREFACE BY NATIONAL PRESIDENT,

JUNE REHMAN

2006 – A milestone as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the foundation of our Society in South Africa and the publication of our new Rule. The Rule was last revised in 1992 and much has changed in the country since then. The work of the Society is dynamic, and we are faced with new challenges almost daily. To this end we rise to meet these challenges since no work of charity is foreign to the Society. We are reminded of this by the following:

- “Whatever you did for the least of my brethren; you did for me”

(Matthew 25:40)

- “Faith without good works is worthless” (James 2:14-26)

The Rule comprises three sections. Part one reminds us of the main purpose of the Society i.e. the relief of the poor and needy, and the sanctification of our (the members’) souls. Part two sets out the international Statutes by which the Society is governed. Part three contains the specifically South African Statutes in terms of which we are guided in the conduct of the Society’s work. All three together comprise “The Rule”.

Short stories about our patron St Vincent, our South African founder Alexander Wilmot, and the origin of the Society in Paris in 1833 have been included to give a historical background to the Rule.

It is in the interest of all members to read and sometimes study the Rule to acquaint themselves with the structure and the guidelines that pertain to the Society, internationally and locally. This will help with growth and development of the Society and its members as one big family. In this vein we will see and understand that our work is not done in isolation, but we experience the joy of sharing in the work of our brothers and sisters in our own small communities and those throughout the world. We all have one motivation and one aim, that is to serve our God in His poor.

With regard to this then, it is my hope that each member of our Society will acquire a personal copy of the Rule, to read and study closely and thus be able to refer to it when the need arises. Conference presidents are encouraged to fit into their programme of spiritual reading some articles from the Rule. This could be done over a period of time. In the words of Mike Nolan, the

National President at the time of the last publication “Let us not bluff ourselves that we can be loyal members of this Society without knowing its rules and its spirit”.

Let us continue to be servants of the poor, and implement the new Rule enthusiastically so that our beloved Society can grow from strength to strength.

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to be the President at this great time and to pen this preface.

June Rehman

**INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW RULE
BY PRESIDENT GENERAL
JOSÉ RAMÓN DIAZ-TORREMOCHA**

The presentation of the Rule of the Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in the world, and of the International By-Laws that govern its operation, recently approved during the Rome Special General Meeting in October 2003, and which follows this prologue, is a special moment in the life of conferences.

The Society, during its one hundred and seventy years of existence, has developed only three fundamental texts, including the text that we are presenting today. Obviously, two of them have had quite a lengthy lifespan.

For an institution such as ours, the Rule is always important. It is even more so that the Society involves its members only in conscience. The members have the obligation to abide by the Rule from the very moment they belong to the fraternal community present in the entire world.

Indeed, such a deeply Christian and Catholic organization, with a vocation to serve poor and marginal people, and all those who suffer, and whose service – stated by God himself as being the way towards eternal life, “he will put the sheep on his right.... ” (Mt. 25, 31-46) – involves us only in conscience. It implicates all those among us who have wished to unite, for the past one hundred and seventy years, with the objective of serving each other ourselves, the poor, and expanding the Kingdom.

Within the Rule, there are five elements above all others on which we should focus: the need for prayer, individual and collective; our personal commitment through action; the brotherhood in which we must live; the universality of our commitment to serve the poor, and our ecclesial vocation.

Without prayer, it is impossible to understand the existence of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, of conferences. In reality, the first conference emerged at the beginning of the 19th century from the common prayer of a few youths in Paris, who wanted to convert their prayer into action. These youths, used to a life of collective prayer, wanted to extend it through serving the poor, devoting themselves to the neediest. But they did it without forgetting to reinforce the need for prayer, which precedes any tangible action for the good of others, of those who suffer.

It is also quite difficult for one to understand service within conferences if one does not accept the necessity to the server on a personal basis, by establishing contact with those who need us in their own environment, wherever they feel the most confident. Since the beginning, conferences “went” to the poor without waiting for them to come to them. In other words, and as the Rule comments, Vincentians seek to help the needy precisely where they feel the most at ease, even psychologically. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has sought so much this type

of contact, where the poor live, that the concept of the “visit”, as the expression of what is most intimate in our commitment, has become a classic among ourselves; the “home visit” to the poor, the “visit” as the expression of a meeting that is always personal and intimate among themselves and to those whom they want to serve.

In order to succeed, to achieve an intimate commitment and meeting with the poorest, it is necessary to first have a solid fraternal community within each one of our conferences. If the Rule, as it states, calls upon us to meet through individual and collective prayer and to benefit from it, it nevertheless invites us to a brotherly relationship among brothers. How is it possible to love others, those whom we do not know we love if we do not love each other? The Rule invites us to strengthen this brotherhood that was always predominant, not only in the actions of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul but also in their very existence.

In a world increasingly open to communication and proximity thanks to increasingly sophisticated means of communication, poverty cannot be felt anymore only in its manifestations that are closest to us. On the contrary, the phenomenon is known as “globalization” must make us feel responsible wherever it manifests itself, whomever it affects, and as far away as it may be. In reality, it should remind us that we must feel called upon to fight against suffering and that the work of brothers in other regions is also our work.

Finally, we are part of the Church and we join it anywhere we are for our apostolate. The Rule reminds us to understand that whenever we approach any suffering person, whenever we contribute to alleviating suffering, and whenever we put the balm on the wound of those injured by life, we pretend nothing else than to bring Christ and his Church’s message of Love. We are aware of his extraordinary representation and of our responsibility in showing the Holy Church as being closer, more committed, and gentler. We are aware that in several places, the Church can be perceived as a whole and in its commitment only through the Society through each conference.

By introducing the new Articles of the Rule, the International By-Laws, and the Required Conditions for internal By-laws of every superior council or country, the Council General calls upon all leaders of the Vincentian service to make these articles known as soon as possible, by making them available to every member of the Society

José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha
XIV President General
Paris, April 2004

INDEX TO THE RULE

The Rule consists of three parts; they are:

1. Part 1 of the Rule: The Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.
2. Part 2 of the Rule: The Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
3. Part 3 of the Rule: The Internal Statutes of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in South Africa.

All three together comprise “The Rule”. The following Index provides an easy guide to anyone needing to consult the Rule.

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Part 1 of the Rule

THE RULE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIETY AND SERVICE TO THE POOR

1.1 Origins

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide Christian community, founded in Paris in 1833 by a group of young Catholic lay people and an older person who joined together to create the first conference. The Society wishes to remember them all with gratitude, as they set an example of dedication to the poor and to the Church. From Le Taillandier who received the first inspiration, to Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Deveaux, Félix Clavé, all of them knew in their humanity, how to seek the wise advice and support of the one who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society, Emmanuel Bailly.

The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charismas of each one. Among them, Blessed Frederic Ozanam was a radiant source of inspiration.

The Society has been Catholic from its origins. It remains an International Catholic voluntary organization of lay people, men, and women.

Commentary. -This first article seeks, in addition to making a firm declaration of its Christian and Catholic faith from its very origins, to make a hymn to the laity's capacity to honour the commitments acquired in Baptism. Those young people, whose names are quoted for the first time in our Rule, were more than one hundred years ahead of their time concerning the obligation of the laity to extend the Kingdom, which the Second Vatican Council would later emphasize.

The Holy Spirit was also present in the first Conference as a group, not only in each individual, as the bond of their unity, ensuring that the various charisms they were given were precisely those necessary for the Conference to achieve the mission willed for it by God. It is the founders' response to the Holy Spirit's inspiration, which enables the Society to help us, in our time, to grow every day, as human beings and spiritually, in devotion to the poor.

1.2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF OUR SERVICE

1.2.1 The Vincentian vocation

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.

Commentary. -Belonging to a Conference is a vocation in itself: a vocation of personal contact with Christ in the Poor. The predominant feature of this contact must always be compassion and the will to free

people from their burdens: an effort to build the coming Kingdom. Personal contact with the suffering is the most obvious distinctive characteristic of the Vincentian ministry. We bring unconditional love to the poor and seek to love in the way Jesus loved, because "the first vocation of the Christian is to follow Jesus" (CCC2232). "Vincentians serve in hope". What air is to the lungs, so is hope to the human spirit. We have a real hope that our work will make a difference, both in the lives of those we visit and, in a mysterious way, in the world at large. If we go through difficulties, we remember that "(hope) affords us joy even under trial" (CCC1820).

1.2.2 Any form of personal help

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.

Commentary. -This is also one of the basic distinctive characteristics of the Conferences: any form of help. From its origins, the Society has claimed that the freedom of action of each Conference makes it possible to adapt to the specific needs of those it visits, serving through personal contact.

"promotes .. personal integrity"

"True development concerns the whole man. It is concerned with increasing each person's ability to respond to his vocation and hence to God's call" (cf. CA 29) (CCC2461).

Poor is the one who has no option to choose.

1.2.3 To anyone in need

The Society serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender or political opinions.

Commentary. -Members do not judge. To judge is reserved to God who sees deep into every person's heart. We serve, considering what each person needs, in keeping with what they themselves consider they lack, which we will not always understand. Vincentians do not impose: they serve in hope and wish to be able to influence by the example of their lives. "Who does not know that among the poor, very often, emotional and spiritual suffering is more acute than material poverty? What saddens them most is that there should not be a friendly hand holding theirs, nor a heart beating with theirs" (Introduction to the Scotland Manual 1845).

We should avoid the danger of forgetting those closest to us: our family, other members and friends. There is the danger that, when attending the poor, we become insensitive towards the pain of those nearest to us.

1.2.4 To seek out the poor

Vincentians strive to seek out and find those in need, the forgotten and the victims of exclusion or adversity.

*Commentary. -This article implies a positive initiative to seek and find the poor, rather than being content with the list of people we currently help. There is a clear need to visit "**the forgotten**". We should not*

expect that the poor will come to us. On the contrary, it is we who should go to encounter them and devote ourselves to share their poverty and their sorrow. Vincentians should always retain their capacity to imagine and observe, working continuously to discover the new forms of suffering that threaten people at every moment.

1.2.5 Adaptation to a changing world

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.

Commentary". -To give priority to the poorest of the poor" Indeed, the Conferences in their daily work must give priority to the poorest of the poor. To them, precisely to them, they have to bring comfort, to reach out and share their suffering. (See 1.5 and Commentary). Each Conference and each member must not forget the difficulty of identifying who are the poorest of the poor. Sometimes, as stated elsewhere, not only financial poverty but emotional and spiritual suffering may result in people being rejected and becoming isolated.

1.3. OUR PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POOR

1.3.1 Prayer before personal encounters or visits

Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for peace and joy of Christ.

Commentary. -We are unable to achieve anything of eternal value on our own, without the assistance of God Himself (Jn 15:5). Prayer, individual and communal, is a fundamental need when the Conferences and each Vincentian undertake any action. The Society's logo: "serviens in spe", always reminds us of the need for hope in our service: a service impossible without deep prayer and reflection, that should be fostered by the community that each Conference is.

The tradition in the Society, established by the first Conferences, shows us the great value of the "Visit before the visit", prior to personal contact: the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the House of God where, with a humble attitude, we will put ourselves at his disposal in order to be his eyes, his hands and his understanding in the subsequent contact with the poor. If that is not always possible, some moments of inner recollection are absolutely necessary: recollection to ask the Holy Spirit for his gifts: Wisdom to understand the situation, its priorities and the deeper needs; Fortitude to persevere, not to give up; Counsel to tackle the problem appropriately; Piety to feel, to feel compassion, which is nothing other than feeling what the other feels; Reverence and awe of God to visit with humility, with the humility that recognizes we are ourselves finite human beings who beseech Providence for those who are our brothers and sisters. Children of God and Temples of the Holy Spirit, they and we are, therefore, equal in dignity no matter what distress they feel or how much misery surrounds them.

1.3.2 Reverence for the poor

Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God's image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ.

Members observe the utmost confidentiality in the provision of material and any other type of support.

Commentary. -This joy should not be tarnished by the pain caused in us by the very suffering of the friend in need whom we are trying to comfort. Cheerfulness is a Christian characteristic and each Vincentian should nurture it. Vincentians respect the views and aspirations of each of the human beings in need whom they encounter. It is their needs, their longings we seek to meet. Sometimes, they will even be far away from our own scale of values; from our scale of needs. Only gentleness and example will be useful to bring about a change; never any imposition. "Another point that also deserves our attention is the discretion that should accompany zeal for the salvation of souls. Fervor is not always holy, nor is it always inspired by God. Not every moment is appropriate for new ideas and Christian teachings to penetrate hearts; it is necessary to wait for God's time and to be patient, as He himself is" (Rule, 1835, PC)

1.3.3 Empathy

Vincentians endeavor to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve, rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.

Commentary. -Sharing is not possible without friendship. The extension of the Kingdom is not possible unless we are aware of our own frailty. Let us be thankful for our faith; for the call we receive; for having the opportunity of becoming close to Christ in the poor we serve; for being able to avoid judging; for being always available to attend to our brothers' needs. "...the member mixes his tears with those of the poor and with patience and love he makes Christian friendship spring up in that heart." (Introduction to the Scotland Manual, 1845).

1.3.4 Promotion of self-sufficiency

Vincentians endeavor to help the poor to help themselves whenever possible and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community.

Commentary. -Conferences do not wish poverty to exist. For this reason, it is implied that they fight against this unjust situation. Nevertheless, the poor should be the ones to find their own path. We, Vincentians, will accompany them wherever they wish to go. Promoting self-sufficiency and the awareness by those who suffer, that they have the ability to overcome suffering, is a basic task which can never be given up by Vincentians. (See 6.2.9)

1.3.5 Concerns for deeper needs and spiritually

Vincentians are sincerely concerned with the deeper needs and the spiritual well-being of those they help, always observing a profound respect for their conscience and their religious belief, listening and understanding with their hearts, beyond both words and appearances.

Vincentians serve in hope. They rejoice in discovering the spirit of prayer in the poor, for in the silence, the poor can perceive God's Plan for every person.

The acceptance of God's Plan leads each one to nurture the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace in themselves, their families and all those whose lives they touch. Vincentians are privileged to foster these signs of the presence of Risen Christ in the poor and among themselves.

Commentary. -We encourage them to improve their life and we try to show them the existence of a different kind of life and spiritual values, always respecting their own values.

"profound respect": That does not mean complicity or silence when we witness situations that are intrinsically perverse or sinful. Respect for the Gospel obliges us to state, without imposition, without contempt, our own moral vision of the world, even when this is opposite to the values of the poor whom we are trying to serve. The Vincentian, despite a deep respect for the decisions of the poor person, cannot give up proclaiming the Word of Life. He cannot give up sharing with others the best of himself: his faith. "Let us avoid arguments with the poor, not being offended if they do not accept our advice nor try to oblige them to accept it with an air of authority: let us be satisfied with suggesting to them the pattern of behavior that seems good to us, and having encouraged them to follow it, leave it to God to enable our words to bear fruit, if this is His Holy Will" (Rule, 1835, PR).

On the other hand, we cannot and we should not forget that very often when people call poverty God's will, it is not his will at all, but is only the product of our deficiencies when distributing the Earth's resources; the result of not loving each other as Christ Himself taught us to do.

"signs of the presence of the Risen Christ": In the commentary on 1.8, the focus is on seeing "the Suffering Christ" in the sufferings of the people we visit. In 1.11, Vincentians are encouraged to see the "signs of the presence of the Risen Christ" in the virtues of those we visit, especially when there has been a transformation of an attitude or of actions, which is a sure sign of grace, and a confirmation that "Christians ... participate in the life of the Risen Lord" (CCC1694).

1.3.6 Gratitude to those we visit

Vincentians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognize that the fruit of their labours, springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the poor they serve.

Commentary. -Many Conferences, at the end of their meetings, thank God for the good they receive from those who suffer. It is a great truth that, in our contact with the poor, we receive much more than we can bring them with our poor donations. Only the Lord's help, only His assistance obtained through deep

prayer, individual and communal, can make us useful to those we try to serve. "Many times, the member gains more benefit himself from what he hears than is produced by what he says" (F.Lallier, circular to the Conferences, August 1837)

2. VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND VOCATION

Faith in Christ and the Life of Grace

"Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5,1-2).

2.1 Love in union with Christ

Convinced of the truth of the Apostle St. Paul's words, Vincentians seek to draw closer to Christ. They hope that someday it will be no longer they who love, but Christ who loves through them (Gal 2.20 "... I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God"), and that even now, in their caring, the poor may catch a glimpse of God's great love for them.

Commentary. -Our starting point is the conviction that the Lord is infinitely good, he who has given us the gift of salvation through His sacrifice. What can we do to repay, with all our imperfections, such devotion from God Himself? We can only try to be a pale reflection of His Love, trying to grow every day in that Love for all people which He taught us. We know that we will only manage to do so if every one of us, day by day, at every moment, tries to discover in each of our actions, what Our Lord himself would do in the specific situation with which we are faced. For this, it is necessary to know and pray the scriptures, where we find: "The Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in my name, .. will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I (Jesus) have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

2.2 The journey together towards holiness

Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness because true holiness is a perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity.

Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their idea is to help relieve suffering for love alone without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves.

They draw nearer to Christ, serving Him in the poor and one another. They grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and one another.

Therefore their journey together towards holiness is primarily made through:

- Visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live. Vincentians assume the needs of the poor as their own.
- Attending the meeting of the conference or council, where shared fraternal spirituality is a source of inspiration.
- Promoting a life of prayer and reflection, both at the individual and community level, shared with their fellow members.

Meditating on their Vincentian experiences offers them internal spiritual knowledge of themselves, others and the goodness of God.

Transforming their concern into action and their compassion into practical and effective love.

Their journey together towards holiness will be all the more fruitful if the members' personal lives are characterized by prayer, a meditation on the Holy Scriptures and other inspirational texts and devotion to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary, whose protection we have always sought, and to the teachings of the Church.

Commentary. -"journey together". This is, without doubt, one of the most fundamental articles in the Rule. It has to be read very slowly, meditated upon deep in our heart and shared with our fellow members. We are not walking alone. We are not called to be saved alone. Each member walks next to his brothers and sisters towards perfection. He is responsible for his own actions and, when appropriate, for the example and help he gives to his brothers and sisters. Nothing good is achieved outside the Conference, if the members do not love one another. No service to the poor is guaranteed if we, the members, are not aware of the service we owe to each other. The ignition of our love in the Conference is the fuel that will allow us, later, to devote ourselves to those who suffer. No one can give what he does not have.

"true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love" This definition of holiness comes from Vatican II. "We will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, holiness," (LG 50) which is "expressed by those who .. strive for the perfection of charity" (LG39). The call to become someone who radiates perfect love is nothing less than a call to sanctity. 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification' (1Th 4:3; Eph 1:4) Vincentians are called to become saints!

2.3 Prayer in union with Christ

In every conference throughout the world and in their personal lives, Vincentians raise their prayers to God, united with the prayer of Christ, on behalf of one another and their masters the poor, whose suffering they wish to share.

Commentary. -Alone, we cannot achieve anything of eternal value. The members' prayer, individual and communal, ensures our union with Christ and enables us to spread His Love. In this prayer, we should feel linked to the Holy Church's prayer and listen to what those who suffer have to teach us. They are undoubtedly our masters, who can teach us best the way of self-denial and of generous devotion. St. Vincent said, "Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything." He proclaims that prayer is a "fountain of youth" which invigorates us.

2.4 The spirituality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

The spirituality of one of its founders inspires Vincentians profoundly. Blessed Frederic Ozanam

- Sought to renew faith, among all people, in Christ and in the civilizing effect of the teachings of the Church through all time.
- Envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world.
- Attained holiness as a layman through living the Gospel fully in all aspects of his life.
- Had a passion for truth, democracy, and education.

Commentary. -The Conferences should take advantage of the teachings of one of our founders, maybe the most important one for Vincentian spirituality, and whose life of perfection has been acknowledged by the Holy Church. A layman, a family man, model husband, professional man and friend. We should not miss the enlightenment that our Lord gave us with the presence of Frederic Ozanam.

"Sought to renew faith ...in Christ" Ozanam's words and example brought others to Christ. Vincentians are called to proclaim the Good News in word and deed (see Commentary to 1.3.5).

"a network of charity encircling the world" Members share in this aspiration of Ozanam by contributing to Council General. One of its main functions is to help the Society in all nations to start new Conferences and Councils, providing financial help, volunteers and always, prayer (see Rule 4.1.2).

2.5 The spirituality of St. Vincent

Having been placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul by the founding members, members of the Society are inspired by his spirituality, manifest in his attitudes, his thoughts, his example and his words.

For Vincentians the key aspects of St. Vincent's Spirituality are:

- To love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms:
- To see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ.
- To share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ the Evangeliser and Servant of the poor.
- To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Commentary. -The founders chose St. Vincent de Paul as patron saint and life model: the great saint of Charity. How could we forget him? How could we not know his works in depth and try to follow in his footsteps? Vincent's holy audacity and creativity should be a permanent example for Vincentians when facing the difficulties that are sometimes entailed in helping people in need. Let us be imaginative in assisting them. Let us dream of new solutions that allow us to help them rise above their current

condition. Let us dream as Vincent did, when he set up the Daughters of Charity, and sent them worldwide, without being bound to a convent. They were obliged only to serve the poor, in whom they could find Christ.

"To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" Through this text and those about charisms and prayer the Rule is calling on the Society to become more and more open to the spiritual light and energy of the Holy Spirit. We will not experience the 'more abundant life' Jesus came to give (cf. Jn 10:10), unless we are open to the 'release of the Holy Spirit', an expression of the Holy Spirit which will frequently become manifest in modest gifts not normally considered to be extraordinary graces. Nevertheless, this intervention and these modest and simple gifts will greatly enhance our service of the poor.

2.5.1 Essential Virtues

Vincentians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:

- Simplicity - frankness, integrity, genuineness.
- Humility - accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts talents, and charisms, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.
- Gentleness - friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, tenderness and patience in our relationship with others.
- Selflessness- dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.
- Zeal - a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

Commentary. -Read these words slowly. These virtues reveal the essence of what a Vincentian should be and how we should work. Is this difficult? Everything is possible with Love, in the encounter with God. "...studying St. Vincent de Paul's most intimate actions and discovering the secrets of his thought, they know that, if he deserves the glorious title of Father of the poor, it is because he learned how to love them through loving our Lord Jesus Christ. If he provided them with bodily care, likely to elevate the deprived instead of humiliating them, it is because he honoured them as images and brothers of his Divine Master ... he considered himself as a gentle instrument of the Divine Providence, which he wanted to obey, but never to run ahead of, because he preferred that the good be done by others rather than by himself. He only appeared when the other workers left the field. After having worked hard with his arms and the sweat of his brow, his deep humility made him consider that he did nothing and that he was a useless servant." (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Scotland Manual 1845)

2.6 A vocation for every moment of our lives

The Vincentian vocation affects all aspects of members' daily lives, making them more sensitive and caring in their family, work and leisure activities. Vincentians are available for work in the conferences only after fulfilling their family and professional duties.

Commentary. -We follow Christ as Vincentians, at every moment and in every situation of our life. Our belonging to a Conference should not be a separate department of our lives. On the contrary: our experience in the Conference and in the contact with the suffering, our prayer, individual and communal, should pervade all our life. Not only for a short time or one day a week: our whole life: as parents, as sons and daughters, as working people and professionals, as friends. We should strive to ensure that everything is presided over by the love we have for Christ.

"making them more sensitive and caring" Vincentians should become known more and more as people who listen. This is how they will be viewed by their next-door neighbours, their colleagues at work and by anyone with whom they come into contact. Listening is another name for love.

3. MEMBERS, CONFERENCES, COUNCILS – COMMUNITIES OF FATH AND LOVE

3.1 Membership

The Society is open to all those who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbour in need. (See Article 6.1.4 and 6.1.5 of Part 1 of the Rule)

Commentary. -Open to everyone. We do not seek to be closed and isolated groups. On the contrary: only if we grow is there evidence that we are really giving witness and a witness that inspires love. Failure to attract new members should always be observed as an indication that something is wrong within the Conference. It could be a symptom that we are asleep; that we are no longer in touch with the needs that the society we serve regards as fundamental."...let us always move ahead and keep developing our modest Works; let us hope that every year a new idea springs up in us, a new improvement and let us, thereby, avoid the apathy which is easily contented with what has already been done" (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Scotland Manual 1845)

3.2 Equality

The Society, in each of its conferences (the primary basic unit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), makes no distinction regarding gender, wealth, occupation, social status or ethnic origin.

Commentary. -Does our Lord make distinctions? We do not aim at making them either. The "Gentile and the Jew" are the same. Men and women, the learned and the illiterate, the white and the black, everybody is the same in the Conferences, so far as they seek to serve God by devoting themselves to the poor in the community of the Conference. "... for all those who wish to do good, it is pleasant and charming to see men from all social levels, positions, views and ages, united by the sacred bond of faith, learning the lessons of charity...." (Introduction to the Manual, 1845)

3.3 Meetings of the Vincentian members

The members meet as brothers and sisters, with Christ in the midst of them, in conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide community of Vincentian friends.

Commentary. -"a worldwide community of friends" It is recommended here that we re-read the commentary to 2.2. Very little is possible without the fellow members' love for one another. First, in their own Conference, later feeling they are members of a single immense Conference that includes all the members worldwide. "The meeting day was a celebration, because it was a reunion of those who had lived apart during the week." (Introduction to the Scotland Manual 1845) "Following faithfully the advice of our Divine Master and of his beloved apostle John, we will love each other. We will love one another now and for ever, far and near, from one Conference to another, from town to town, from nation to nation. This deep friendship will enable us to bear with each other's failings." (Rule, 1835, PC)

Members who do not live up to their vocation "We will never believe an evil report of a brother but with great sorrow, and when we cannot reject the evidence of facts. Then, in order to conform ourselves to the will of Him who has confided to each one the care of his neighbour, in a spirit of charity, and with all the kindness and warmth of sincere friendship, we will ourselves counsel our failing, or fallen, brother or cause advice to be conveyed to him; we will help him to become stronger in good or to get up from his fall." (Rule, 1835, PC)

"with Christ in the midst of them" Christ is in the midst when we are gathered "in his name," i.e. sharing the mind and heart of Christ, when love is present and the Conference is open to all the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see 2.5). Ozanam experienced all this in the first Conference and wrote: "God who draws the clouds together to scatter the lightning, also draws souls together to radiate love", implying an immense amplification of love, far beyond that which could be achieved by all the members as separate individuals.

3.3.1 Frequency of the meetings

The conferences meet regularly and consistently, usually weekly, but at least every fortnight.

Commentary. -Friends wish to see each other frequently; the poor need us urgently. This article says that we should meet at least once a fortnight. But we strongly recommend that, whenever possible, a week would be the longest gap before meeting to talk about all the issues - concerning the poor, and concerning God. "Isolated virtues wither easily; together and intertwined they form immortal wreaths" (Blessed Frederic Ozanam, letter from Lyon to the Conferences of Paris, 1838).

3.4 Fraternity and simplicity

Meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.

Re-read the commentaries on 2.5 and to 2.5.1 How can it be otherwise? Everything has been given to us. Nothing belongs to us: simplicity is required. "Our mutual kindness should be warm and without limits" (Rule, 1835, PR). "To have friends means to live twice" (F,Lallier, circular letter 1/3/1837)

3.5 Preserving the spirit

Members of all ages strive to preserve the spirit of youth, which is characterized by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination. They are willing to make sacrifices and take risks for the benefit of the poor wherever they may be: by sharing their discomfort, needs, and sorrows and defending their rights.

Commentary. -We have already written concerning 2.5, about the need to dream. Youth is the period with a capacity for "daydreaming". Let us all be young and never lose the capacity to be surprised, by trying to discover new ways in the service required by the poor: seriously! Suffering is not something that we can accept without trying to eradicate it: always with charity, but without forgetting clarity. People only become old when they lose the ability to teach or to learn. Let us not become old in the service of the poor.

3.6 Councils

Conferences are grouped under various levels of councils.

Councils exist to serve all the conferences they coordinate. They help the conferences to develop their spiritual life, to intensify their service and to diversify their activities so that they always be responsive to the needs of those who suffer.

Councils at appropriate levels are particularly called to: create new conferences, to help existing conferences to expand, to promote special works, to prepare training courses and encourage Vincentians to attend them, to foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian family, to promote cooperation with other organizations and institutions, to develop friendship between members in the same area, to provide communication to and from conferences and higher councils. In summary, to promote the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world.

Commentary. -Councils have an enormous importance in intensifying the Conferences' life and development. This article should be read carefully. Councils exist in order to serve, and the required service is perfectly explicit in the article. Let the Councils be diligent in their task and let the Conferences value the Councils' effort to serve; "...if there is a Council at their service, this is because the highest trust prevails among us and no one wants to rule over the rest. One heart and one soul: cor unum et anima una" (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Scotland Manual 1845).

3.7 Young members

Young members keep the Society young. They see with new eyes and often look far ahead. The Society works constantly to form youth conferences and welcomes young members into all conferences. Their experience in a community of faith and love and their exposure to poverty deepen their spirituality, spur them to action and help them to grow as human beings. The senior members assume the responsibility of assisting them along

their path of training, respecting their personal choices and their aspirations of Vincentian service.

Commentary. -What a great mission for the senior members: to serve the youngest ones! It is not about leading them. It is not about commanding them. It is about serving them, being useful to them on the road they are beginning to travel – their own life - and which should be discovered by them with the support, example and humility of the senior members: just as it was when we were founded. Bailly, the first President General, was close to the young members, who dreamed of and desired the foundation of the Conferences. It was his example, his good work that convinced the students to join the first Conference. Let us do the same. Let us be at their disposal; making clear our opinion regarding their doubts and their aspirations but allowing them to find their own way.

3.8 Aggregation and institution of conferences and councils.

The visible unifying link within the Society is the aggregation of the conferences and the institution of the councils declared by the Council General.

Commentary. -We are a "worldwide Christian community", says the first article in the Rule. Incorporation into the union of that universal fraternal community which is the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, is called Aggregation for the Conferences and Institution for the Councils.

3.9 Subsidiarity and freedom of action

The Society embraces the principle of subsidiarity as its basic standard of operation. Decisions are made as closely as possible to the area of activity to ensure that the local environment and circumstances (cultural, social, and political etc.) are taken into consideration. In this way, the Society promotes local initiatives within its spirit. This freedom of action of conferences and councils, which has been kept faithfully since the origins of the Society, enables them to help the poor spontaneously and more effectively, free from excessive bureaucracy.

In exercising this freedom of action to face the challenge of poverty in their area, Vincentians feel called to pray together for guidance and strength and for that creative imagination which is the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, "Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions". (Joel 3,1).

Commentary. -A certain authority and certain functioning rules are, undoubtedly, necessary for a worldwide organisation. But even more important, the principle of Subsidiarity has been enjoyed by the Conferences from their beginning. Where are the needs of the suffering best known? In the local area. Therefore, all Conferences have total freedom to serve the deprived as they think best, within the spirit of the Rule. But this does not mean that Conferences and Councils are autonomous in all ways. Conferences and Councils have an obligation to comply with civil law, to adhere to the Rule and Statutes of the Society, and to the policies and strategies of the National Council. It is also essential for the good name and transparency of the Society that National Councils require adherence to good but simple accounting and auditing practices, including, if appropriate, central banking and consolidated accounts for the entire Society.

3.10 Democracy

All decisions are made by consensus after the necessary prayer reflection and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and when appropriate, matters are put to a vote.

Commentary. -"consultation». Is anybody cleverer or holier than the other members? We cannot be sure through whom the Holy Spirit will speak. Are we sure that we, like God, can see deep into the heart of each person? Obviously not. Let us consult, let us comment, with charity and clarity, about all the issues. Light will frequently arise from the one of whom we expect the least. The Lord will enlighten whoever He wishes. A dominating leader will de-motivate some people, be a source of conflict and ultimately will harm the Society.

"consensus". Let us take our decisions after listening to each other. 'Consensus' implies general approval with no one feeling strongly enough to continue advocating an alternative view.

3.11 Presidents as servant leaders

Following Christ's example, the presidents at all levels of the Society endeavour to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charismas of the members are, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The president of the conference or council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.

Commentary. -What is the Mission of the Presidents? To serve. It is as simple as that. As the President is, so is the Conference. Our tradition says that usually Conferences are what their Presidents are. This is not because they preside over them, nor because of what they demand, nor because of what they know. It is because of what they are able to elicit from each one of the members by listening to them, encouraging them and by accompanying them, by being concerned about them, all to achieve better service of the poor. Presidents are the key figure in the Conferences but usually this will not be obvious because of their humility. "(The President) is marked out to be the servant of the rest, to lead and direct Christian societies. He combines in himself the necessary knowledge and a sincere practice of his religion with a great spirit of prudence and conciliation. Prudens est, regat nos" (E. Bailly, I President General, Circular Letter 1/3/1844). A servant leader will ideally have that deep faith which is a silent influence for good.

3.12 Formation of members

It is essential that the Society continually promotes the formation and training of its members and officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of it and their spirituality, improve the sensitivity, quality, and efficiency of the benefits, resources, and opportunities that are available for the poor.

The Society also offers members higher training in order better to help raise the cultural and social level of those who request this support.

Commentary. -On-going training is a requirement in the life of each Conference. Continuous social changes, new legislation, new resources that become available, demand from each Vincentian the effort

to keep up and constantly to enhance his formation. It is not possible to dispense with this almost daily "updating", that enables us better to serve those who suffer. "Is it not true that we must study steadily, if we want to carry out our works successfully?" (Introduction to the Manual, 1845)

"essential" is a strong word which implies that every National Council should develop a programme of formation and training, either alone or with the support of the rest of the Society.

3.13 The spirit of poverty and encouragement

Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a spiritual adviser is very important.

Commentary. -Each Conference, whenever possible, aspires to enrich itself with the presence of a priest who encourages the members towards a life more and more perfect and devoted. But neither does a Conference forget the ultimate responsibility of the laity in the Conferences. This does not diminish the importance of the priest's contribution among us. On the contrary, we owe him the highest respect and consideration, and give his views special weight in matters of faith or morals. But this should never be the excuse for us to neglect or to leave in his hands the most serious decisions affecting our Vincentian work. The responsibility we acquire in Baptism demands from us our own commitment in matters regarding the poor entrusted to our care.

3.14 The use of money and property for the poor

Vincentians should never forget that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money.

Nevertheless, the Society uses money and property to help relieve the suffering of those in need. The Society's funds must be handled with the utmost care, prudence and generosity. Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. Accurate records must be kept of all money received and spent. The Society may not allot funds to other organizations, except occasionally to other branches of the Vincentian Family, save under exceptional circumstances.

Commentary. -An old member used to call money, even though it was necessary, "the devil's dung". It should be used properly, of course, not in any way hoarded. We should firmly believe that God will provide everything we need, and instead of hoarding it in excess, the Conference should put it at the disposal of other Conferences having needs but inadequate resources. Sometimes, there can be situations of real scandal, due to the lack of a commitment to share. This is an issue about which each Conference should think seriously.

3.15 Communication

The vitality of the Society's network of charity depends on the regular and rapid exchange of news and information. Such communication broadens the members' horizon and enhances the interest of members in the experiences and challenges of their brothers and

sisters throughout the world. The Vincentian response to communication is a willingness to learn and desire to help.

Commentary. -Without communication, we simply do not exist as an interdependent Society. It is one of the most frequent omissions committed by the Conferences. How can we not tell others of the things we do which we find makes it easier to serve and to tackle a specific poverty? How can we not pay attention to those things discovered by others? How can we properly serve the poor without exchanging experiences among us? Without telling what we do, is it possible to improve and to attract resources to assist the poor? Any country or Council publishing any kind of Magazine about the Society should send it to other Vincentian nations and to the General Council itself, in order to contribute to this effort of communication.

4. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE VINCENTIAN AND CATHOLIC NETWORK OF CHARITY

4.1 Twinning

Conferences and councils help others in need, both at the national and international level. This is one of the activities most cherished by the Society. The awareness of acute poverty in a great number of countries and the Vincentian preferential option for the poor, spurs conferences and councils to assist others with less resources or in particular situations.

This direct link between two conferences or councils, consists of sharing prayer, a profound friendship, and material resources, is called twinning. This activity contributes to, world peace, to understanding and cultural exchange among peoples.

Commentary. -Could a Christian, seeing another member of his community in the most absolute poverty, refuse to reach out to help? The negative answer, arising from faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, compels us to be very attentive in providing help to the Conferences who need it. The amount sent every year by Vincentians to other poorer Vincentians in order to help them in their task, is huge. It cannot be otherwise, if we really understand the challenge of a globalised poverty, for the alleviation of which we are all responsible. The Conferences do not limit themselves to the care of poverty nearby. On the contrary, those Conferences which really feel the true nature of their mission, are always ready to send the necessary assistance so that members in other parts of the world with smaller economic resources, will be able to help the most deprived to release themselves from poverty. This is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful tokens of selfless love; to help the poor whom we only see with the eyes of faith through the work of other members in remote places of the world.

4.1.1 Prayer as the basis of friendship

Twinning promotes spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help. Funds and other material resources can be provided to enable a conference or council to help local families. Financial, technical, medical and educational support is given to projects which are recommended by the Society locally, and which encourage self-sufficiency. Even more important is support given through prayer, as well as through mutual communication regarding what has been accomplished and what is happening among Vincentians in each area.

Commentary. -If any kind of economic help is necessary, so is spiritual help through prayer. None of us is so poor that we cannot help someone else, and this applies even more to prayer, to offering small personal sacrifices, to help fellow members with whom we are not acquainted. We do not know them, but we feel linked to them by the universal work of bringing God's Love to all people.

4.1.2 Vincentians' personal commitment

The Society urges Vincentians to consider undertaking a personal commitment for a particular period of time to work with Vincentians in other countries or to promote the spread of conferences.

Commentary. -Some Vincentians, when they find the time and the capacity, volunteer to bring their experience and knowledge to other places in the world. They are called "Vincentians for Peace". These groups of the Society's members, of different ages, commit themselves for a specific period of time, either to help the Conferences in general, or to work on specific projects helping to develop certain skills in other countries. This is a sort of Twinning where the donation generously offered is personal experience and devotion.

4.2 Emergency assistance

When disasters, war or major accidents occur, the Society launches emergency initiatives on the spot and provides funds for the local Society to help victims.

Commentary. -The Society, through the Council General, always has bank accounts containing Emergency Aid Funds. For Conferences and Councils worldwide there is always a special responsibility to contribute to these accounts so that, faced with unforeseen situations of distress, the Council General, on behalf of the whole Society, can send the necessary assistance to the Conferences or Councils needing it. The action of Conferences in such emergency situations will always be to help the poor when larger organisations are not able to meet their individual needs.

4.3 The Vincentian Family

Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help form a single family. Gratefully remembering the support and encouragement the first conference received from Blessed Rosalie Rendu, the Society maintains and develops close relationships with other branches of the Vincentian family, while preserving its identity. It cooperates with them in spiritual development and common projects, as well as with the Church's charitable pastoral initiatives at every level, whenever this may be mutually enriching and useful to those who suffer.

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH HIERARCHY

Commentary. -True to the wishes of the founders, the Conferences do not forget the inspiration of Vincent de Paul (Rule 2.5; 2.5.1). That inspiration leads us to share our efforts and challenges with the ecclesiastical institutions which share the spirituality of the Saint of Charity. With them, (The Daughters of Charity, Congregation of the Mission, Religious of Saint Vincent, International Association of Charity, Vincentian Marian Youth and Misevi -Vincentian lay missionaries -, among others), we strive to serve the poor better by a coordination between consecrated and lay persons, which is always so necessary in the life of Holy Church.

Conferences do not forget the one who undoubtedly can be called our first Spiritual Adviser: the Blessed Rosalie Rendu, who knew how to stand by our young founders in the beginning, with her advice and her example, afterwards letting them walk on their own, in response to their lay vocation. She always remained at their disposal for everything they could need from her. She was an example of a mother who dreamed of the formal and responsible independence of those children who sought her help in the first moments of their journey.

5.1 A close relationship

Faithful to the clear intentions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the Society has a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Respect of the members for the hierarchy provides the foundation for harmonious reciprocal cooperation.

Commentary. -Being part of a lay Society which takes seriously its responsibilities within the Church, the Conferences strive to maintain an absolute respect and love towards the Holy Church's hierarchy. The Society strives to scrupulously respect the Hierarchy's voice in everything that concerns it, whether from the Parish, the Diocese or the Holy See. The process is reciprocal. Canon law says, "(The laity) have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church" (Canon 212.3). The Society also bears in mind that "associations and movements need to work in full harmony within both the universal Church" (NMI 46) and the dioceses.

5.2 Autonomy

The Society is legally autonomous in its existence, constitution, organization, rules, activities and internal government. Vincentians freely choose their own officers and manage the Society's activities and assets with full autonomy, in accordance with their own Statutes and the legislation in effect in each country.

Commentary. -The Society, usually a civil institution, legally constituted in most of the countries, is free in all its actions and does not need the formal authorization of any entity to develop its activities. The Society's autonomy has been recognized on many occasions by the Holy See, in particular in the decision dated 13th November 1920.

5.3 Moral recognition

The Society recognizes the right and duty of the diocesan bishop to confirm that none of its activities is contrary to Catholic faith or morals. The Society, whenever possible informs the diocesan bishops of its activities annually, as a sign of ecclesial communion.

Commentary. -The Conferences, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, whose members wish to be faithful children of the Holy Church, acknowledge that it is each Diocese's Bishop with whom it should cooperate in the Diocesan Pastoral social welfare initiatives that the Bishop considers appropriate and which foster person-to-person contact with the poor. In particular, it recognizes the Bishop's competence to confirm that the Society's activities in his Diocese are in keeping with Catholic faith and morals. "Let us never do anything new without having received the blessing of the Hierarchy at its different levels. Neither will we ever undertake any new and important work within an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, without consulting him who is at the head of it. We will do nothing in opposition to spiritual authority" (Rule 1835, PC)

6. OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

6.1 Ecumenical and Inter-faith relationships

6.1.1 Every member should foster ecumenism

Each Vincentian should seek to deepen a personal commitment to ecumenism and to cooperation to works of charity and justice as a contribution towards the achievement of that full and visible unity of the Church for which Christ prayed. *"that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me"* (Jn 17:21).

Commentary. -The Society, each Conference, even each Vincentian, does not forget the requirements of ecumenism as stated by the Holy Church. It is not possible to make this commitment as a duty, following a 'rule'. "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from newness of attitudes (cf. Eph 4:23), from self-denial and un-stinted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow toward maturity (UR 7). It is prayer to the Holy Spirit which will open us to this change of heart (cf. CCC1108).

"that the world may believe" "Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature" (UUS 6). "Those belong to (the ecumenical movement) who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour, doing this not merely as individuals but also as corporate bodies." (UR1)

6.1.2 The Society is committed to ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation

Following the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul recognizes, accepts and encourages the call to ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation which arise from its charitable activity. It is prepared to participate in the

Church's ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives within each country, in harmony with the diocesan bishop.

Commentary. -Being aware of this ecclesiastical requirement, the Society, everywhere in the world, abides by the guidelines of each Diocese. Each Conference understands that the Catholic response in each area should be characterised by harmony and, therefore, prior to any action in this delicate field, it listens to and acts in keeping with the indications of the local bishop.

If this cooperation with people of other denominations is to be a witness to an unbelieving society, it is important that the public should observe an easy friendship and trust, and a oneness that is a reflection of the oneness of love, knowledge, will admission at the heart of the Trinity.

6.1.3 The adoption of practical initiatives

Conferences and councils should establish a dialogue with their counterparts in other Christian churches or ecclesial communities and other faiths, with regard to cooperation in charitable work wherever this is appropriate.

Commentary. -There are various circumstances in which the Conferences can be established in so many places around the world. The principle of Subsidiarity (refer to Rule 3.9), allows the different Conferences and Councils to decide locally with whom to cooperate in their service of the poor. Prudence will indicate on each occasion what advice to seek before commencing this cooperation, which must always be in keeping with the spirit of the Society.

6.1.4 Ecumenical and inter-faith membership

In some countries, circumstances may make it desirable to accept as members, Christians of other denominations or people of other faiths who sincerely respect and accept the Society's identity and its principles insofar as differences of faith allow. The Episcopal Conference should be consulted.

Commentary. -The world is big and many people feel the call to help the poor. The Conferences must be open to admit them. Having said that, the Society cannot forget that, in addition to trying to help people in need, those who suffer, each Conference is part of a worldwide Catholic community. The members who feel called to admit people of other beliefs must ensure they understand that whilst we will always have the utmost respect for the faith and conscience of such members, we will always preserve those prayers and other spiritual practices which are fundamental to the Catholic ethos of the Society. To protect ourselves from any possible danger to our ethos, the Rule underlines the need to consult the local Episcopal Conference. Let us submit to its criteria; that will always be good for the peace of our souls. (See also 3.1)

6.1.5 Preserving the Catholic credo and ethos

The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The president, vice-president and spiritual adviser should, therefore, be Roman Catholic. They may, in certain situations depending on national circumstances, and after consultation with the local diocesan bishop, be members of churches and ecclesial

communities which share the Catholic belief in, among other issues, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the seven Sacraments and devotion to Mary.

Commentary. -In addition to the Spiritual Adviser, the President has an obligation to promote Vincentian spirituality and the Catholic ethos (see 3.11). This also applies to the Vice-President who, when necessary, fulfils all the duties of the President. Such an

obligation should not be imposed on someone who cannot in conscience discharge it. The intention of the Society's 1999 General Assembly was to allow at least Catholic, Orthodox and High Anglican members to hold these offices. The Catholic hierarchy within each country will know whether there are other churches or ecclesial communities which meet these criteria. As other officers do not have a specific obligation to promote Vincentian spirituality, these offices, Secretary, Treasurer etc. are open to any member.

6.1.6 Affiliated groups can work very closely with us

The Society accepts the principle of affiliated groups. These groups consist mainly of members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities who are attracted by the work of the Society and/or its spirituality. They are welcome to participate in the charitable work, appropriate council discussions and the fraternal life of the Society, but are not eligible for office in the Society. Groups from non-Christian religions may also be similarly affiliated.

Commentary. -In some places, it can be appropriate to accept with an affiliated status, and with the limitations stated by the article, groups from other creeds or beliefs. The Society can admit them, but in its desire to remain Catholic, rules out their eligibility for representative offices.

6.1.7 Relationships with state agencies and other charities

When the problems they encounter are beyond their competence or capacity, Vincentians may contact state agencies and other more specialized charitable organizations, provided that such action helps the Society in its struggle against injustice and respects the spirit of the Society.

Commentary. -A more and more globalised world is also a more complicated world. The Conferences, through the appropriate Councils, can and should seek a ready collaboration with other organisations, agencies or institutions that could assist their work, with benefit to the most deprived. A prudent, observant attitude, will keep us away from the scandal that could be implied by collaboration with groups or people having approaches opposite to the Holy Church' moral teaching. "...it is necessary to avoid even the appearance of evil and everything that could cause scandal to the weak" (Rule 1835, PC)

6.2 Relationship with civil society - work for social justice

6.2.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of

poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

Commentary. -The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and each of its Conferences, seeks the spiritual and material prosperity of each of the persons it helps. It seeks to prevent the extension of poverty in its various manifestations. It seeks to alleviate suffering. For this purpose, it uses as many means as possible to reestablish justice, always with Charity towards all men. "Peace is also the fruit of love, for love goes beyond what justice can achieve" (GS 78).

6.2.2 A vision of the civilization of love

Affirming the dignity of each human being as created in God's image, and Jesus' particular identification with those who are excluded by society, Vincentians envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities, and development of all people are promoted.

As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and the civilization of love. In this way, the Society shares the Church's mission to evangelize the world through visible witness, in both actions and words.

Commentary. -It is not possible for Vincentians to remain solely interested in the effects of deprivation on individuals. We have to seek to remedy the causes as far as our modest possibilities allow. To evangelize, the inalienable mission of each Conference and each member means to proclaim the Good News and this includes the promotion of a civilisation of love. It is not possible to tell men that God loves them, without them seeing our determination to change the structures of society so they are founded on Love.

"As citizens of one world». Of course, Vincentians are loyal citizens of their country but their concern for the common good embraces the world and we have a loyalty to the poor everywhere.

"culture of life": Vincentians are committed to promote the right to life from conception to the natural end of earthly life.

6.2.3 Vision of the future

The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

Commentary. -The Society's Twinning projects foster "sustainable development." protection of the environment". It is essential to respect the environment, as a consequence of our faith in its creation by God for the benefit of human beings, who are the stewards of creation and must care for it and nurture it for future generations. The environmental crisis "is truly trans-national and intergenerational, the first of such kind ever to face humanity as a whole" (To the UN 11/91).

6.2.4 The practical Vincentian approach to social justice

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those we visit who suffer from injustice.

Commentary. -There are no two ways about it. Our outlook is that of the poor, of the oppressed, of the persecuted, of the hungry, the exploited... Others may defend other views and other options. Ours is the viewpoint of the poor.

6.2.5 A voice for the voiceless

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.

Commentary. -Let us help them to tell their truth, to reveal their suffering, to explain their needs. Let them feel responsible for achieving their goals. When this is not really possible, only then, let us become the voice of the voiceless ones. Only then.

6.2.6 Facing the structures of sin

Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak out clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements.

Commentary. -"speak out clearly .. with charity". We cannot pretend that the structures of sin do not exist. They do exist. We should point them out, even with our modest resources, but with the full conviction and vigour that derives from a life shared with the poor. Charity towards everybody will help us to achieve this with the least possible offence to those responsible. To challenge what is wrong in society was seen by Ozanam as essential; "What evil is done in the world through the inconsistency and timidity of good people." But, he reminded us, "kindness will be the character of Christian controversy." "Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society" (GS 27). "There exist also sinful inequalities that affect millions of people" (CCC1938)

6.2.7 Striving to change attitudes

Vincentians oppose discrimination of all kinds and work to change the attitudes of those who view the weak or those who are different with prejudice, fear or scorn, attitudes which gravely wound the dignity of others.

The Society strives, with charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, so that all are able to understand, recognize and defend the right of each person to be responsible for his or her own life. The Society promotes understanding,

cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.

Commentary. -The poor are our friends: regardless of their colour, of their medical condition, of their poverty, of their weakness, of their defects. Let us introduce them to the world as Children of God: as our brothers, as beloved friends.

"opposes discrimination .. promotes understanding" To be misunderstood and discriminated against is a severe form of poverty because it humiliates, reduces self-esteem and reduces opportunities for work. Let us encourage sympathy and tolerance.

6.2.8 Political independence of the Society

The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a non-violent approach.

Some members may follow and fully participate in their political vocation in such a way that they bring Christian values to political matters. Those members who hold political offices will be asked, always with charity, not to hold any mission of representation in the Society during their term of political office.

Commentary. -From its foundation, the Society has taken extreme care not to identify itself with any political party or political option. It even advised that there should be a total absence of party-political conversations within each Conference. Of course, the Society understands and praises the members who wish to take the Christian message into active politics. But these dear members, in order to avoid misunderstandings of any kind, are begged to relinquish any representative service in the Society while they are in a period of direct political activity. This is a small sacrifice that will undoubtedly be welcome and understood by all of them. "The spirit of charity, together with Christian prudence, shall further induce us to banish party-political discussions for ever from both general meetings and ordinary meetings. (Rule 1835, PC)

6.2.9 Working with communities

The Society should work not only with individuals in need but also with families and communities. It can help an excluded or deprived local community to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity which leads it to improve its economic, social or environmental well-being, always retaining the personal contact of members with those who suffer.

Commentary. -It frequently becomes necessary to go beyond simple personal help, as has been mentioned so often in this Rule and in its commentaries. We referred in 1.10 to the empowerment of individuals to help forge the destiny of their community. In this article, 6.2.9, it is envisaged that in a deprived community in which Vincentians already visit the poor, members may be able to help gather together people in the community who want to find ways to improve their lives. Vincentians could help

them to discern their most pressing problems, to decide on the relative priorities and to develop a plan to raise public awareness and achieve change.

Any action of the Society, to be fully justified from a Vincentian point of view, always has to arise from personal contact with the individuals who suffer. It is far from our intention to become simply pressure groups. The Society and each Conference must first live close to those who suffer, and only then build on this experience by helping them to overcome difficulties.

Part 2 of the Rule
STATUTES OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY
OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL

1. THE CONFEDERATION, HEAD OFFICE, AND MEMBERS

1.1 THE CONFEDERATION

At the international level, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is united in its spirituality and management through an International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (hereinafter referred to as the "Confederation"), which is presided over by The President General.

1.2 The name of the Society

The International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the sole owner of the Society's name. Only the Council General may, on behalf of the Confederation, authorize or prohibit the use of its name.

1.3 The international head office

The Confederation's head office is based in Paris, France, the city where the first conference was founded.

The head office may be transferred to any other location in the world by resolution of the Council General Assembly; this resolution shall be adopted by a majority of two-thirds of the votes of the members present and represented. In order for this resolution to be validly adopted by the Assembly, the proposal must have been included on the agenda prepared previously and sent to the members of the Council General.

1.3.1 Other International Confederation centers

Other work centers may be established in different cities around the world.

1.4 Official language

In recognition of the establishment of the first St. Vincent de Paul Conference in France, the official language of the Confederation is French. All the Confederation's official documents shall be drafted in this language.

1.4.1 Other co-official languages

The co-official languages of the Confederation are English, Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. The Confederation undertakes to publish most of its documentation in all the co-official languages.

1.5 The Assembly of the Council General

The supreme democratic body of the Confederation is the Council General, which meets in ordinary or extraordinary Assembly and is presided over by the President General.

1.6 Legal members

Each national or assimilated council that duly joins the Confederation, and is instituted accordingly, shall become a legal member of the Confederation's Council General.

They must be constituted within the scope of their national legislations as non-profit or similar organizations, and duly instituted by the Council General.

Although the tradition of our Society prefers to use the term "Superior councils", special provisions in legislation or other circumstances may warrant the use of the term "National Council".

1.6.1 Representatives on the Council

The Council General is formed by the duly elected presidents of the national or assimilated councils, which they represent, and which are instituted in the different countries and clearly defined regions around the world.

1.6.2 Definition of assimilated councils

Assimilated councils are councils that have been instituted or conferences that have been aggregated, and which are legally constituted within the scope of their national legislations as non-profit organizations representing a country or region in which a national council has not yet been instituted.

1.7 Affiliation to the Confederation

Any national, assimilated or associated council (as defined in Article 1. 10. 1 of Part 2 of the Rule) of the Society around the world that wishes to join the Confederation must request this in writing and submit such request to the President General of the Confederation.

1.7.1 Requirements for the affiliation

The abovementioned written request for affiliation to the Confederation must state that such council complies, pursuant to national legislation, with the provisions established in Article 1.6 of Part 2 of the Rule, and must also indicate the area for which it is responsible.

Likewise, it shall expressly accept all aspects of the Rule and Statutes of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which consists of three parts: The Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (Part 1); the Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (Part 2); the basic requirements for drafting the Internal Statutes for national, assimilated or associated councils (Part 3).

1.7.2 Legal liability

Under no circumstances shall the Confederation or any of its governing members, by virtue of the affiliation described above, be liable for events occurring without their full and proven knowledge. The national, assimilated and associated councils shall, for all legal purposes, be the highest and ultimate bodies responsible, before any type of national or international jurisdiction, for events occurring within their jurisdictional areas.

1.8 Institution of national councils

In order to achieve a better service for members and the poor in the same country, two or more national councils may be instituted in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 1.9 of Part 2 of the Rule.

1.8.1 The conditions

The following conditions must be met in order to justify need:

- a) Excessive territorial scope.
- b) Difficulties in communication.
- c) A large number of conferences and councils.
- d) A large number of members and special works.

1.9 Procedures for instituting new national councils

The following conditions must be met in order for a new national council to be instituted in a country where there is already a national council:

1.9.1 Establishment on the request of a national council

- a) Existence of more than 3,000 conferences working in the country of the applicant national/assimilated council.

- b) The new council, which is the object of the institution request, will have more than 1,000 conferences.
- c) The request is presented to the existing national council,
- d) Authorizing the institution of the new national council.
- e) The legislation in the country in question permits the institution of two national councils in that country, with different jurisdictions.
- f) Favourable recommendation by the Territorial Vice-President.
- g) Express authorisation from the Council General through its permanent section.

1.9.2 Institution following an official request

The Council General, through its Permanent Section, may officially institute national or assimilated councils for specific regions around the world, regardless of the frontiers of the countries in question, whenever socio-political, geographic reasons for the service make this necessary.

When the institution of these councils affects already instituted national councils duly aggregated to the Confederation in, accordance with the provisions established in Article 1. 6 of Part: 2 of the Rule, the aforementioned council must be consulted beforehand. This consultation obligation shall be binding on the Permanent Section of the Council General.

1.10 Other members of the Council General

Different circumstances may mean that there are other members of the Council General, in accordance with the following classification.

1.10.1 Associated Councils

These are councils that cannot achieve full legal member status due to limitations in their national legislations or to the fact that they have availed themselves of legal instruments governing legal members other than those established in Article 1.6 of Part 2 of the Rule.

1.10.2 Temporary members

These are members appointed by the President General in countries or regions where the Society is not present and until the corresponding national or assimilated council can be instituted.

The same shall apply to the provisional presidents of the national councils instituted by the Council General, in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 6. 5 of Part 2 of the Rule.

1.10.3 Missionary members

These shall be members appointed by the President General to perform specific tasks and services. They shall always include members who have served as International Presidents General.

1.11 Right to speak but not to vote

All the other members of the Council General that are: associated, temporary or missionary members shall be entitled to speak but not to vote at Council General Assemblies.

1.12 Related special works

Special works related to the Society that may use the Society's logo in the places and situations that are considered appropriate, shall be deemed to be those special works in which the Society of St. Vincent de Paul participates at any level of the organization; the aforementioned participation shall enable the special work to be controlled by Vincentian members on an effective, majority and real basis

1.12.1 Use of the Society's logos

Every national or assimilated council shall authorize the use of the Society's logos within its jurisdiction in accordance with the provisions established in the previous paragraph.

1.12.2 Employees

The employees of these special works and in general those employed by the Confederation may not hold offices on the councils of the Society, with the exception of the technical and executive position corresponding to them at the special work or council where they render their services.

2. THE COUNCIL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

2.1 The General Assembly of the Confederation

The senior body of the Confederation is the Council General, which meets in a General Assembly as provided in Article 1.5 of Part 2 of the Rule.

Each national council and assimilated council which is a legal member is represented by one vote. The President General shall likewise have one vote which, if the case may be, shall be considered the casting vote.

2.1.1 Quorum and voting

The valid adoption of resolutions by the General Assembly shall require the attendance or representation of at least 30 % of its full members. Should a second call be necessary, this shall be issued at least 24 hours later, and shall be considered as validly constituted regardless of the percentage of members present or represented. Resolutions shall be validly adopted by a simple majority.

2.2 Frequency of Assembly meetings

The Council General Assembly normally meets once every six years.

2.2.1 Extraordinary General Assemblies

The President General may convene Extraordinary General Assemblies whenever circumstances make this advisable.

An Extraordinary General Assembly must be convened when so requested by more than 50% of the legal members of the Council General.

2.3 Participants

These assemblies may be attended by the representatives of the councils indicated in Article 1. 6 herein as well as those indicated in Articles 1.10.1 and 1.10.2 and 1.10.3 of Part 2 of the Rule, each by virtue of the powers granted to them in the aforementioned articles

2.4 Agenda

The agenda of the Assembly meeting and the notice convening the meeting are determined by the Secretary General in agreement with the President and taking into account any suggestions by members of the council to whom this notice is delivered.

2.5 Prayers and meditation

According to tradition, the meeting begins and ends with a prayer, consisting of a spiritual reading or meditation, which may lead to a brief exchange of opinions. This reading is given by the International Spiritual Adviser. The corresponding secret collection is always taken among attending members.

3. THE PRESIDENT GENERAL, THE BOARD OF THE COUNCIL GENERAL AND THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

3.1 The President General

The President of the Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and its Council General represents the Society before the Holy See and all international religious or civil organisations, and in general, before any public or private organization.

Since the founding of the first conference, this figure has represented the nexus of union and moral authority of the Society in periods when the Council General Assembly has not met.

The President General personifies the unity of the Society worldwide.

3.2 The functions of the President General

The President of the Council General, supported by a team within the International Structure, supervises, fosters and coordinates the Society's activities worldwide and, for this purpose, makes any decisions deemed appropriate, implementing the resolutions of the Council General Assemblies in compliance with the provisions established in the Rule, and pursuant to the Society's tradition.

3.2.1 Report on the progress of the Society

In January every year, and for general information of all the members and councils, the President General drafts a report for all the members of the Council General, reflecting the progress of the Society during the previous year and the prospects for the future.

3.3 Election of the President General

The President General is elected by all the members of the Society, represented by the presidents of the national, assimilated and associated councils, who exercise this right on their own behalf and on behalf of the members they represent.

3.4 Duration of the term of office

The term of office of the President General is six years; this term of office may be renewed once only.

3.5 Age limit

The President General may not be more than 65 years of age when elected.

3.6 Election procedure and deadlines

When a President General must be elected because the term of the existing president has reached its end, the Vice President General must announce this at least ten months prior to the time of the election to the members of the Council General, who are then responsible for notifying the members accordingly.

3.6.1 Electoral Board

The Electoral Board is presided over by the Vice-President General and is formed by the latter, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General, provided that none of them is a candidate. If any of the aforementioned three persons is a candidate, he/she shall be replaced by a legal member of the Council General.

3.7 Presentation of candidates, forms, and limitations

During the two months following the notification of the election the members of the Council General, either individually or in groups, may present the candidates whom they deem suitable and worthy, chosen from among those members who have belonged to the Society for more than fifteen years and who do not hold remunerated service posts in the Confederation at any level or in any of the participating or related special works.

3.8 Announcement of candidates

At least three months prior to the Council General Assembly meeting, the Vice-President General shall announce the candidates who fulfil the required conditions and whose proven acceptance has previously been obtained by the Vice President General.

This announcement shall be accompanied by a short Vincentian "curriculum vitae", together with the candidate's action programme if elected, presented on a maximum of two sheets.

3.9 Time and form of election

The new President General shall be elected at the General, Ordinary or Extraordinary Assembly called for this and other purposes.

3.9.1 Quorum for election

In order for the General Assembly to be validly constituted to elect a new President General, a quorum of 30% of the members with voting rights pursuant to Article 2.1.1 of Part 2 of the Rule shall be required.

3.9.2 Voting procedure

The voting system used shall consist of two rounds and shall be effected by secret ballot. The first round shall include the postal votes of those electors who are unable to attend in person. In the second round, which shall only be required if no candidate obtains one half plus one of the votes presented, the candidates shall be the two members who have obtained most votes in the first round. Due to time restrictions, this second voting round shall be performed directly and by secret ballot; no postal votes shall be accepted. Voting shall take place on the afternoon of the first day of the Council General Assembly meeting in which the voting is included on the agenda and shall have priority over any other matters.

3.9.2.1 Limitation

If an existing President General is presented for the second term of office having passed the first round without any candidates, reaching half plus one of the votes, in order for his/her election to be valid, he/she must obtain at least one-half plus one of the votes presented in the second round. Otherwise, the voting process shall recommence twenty-four hours later with the proposed candidates, excluding the existing President.

3.9.3 Taking of office

The President General shall take up the Presidency on the next Feast of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, namely on 09 September in the City of Paris.

3.10 Termination of function

The President General may cease to perform his/her service functions for the following reasons:

- a) End of the term of office for which he/she was elected.
- b) Not selected for the second term of office.
- c) Expiry of a maximum of two terms of office.
- d) Resignation during the period of service.
- e) Incapacity.
- f) Death.
- g) Loss of civil rights.

3.11 Resignation from service

In the event a President General should resign, in order of such resignation to take effect it must be formally presented to the International Executive Committee, pursuant to

Articles 4. 1, and subsequent, of Part 2 of the Rule, and accepted by the aforementioned committee.

3.12 Incapacity

Should any incapacity impede the President General's performance of service, the board members, i.e. the Vice-President General, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General shall jointly call an extraordinary meeting reserved solely for the International Executive Committee in order to deal exclusively with this matter. This meeting shall be held within a maximum of 30 days.

In order for the meeting to be validly constituted, the attendance of 30% of the members established in Article 4.3 of Part 2 of the Rule shall be required.

3.12.1 Consideration of incapacity

The committee, meeting on an extraordinary and emergency basis to deal exclusively with this matter on the agenda, shall examine on a charitable and reserved basis, the alleged incapacity of the President General based on founded and documented arguments presented by the members of the board of the Council General. During the period elapsing between the convening of a meeting of the committee and its decision, no international Vincentian office undertaking may be suspended, replaced or cancelled.

3.13 Guaranteeing the decision about incapacity

In order for the incapacity decision to be legally executed and validated, it must be supported by at least two thirds of the votes present and represented at the meeting of the International Executive Committee. The Secretary General of the Society shall immediately take detailed minutes of all the events at the committee meeting, which, on this specific occasion, must be signed by all the attendees.

3.14 Replacement of the President General

In any of the events envisaged with respect to the termination of services and functions on the part of a President General, the Society's Vice-President General shall be responsible for the international management of the Society.

In all cases, he/she shall notify the other members of the Council General and particularly the President General when specifically declaring the latter's incapacity.

3.15 Deadlines for the election of a new President General in the event of resignation or incapacity

In the event of resignation or incapacity, and within the maximum and non-extendible period of 90 days, the International Vice-President General shall call elections in accordance with the provisions established in Articles 3.3 to 3.10 of Part 2 of the Rule.

3.16 The Board Members of the Council General

The President General, after making the appropriate enquiries, shall appoint a Vice-President General, a Secretary General, and a Treasurer General for a limited renewable period; these persons, together with the President General, shall form the Board of the Confederation's Council General, and shall provide the President General with counsel, and shall also have the functions described in Article 7.4 of Part 2 of the Rule.

The President General shall preside over the Board. All the members indicated pursuant to Articles 3.16 through 3.18 of Part 2 of the Rule shall be entitled to vote at the Board meetings, with the exception of the spiritual adviser. Meetings of the Board shall not require a quorum and resolution shall be adopted by simple majority vote.

3.16.1 The Board's Mission

The Board shall collaborate with the President General in order to develop the strategy required to implement the agreements reached by the Council General Assemblies and the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

It shall also collaborate with the President General in designing the strategy to be proposed to the Council General Assemblies and to the International Executive Committee.

It is the closest Vincentian body to the President whom it advises and counsels on any matter.

The President must consult the full Board at least three times a year, in between International Executive Committee meetings.

3.16.2 The International Spiritual Adviser

The International Spiritual Adviser always belongs to the board of the Council General, as a member, with a right to speak but not to vote; this person shall also be appointed by the President General with the authorisation of his direct superior.

3.16.3 The International Youth Delegate

The member entrusted with the International Youth Delegation shall also always form part of the Board of the Council General.

3.16.4 Other Board members

Depending on the board's needs, other members may be appointed as deputies to the Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer.

3.17 The Vice-President General

The Vice-President General shall replace the President General if the latter is prevented from attending, absent, or disqualified, and all the latter's functions shall be delegated to the former.

3.17.1 The special mission

The Vice President General is responsible for ensuring and organizing the election of a new President General, whenever the post becomes vacant, and in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 3. 6 of Part 2 of the Rule, and announces the election results and submits these to the Society.

3.18 Deputy Vice-President General

Whenever necessary, and for specific general areas of considerable responsibility within the Vincentian Society, the President General shall appoint Deputy Vice-Presidents General to whom certain functions shall be delegated; these Deputies shall automatically form part of the Board of the Council General.

3.19 The Secretary General: functions

Under the authority of the President General, the Secretary General ensures the smooth running of the different administrative services and bodies worldwide that report directly to the Council General. The Secretary General prepares the schedule of Council General Assemblies, organizing its agendas and drafting the minutes. The Secretary General performs the same mission for the International Executive Committee, the Permanent Section, and the Board. (For "Permanent Section" refer to Article 5 of Part 2 of the Rule).

The Secretary General handles necessary and regular relations between the Permanent Section and the different councils and conferences of the Society.

The Secretary-General is responsible for the Council General's archives and may be assisted by deputy secretaries.

3.19.1 Annual Report

In July every year, the Secretary General shall draft an annual report on the Society's worldwide activities, based on the information obtained from the national councils. This report shall also be publicised internally and externally.

3.20 The Treasurer General: functions

Under the authority of the President General, the Treasurer General is responsible for the financial management of the Council General. The Treasurer General keeps the accounts, which must be checked at least once a year by a financial commission appointed by the Council General and by a professionally qualified independent body.

The Treasurer General may be assisted by Deputy Treasurers.

3.21 The Budget of the Council General

The Treasurer General establishes the budget for the administration of the Council General: the income and expenses accounts are approved by the Permanent Section, in its capacity as the Governing Board, before being presented at the Council General Assembly. In years in which no Ordinary Assembly is convened, the International Executive Committee shall be responsible for approving these budgets.

3.21.1 Income

The ordinary budget of the Council General in terms of income is generated by:

- Contributions from the National assimilated and associated councils.
- Collections taken during Council meetings.
- Donations with or without special applications.
- Subsidies from any type of public or private institution.
- The personal contribution of each member of the Society through the secret collection in the last quarter of each year, as a sign of solidarity with the Council General.
- Others.

3.21.2 Expenses

The main expenses are as follows:

- Expenses incurred to finance actions in any country in order to develop,

extend and support the Society.

- Expenses incurred by the Secretariat and with respect to Council General publications.
- Expenses incurred in the organisation of Vincentian meetings that serve the international structure.
- Expenses incurred in connection with strictly essential trips.

3.21.3 Extraordinary budgets, global or special funds, and others

Besides the ordinary budget, a provision may be allotted for creating global or special funds, which are managed in the same way and intended for use in emergencies or as aid in specific circumstances for the benefit of one or various councils, conferences, countries, geographical regions of the world, in the event of catastrophes, or for any other purpose that is deemed appropriate.

3.22 The remaining International Service Structure

The President General appoints Territorial Vice Presidents and Area Coordinators from among the Society's worldwide members.

3.22.1 Enquiries

Prior to making the appointments to the International Service Structure, the President General shall, on a non-binding basis, always consult with the countries affected by the appointments.

The countries affected by an appointment to service in the structure of a Coordinator or International Vice President with which they do not agree by majority vote shall inform the President General of such a decision. The President General shall be obliged to revoke his/her appointment and appoint a different Coordinator or Territorial Vice President within the shortest possible time.

3.23 Territorial Vice-Presidents

In close cooperation with the President General and in his/her name, the Territorial Vice-Presidents shall support, advise, protect, help and coordinate the Society in large geographical areas around the world.

3.23.1 Regional meetings

In the parts of the world where they supervise and are responsible for rendering their services, they may organize regional meetings with the authorisation of the President General.

3.24 The Coordinators

The Territorial Vice-Presidents are assisted in their supervisory and promotional tasks by members who report to them and to whom they delegate specific service tasks for specific groups of countries. They shall also respect at all times the freedom of action of the national, assimilated and associated councils which they serve as a nexus of union and means of communication.

3.25 International Commission

For specific purposes, the President General may delegate different members the task of presiding over work or representing commissions established to achieve specific targets.

3.25.1 The members of the international commissions

Whenever proposed by the different commission presidents, the President General shall appoint the members of these commissions.

3.26 Individual responsibilities

Likewise, and for specific missions that do not require a larger number of collaborators, the President General may delegate specific missions to individual members.

3.27 Members with international missions

All members summoned to render important international services to their fellow members and to the poor shall do their utmost to perform these tasks simultaneously with their commitments to the conference to which they belong.

3.28 The end of terms of office

In order to ensure the smooth hand-over of functions, all terms, posts, and services delegated by the President General shall automatically cease six months after a new President General takes up his/her appointment. The new President General may shorten this period if it is deemed appropriate.

4. THE INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

4.1 The mission of the Committee

The International Executive Committee of the Confederation (hereinafter referred to as the "Committee"). Shall be responsible for coordinating the Society international strategy in the interim periods between Council General Assemblies, giving special attention to the need to ensure that this complies with the requests and matters approved during the aforementioned General Assemblies.

It shall also assist and advise the President General in the task of supervising all the conferences and councils, examining the general progress of the Society and making decisions on the strategy for the following year, as well as aspects the President General considers, must be corrected from previous administrations.

4.1.1 The mission of the Committee as an Ordinary Assembly of the Confederation

In the years in which the Ordinary Assembly of the Council General is not convened, the committee shall be responsible for performing the Assembly functions of the Confederation as provided in French legislation governing non-profit associations.

4.2 Report to the General Assembly

At the beginning of each Council General Assembly meeting, the Committee shall report to the Assembly through the Secretary-General on the results of its management and administration during the years in which the Assembly was not convened, and shall request the ratification of its performance.

4.3 Permanent and legal members

Permanent Committee members are, apart from the President General, those members who are responsible for the effective presidency of the Committee, namely the Vice-President General, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General.

Likewise, they shall include, where appropriate, the Deputy Vice-President General envisaged in Article 3.18 of Part 2 of the Rule.

Legal members of the Committee are the President of the national or assimilated councils with more than 1,000 active and aggregated conferences within their jurisdiction.

Moreover, the President General shall appoint, on the proposal of the other permanent and legal members of the Committee, five members of the national or assimilated councils with a lower degree of Vincentian representation around the world; these members are appointed on a biannual basis.

Each national or assimilated council which is a legal member is represented by one vote. The President General shall likewise have one vote which, if the case may be, shall be considered the casting vote.

4.3.1 Quorum and voting

The valid adoption of resolutions by the International Executive Committee shall require the attendance of representation of at least 30% of its full members. Should a second call be necessary, this shall be issued at least 24 hours later and shall be considered as validly constituted regardless of the percentage of members present or represented. Resolutions shall be validly adopted by a simple majority.

Each national or assimilated council, which is a legal member, is represented by a vote. In the same way, the vote of the President General shall be considered, if the case may be, the casting vote.

4.4 Guest Participants

The Territorial Vice-Presidents, the Presidents of the existing International Commissions and members especially delegated by the President General with individual tasks of an international nature, shall always be invited to attend Committee meeting with a right to speak but not to vote. The International Spiritual Adviser shall also be invited especially because of his/her spiritual work.

4.4.1 Special invitations

Any person holding a post of responsibility within the Society's international structure may be called to explain his/her management and administration

performance to the Committee, and this shall be subject to approval by the latter; the corresponding observations shall also be made by the Committee itself.

4.5 Special Reports

The Deputy Vice-Presidents General, the Secretary General, the Treasurer General, the Territorial Vice-Presidents, and the members delegated by the President General with commissions or special missions shall be specifically obliged to report on the work performed.

4.5.1 The Secretary General's Report

The Secretary-General, who shall also act as the secretary of the Committee, shall report to the management of the Permanent Section and on the administrative situation and service of the offices of the Council General of the Society.

Except for the extraordinary meetings envisaged in paragraph two of Article 4. 7 of Part 2 of the Rule, the Secretary General shall obtain confirmation from all the national or assimilated councils, at least two months in advance of the meeting of the International Executive Committee, regarding the inclusion or exclusion of any point on the agenda of the meeting.

The Secretary General shall be the spokesperson for national, assimilated or associated councils that do not form part of the Committee and do not attend its meetings, with respect to any reports or opinions that have been sent in writing.

4.5.2 The Treasurer General's report

Specifically, with respect to the Treasurer General, he/she shall report on his/her management and administration performance to the Committee, which shall represent, for him/her, the financial commission envisaged in Article 3.20 of Part 2 of the Rule. Likewise, the Treasurer General shall present the budget and obtain its approval in those cases envisaged in Article 3.21 of Part 2 of the Rule.

4.6 Correspondence and coordinators

In addition to the members with the responsibilities mentioned in the previous Articles, the committee may specifically summon any correspondent or coordinator, etc., and included within the performance of their services, to ask questions with respect to any aspect of their services.

4.7 Committee and International Structure meetings

The Committee shall meet at least once a year, during the first six months of the year, except in years in which the Council General Assembly is convened.

Extraordinary meetings may be convened when the President General considers that these are necessary and also whenever requested by one-half plus one of its voting members.

4.7.1 Service Structure meeting

The entire International Service Structure shall meet in a plenary session each two years, except in years in which the Ordinary Assembly of the Council General is convened, on the days after those on which the Committee convened.

4.7.1.1 Participants

All Vincentian members that are delegated international services and are the components of the International Structure shall be invited to participate in these meetings.

4.7.1.2 Objectives

The aim of these meetings shall be to provide information and to exchange experiences among the different members serving the International Structure of the Confederation. In this way, the members of the International Executive Committee shall learn about the difficulties of the International Structure and the latter shall gain knowledge of the international strategy to be designed by the former - the Committee - during inter-assembly periods.

These shall be mainly training and informative meetings for the entire structure.

4.8 Prayer and meditation

In accordance with the Society's tradition, the Committee meeting shall begin and end with a prayer. A spiritual reading of meditation, which may lead to a brief sharing, shall be presented by one of the attending members, normally by the International Spiritual Adviser. A collection shall then be taken among the participants.

5. THE PERMANENT SECTION/GOVERNING BOARD

5.1 Head office and convening of meetings

A Permanent Section shall be established at the head office of the Council General of the Confederation; it shall be presided over by the President General. It may be convened anywhere around the world, whenever the President General considers that circumstances make this advisable.

5.1.1 The mission of the Permanent Section

Its mission is closely to supervise and monitor the activity of the Society of St Vincent de Paul around the world, helping the President General to achieve a better international service for, members and the poor. It makes any appropriate decision within the scope of the Rule and Statutes and the Society's tradition and also complies specifically with the resolutions adopted by the assemblies of the Council General and the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

The Permanent Section shall specifically monitor resolution adopted at the last assembly meeting of the Council General the International Executive Committee, as well as their degree of implementation in the different national, assimilated or associated councils and by the Council General itself whenever appropriate.

5.1.2 The mission of the Permanent Section as the Governing Board of the Confederation

Whenever appropriate, and at least once a year, the Permanent Section shall be responsible for performing the role established by French law for the Governing Boards of non-profit associations.

In such circumstances, the Permanent Section shall be convened with a special agenda that shall make special mention of the fact that it acts as the Governing Board of the Confederation.

5.2 Permanent Section members

By virtue of the service that they render, the board members of the Council General, the Territorial Vice-Presidents, and the correspondents are members of this Permanent Section.

5.2.1 Voting

Save on the occasions when the Permanent Section meets as the Board of Directors of the Confederation, pursuant to Article 5. 1. 2 of Part 2 of the Rule, all presidents of national, assimilated or associated councils who attend a session of the Permanent Section shall be entitled to a voice and vote, as if a full member of this body.

5.3 Territorial technical liaison officers

These members of the Permanent Section are those professionals who are recruited whenever possible, and on a preferential basis, from among the members from different geographical origins. Their mission is delegated by the President General for a specific renewable period. They are appointed with the right to speak but not to vote.

5.3.1 The mission of the territorial technical liaison officers

Each liaison officer is appointed at the designated Council General work center determined pursuant to Article 1. 3. 1 Part 2 of the Rule as an assistant to the territorial vice-presidents and coordinators of the geographical area to which they are assigned.

From time to time, other technical liaison officers, with or without territorial responsibilities, may be entrusted with special missions reporting directly to the Secretary-General or the President General.

5.3.2 Exclusion

These members of the Permanent Section shall not belong to this Section when meeting as the Governing Board of the Confederation, as provided in Article 5. 1. 2 of Part 2 of the Rule.

5.4 Correspondent members and others

The members traditionally referred to as territorial correspondents who are appointed by the President General for an especially renewable period, as well as other members with speech missions, also form part of this Section.

5.4.1 The mission of the territorial correspondents

The mission entrusted to the territorial correspondents is that maintaining a constant relationship and effective cooperative with the different territorial technical liaison officers who depend on the former. They shall be close and fraternal representatives before the International Structure, of the national, assimilated and associated councils, to whose service they have been assigned.

5.5 Permanent guests

The presidents of the national or assimilated councils, which present at the head office, shall always be invited to attend meetings of the Permanent Section.

5.6 The Secretary of the Permanent Section

As envisaged in Article 3. 19 of Part 2 of the Rule, the Society's Secretary General is also the Secretary General of the Permanent Section.

6 INSTITUTION, AGGREGATION AND DISSOLUTION

6.1 Aggregation and institution powers

Only the Council General is empowered to institute new councils and aggregate new conferences to the Society, after consulting the national, assimilated or associated councils accordingly.

6.2 Aggregation and institution proposals: Speaker

Proposals for the aggregation of conferences and institution of councils are presented by a Speaker appointed by the President General, in a session of the Permanent Section. The Speaker receives the proposals and recommendations of the competent national, assimilated or associated councils on behalf of the President General and obtains opinions from the

members of the Permanent Section specifically responsible for handling relations with the council which has requested the aggregation or the institution.

The Speaker presents the request to the Permanent Section, which either approves or rejects the aggregation or institution request.

6.2.1 Deadline for presenting and requesting the aggregation of conferences

The conference, for which an aggregation request is presented by the Speaker, must have been created and must have provided services to the poor for at least twelve months.

6.2.2 Preservation of aggregated or instituted status

The conferences and councils once aggregated or instituted, shall retain that status as long as circumstances do not require the President General to proceed to their temporary suspension (see Article 6. 8 of Part 2 of the Rule), or to the firm exclusion by the Society of any conference or council.

6.3 Extraordinary circumstances

The Permanent Section, through the Aggregations and Institutions Speaker, may sometimes request supplementary reports from the international territorial vice-presidents.

6.4 Communication

The aggregations or institutions declared by the Permanent Section are notified by the President General to the President of the interested national, assimilated or associated council, as well as to the beneficiaries.

6.4.1 Aggregation and institution letters

The aggregation or institution letters shall be signed by the President General and the Secretary General; space shall be left for the signature of the relevant president of the national, assimilated or associated council. The Speaker shall provide notification of any aggregation or institution requests that have been rejected.

6.5 The Institution of a national council

Appointment of a provisional board

When the Council General, through the Permanent Section, institutes a national council, the President General appoints a provisional board, whose term of office is limited to one year and which may be renewed only twice. The president of this provisional board is a temporary member of the Council General, as established in the provisions contained in Article 1.10.2 of Part 2 of the Rule.

6.6 Missions of the provisional board

During this year, the provisional board shall prepare and ensure the adoption of the internal Statutes of the new Society for the members in their geographical area and shall establish the legal procedures required for it subsequently to join the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as a fully legal member, in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 1.6 of Part 2 of the Rule.

The Council General, through its Permanent Section, shall finally, and whenever necessary, approve the text of the proposed Internal Statutes, including those of any national, assimilated or associated council. Then, and within the scope of the new Statutes, the members shall elect a new president of the National Council and notify the Council General accordingly.

6.7 The dissolution or suspension of the aggregation or institution of a conference or council

For reasons prompted by the seriousness of a particular event, the President General may suspend temporarily or permanently exclude a conference or council, after notifying the Permanent Section accordingly. In the case of a permanent exclusion, this shall always entail the cancellation of the aggregation or institution. (See Article 6. 9 of Part 2 of the Rule)

6.8 Extraordinary delegation

Each president of a national or assimilated council, is on a precautionary basis by virtue of his/her election received and accepted accordingly at the head office of the Council General, delegated the powers temporarily to suspend a conference, council or member which are the prerogative of the President General. In other words, in cases of extreme seriousness and urgency, a president of a national or assimilated council may suspend a conference, council or member, exclusively as a precautionary measure, within his/her territorial jurisdiction.

6.8.1 Communication

In such circumstances and regardless of the direct communications to those involved, the President General shall be notified of such decision, and the justification for the same, within a maximum of 15 working days (as provided in Article 6.9.1.1 of Part 2 of the Rule); the member, conference or council in question may appeal to the aforementioned president in order to be heard. The President General shall approve or reject the appeals that are presented.

6.9 Commencement of dissolution or suspension procedures

Two procedures may be used to suspend, cancel or, where appropriate, withdraw an aggregation or institution procedure.

6.9.1 On the request from a national, assimilated or associated council

On request from the national, assimilated or associated council within whose jurisdiction the relevant member, conference or council is operating.

6.9.1.1 Necessary documentation

When a national council requests the intervention of the Council General, it must send, together with the request, full documentation for the information of the President General, particularly the documentation resulting from the intervention of the conciliation committee of the national, assimilated or associated council, where appropriate.

6.9.2 Ex-officio

The President General ex officio, i. e. on the initiative and request of one of the International Territorial Vice-Presidents, shall start the procedure of suspension or exclusion in the event of any serious circumstances arising. The President General shall report these to the Permanent Section.

6.10 Execution of the decision

The national, assimilated or associated council that has supervised the conference or council is responsible for taking the necessary steps, in agreement with the Council General, in order to execute the sanction and to ensure the transfer of property and files of the dissolved organization. In the event of suspension or dissolution of a national, assimilated or associated Council, the President General shall appoint a provisional board pursuant to the provisions contained in Article 6.5 of Part 2 of the Rule.

6.11 Extraordinary procedures

In agreement with, and normally on the request of, the national, assimilated or associated council concerned, the Council General may intervene in disputes arising at conference and council level. Its proposed decision shall take into account the spirit of the Society and any specific aspects of the Society's Statutes at the location in question, provided that they are approved in conformity with the provisions contained in the Rule and ratified accordingly by the Permanent Section.

6.11.1 Civil and other tribunals

Any member, conference or council that takes legal action through civil or other tribunals, without express authorisation from the Council General, in order to resolve disputes between members, conferences or councils, shall be automatically separated from the Vincentian friendship by virtue of this action and shall be excluded, for all intents and purposes, from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

7. AMENDMENTS TO AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RULE AND THE STATUTES

7.1 Rule and Statutes reform procedures

This Rule and the Statutes, in their three parts, may be modified by means of two procedures.

7.1.1 General Reform

Firstly, on a general basis, by replacing it with another newly worded version.

7.1.2 Partial reforms, amendments

Secondly, by so-called "amendments". By means of this procedure, the different amendments approved shall be attached to the end of the text of the Rule and Statutes and shall have the same effect as those that they rectify, complement or replace.

7.2 Rule and Statutes reform periods and methods

In both cases, proposed changes to the Rule and Statutes or amendments to any of its articles must be presented one year before the date scheduled for the Council General Assembly meeting at which these changes or amendments are to be discussed.

7.3 Quorum

In order for the change or amendment by means of one of the two procedures mentioned above (reform of the entire Rule and Statutes or partial amendment) to enter into effect, it must be approved by 2/3 of the legal members of the Council General present or represented, including those members who have voted by post.

7.4 Interpretation of the Rule

Any matter that is not specifically governed by any parts of the Rule and Statutes shall be governed by tradition and, in the final instance, by the decision issued by the Board of the Council General.

7.5 General rules governing interpretation

Despite the fact that the entire Rule and Statutes in their three parts must be treated as a single legal document, the first of these parts entitled "Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul" (Part 1) prevails with respect to the other two parts in terms of its contents.

Likewise, the "Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul" (Part 2), are subordinate to the Rule (Part 1) but prevail over the Internal Statutes.

There are also the corresponding Internal Statutes for the National Councils (Part 3). For their drafting, we have the "Basic Requirements for the Drafting of the Internal Statutes of the National, Assimilated or Associated Councils".

The Internal Statutes (Part 3), which must be prepared by each national, assimilated or associated council, shall comply fully with, and be subordinate to Part 1 and to Part 2, and shall be treated as a single legal document, as provided in Article 1.7 of Part 2. They must always be approved by the Permanent Section of the Council General in order to be valid.

Part 3 of the Rule

THE INTERNAL STATUTES FOR THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL IN SOUTH AFRICA

1. CONFERENCES MEET FREQUENTLY

Members of the Society, called Vincentians, gather in communities called "conferences" which meet regularly and frequently, usually weekly but at least once every fortnight. (Refer to Article 4.1.6 and Article 5 of Part 3 of the Rule for full details)

2. COUNCIL AND CONFERENCE NAME AND COMPOSITION

All councils shall include a reference to the area they serve, in their name, in order to differentiate between them.

Conferences shall be named after Saints, or our Blessed Lady, or Almighty God under their various titles. Conferences may not, however, be named after St. Vincent de Paul or Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

National Council determines the boundaries of the central councils, and creates new councils in need, informing the Council General accordingly and requesting their Institution.

Councils are at the service of all conferences under their jurisdiction. They help conferences develop their spiritual life, intensify the service of each conference, and diversify their activities so that they will be constantly attentive to the needs of those who suffer. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.6 of Part 1 of the Rule).

In particular, councils at appropriate levels should promote youth conferences, helping them to be fully integrated into the life of the Society.

The youth conferences shall have the same relationship with the council under which they operate as the rest of the conferences linked to the same council.

3. COUNCILS AND CONFERENCES

3.1 Organisation

Councils and conferences are organized under 3 (THREE) levels of councils. They are:

3.1.1 National Council

National Council coordinates and represents the general activity of all conferences throughout South Africa. It ensures that the basic principles of the Society, as expressed in all 3 parts of the Rule are respected. The National Council shall meet at least once per year and at such other times as the National President may determine, with the proviso, however, that on receipt of a written petition signed by at least 25 % (TWENTY-FIVE PER CENTUM) of the members of the National Council, stating the reasons for the petition, the National President shall call a special meeting, notice of which shall be the same as for an ordinary meeting of the National Council.

21 (TWENTY ONE) days' written notice shall be given of all meetings of the National Council and the agenda of the meeting shall be posted to each member thereof at his/her last known address. Any notice to a member shall be deemed to have been received by the member within 7 (SEVEN) days from date of posting of the notice to the member's last known address.

The quorum for meetings of the National Council shall be 50% (FIFTY PER CENTUM) plus 1 (ONE) of the total membership thereof.

In the event of there being no quorum, the members present shall determine a date on which another meeting is to be held. If there is again no quorum of members present at the second meeting, the members present at this meeting shall be deemed to be a quorum, and the meeting shall proceed.

In the event of a president of a central council not being able to attend a meeting of National Council, he/she may appoint one of his/her vice-presidents or any member of his/her central council to attend in his/her stead. Such representative shall, for the duration of the meeting, have all the rights and powers of the president who appointed him/her.

Resolutions adopted by the National Council shall be by a simple majority, except in respect of amendments to the Constitution when 2/3 (TWO THIRDS) of the members present must vote in favour of the proposed amendments.

In the event of an equality of votes, the Chairman of the meeting shall have both a deliberative as well as a casting vote.

The National Council shall hold a National Meeting at least twice during each 6 (SIX) year cycle, with a view to giving any ordinary member of the Society, who might wish to do so, an opportunity to discuss any matter at the national level.

Minutes will be taken at every meeting to record the Council's decisions. The minutes of each meeting will be given to Council members, at the latest, two weeks before the next Council meeting.

3.1.1.1 Composition

National Council shall comprise the following members:-

- 3.1.1.1.1 A president.
- 3.1.1.1.2 One or more vice presidents.
- 3.1.1.1.3 A treasurer.
- 3.1.1.1.4 A secretary.
- 3.1.1.1.5 A twinning officer.
- 3.1.1.1.6 The president of each central council or his/her appointed representative.
- 3.1.1.1.7 An officer to promote youth membership.
- 3.1.1.1.8 An aggregation officer.
- 3.1.1.1.9 A training officer.
- 3.1.1.1.10 The president, in consultation with his/her council may co-opt to membership, and/or undertake a specific non voting office, people who, because of their experience or qualifications, could be of benefit to the Society. The terms of office of such appointees terminate once a new president has been elected and assumes office. (For additional criteria refer to Article 9 of Part 3 of the Rule)

3.1.1.2 Executive Committee

The National President may appoint an Executive Committee comprising any member of the National Council and ordinary members of the Society as deemed necessary. The committee will meet monthly between the annual meetings of the full National Council. The purpose of this committee shall be to administer the Society, to implement policy as defined by the Rule and resolutions adopted by

National Council, and to prepare proposals to be considered by National Council, either at the next National Council meeting or, if because of the need of an urgent decision, by round robin resolution.

3.1.2 Central Councils

3.1.2.1 Central councils meet monthly, and group together various district councils and conferences in a particular geographical area under the supervision of National Council.

3.1.2.2 The National Council shall establish central councils to administer the Society in defined geographical areas. Central councils shall comprise:

3.1.2.2.1 A president.

3.1.2.2.2 A vice president.

3.1.2.2.3 A treasurer.

3.1.2.2.4 A secretary.

3.1.2.2.5 An officer to promote youth membership.

3.1.2.2.6 The president of each district council, operating within geographical areas defined by its central council, or his/her appointed representative. In the case of central councils which do not have constituted district councils within their geographical area, the presidents of conferences within such area (or the appointed representatives) shall be members of central Council.

3.1.2.2.7 The President in consultation with his/her Council may co-opt to membership, and/or to undertake a specific non voting office, people who, because of their experience or qualifications could be of benefit to the Society. The terms of office of such appointees terminate once a new president has been elected and assumes office.

3.1.3 District Councils

3.1.3.1 District Councils, under their respective central councils, meet monthly, and facilitate communications between central councils and conferences.

3.1.3.2 District Councils may be established within defined areas administered by any central council.

District councils shall comprise:

3.1.3.2.1 A president.

- 3.1.3.2.2 A vice president.
- 3.1.3.2.3 A treasurer.
- 3.1.3.2.4 A secretary.
- 3.1.3.2.5 An officer to promote youth membership.
- 3.1.3.2.6 The president of each conference under its jurisdiction or his/her appointed representative.
- 3.1.3.2.7 The President in consultation with his/her Council may co-opt to membership, and/or to undertake a specific non voting office, people who, because of their experience or qualifications, could be of benefit to the Society. The terms of office of such appointees terminate once a new president has been elected and assumes office.

3.2 Conferences

3.2.1 Branches of the Society (known as conferences) shall be established within parishes of the Catholic Church or within defined geographic boundaries in order to serve the objects of the Society within such parishes or areas, or within other places where the need for one becomes apparent such as in a hospital, university, factory or prison.

3.2.2 Conferences shall comprise and be administered by:

- 3.2.2.1 A president.
- 3.2.2.2 A vice president.
- 3.2.2.3 A treasurer.
- 3.2.2.4 A secretary.
- 3.2.2.5 And such other members as may be admitted to the conference.

3.3 Functions of Councils

3.3.1 Councils are first and foremost at the service of conferences and other councils falling under their jurisdiction, with the view to promoting the growth of the Society and its works. They also help conferences to develop their spiritual life.

- 3.3.2 They stimulate and co-ordinate the activities of the conferences and councils within their area of jurisdiction.
- 3.3.3 They examine the financial statements and annual reports and forward them, together with their comments, to the next higher council, without delay.
- 3.3.4 They co-operate with other charitable organizations which share the same objectives that the Society has. However, sharing the Society's financial resources must be considered only in exceptional circumstances, with great circumspection, and only later receiving approval by the next higher council. It must be remembered that the Society's benefactors donated specifically to the Society, and accordingly their intentions must be respected. (Refer to Article 3.14 of Part 1 of the Rule).
- 3.3.5 They encourage initiative and strive to establish new councils and conferences and new works of charity.
- 3.3.6 They submit to the council requests for aggregation of conferences and institution of councils together with their comments thereon.
- 3.3.7 They arrange, whenever possible, meetings for the training of members and prospective members, in the Vincentian vocation. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.6 of Part 1 of the Rule).

3.4 Aggregation and institution

All conferences and councils belong fully to the Society when they are respectively aggregated or instituted by the Council General. It is the responsibility of a central council president to inform the Aggregation Officer of new conferences that have been established, of conferences that have been closed, and to apply for aggregation of conferences that have been operating for at least one (1) year.

4. CONFERENCES AND THEIR WORK

4.1 Membership

4.1.1 The Society may establish, as necessary, categories of members.

- 4.1.1.2 Full members are those who voluntarily live the conference's life of prayer and action by attending the meetings and by having regular personal contact with those who suffer.
- 4.1.1.3 These Internal Statutes (Part 3 of the Rule) may establish, as necessary, other categories of members who collaborate with its service to the poor.

- 4.1.1.4 Auxiliary members help the Society through their personal co-operation in any work for the service of those in need.
- 4.1.2 The names of persons proposed for membership should be submitted to the president of the conference concerned. Information about the recommended person will be made known to the conference by the president and, if approved, he or she will be admitted and given a Vincentian welcome at the next meeting. Conferences have autonomy in their work for the poor but comply with the Rule and Statutes of the Society.
- 4.1.3 Conferences may consist of men, of women, or of both, although mixed conferences are recommended. (Youth conferences can consist of members up to the age of 30, though usually much younger.)
- 4.1.4 The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The president, vice-president and spiritual adviser must, therefore, be Roman Catholic. In certain circumstances, and after consultation with the local diocesan bishop, members of churches and ecclesial communities which share the Catholic belief in, among other issues, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the seven Sacraments and devotion to Mary, may be admitted as members. Notwithstanding the foregoing, non-Catholic spouses of Catholic members who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbour in need, are always to be welcomed as members of the Society, but are not eligible to be elected as a president, vice-president or spiritual adviser of a conference or a council unless they belong to a Church or Ecclesial Community which shares Catholic belief in the criteria referred to above.
- 4.1.5 As soon as is deemed appropriate by its central council, and only after having provided services to the poor for, at least, twelve (12) months (refer 6. 2. 1 of Part 2 of the Rule), a newly-formed conference will be recommended by National Council for aggregation by the Council General. Such aggregation qualifies the conference members to belong to the international Vincentian family.
- Should a conference be suspended or go into abeyance, its records and funds will be transferred to its central council.
- 4.1.6 Conferences shall meet regularly and consistently at such places, on days and at times determined by themselves. The council having jurisdiction is to be informed of the day and time of the meetings. The conference meetings are the power source from which Vincentian action flows. Conferences usually meet weekly, but at least every fortnight. The decision to meet less often than weekly should not be taken lightly and should be approved by its central council.

5. CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL MEETING ESSENTIALS

(FOR AGENDA REFER TO APPENDIX 1)

- 5.1 Opening and closing prayers, formal and, if needed, spontaneous. (Refer to Appendix 2)
- 5.2 A spiritual reading or meditation, on which members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith and deepening their mutual understanding.
- 5.3 Reading and approval of the minutes of the previous meeting.
- 5.4 Reading and approval of the financial statements presented by the treasurer.
- 5.5 Reports on the visits made by the members, since the previous meeting, to families and friends in need. Discussion on ways to improve the conference's service.
- 5.6 Allocation of the visits and other tasks entrusted to each member for the following week by the president, after consultation with the conference. Visits must be made in pairs for the following reasons:
 - 5.6.1 Two members are likely to see different aspects of a problem and other possibilities.
 - 5.6.2 It helps to foster the friendship between members which is so important to us.
 - 5.6.3 Our Lord sent out his disciples in pairs, for mutual support and inspiration.
 - 5.6.4 For the sake of the Society's, and visiting members' reputation, it is prudent to visit in pairs, especially when visiting vulnerable people living alone.
- 5.7 Review of any correspondence.
- 5.8 A secret collection must be taken, and the amount collected announced by the treasurer.
- 5.9 Whenever possible, the inclusion of training periods for members, and communication of relevant current information about the Society.
- 5.10 Council meetings at all levels should follow a similar agenda suitably adapted. No secret collection need be taken up.

6. VISITS TO THE POOR ARE MADE IN A VINCENTIAN SPIRIT

Visits to those in need should be made in their environment, whenever possible. The contact with those in need should always be made in a spirit of friendship, respect, cordiality, empathy and affection. It should also promote self-sufficiency whenever possible for those who suffer, and show concern for their deepest needs.

(For the complete criteria, see Articles 1.2 through 1.3.6 of Part 1 of the Rule).

7. CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL ANNUAL REVIEW

At least once a year, all conferences and councils must evaluate their service to the members and to the poor they visit and find ways to provide better service.

(For the complete criteria, see Article 1.2.5 and Article 3 of Part 1 of the Rule).

They should also consider the new types of needs they seek to alleviate and how to find those in need.

At least once a year they must submit a report on their activities to the National Council through the immediate council to which they belong, on the forms provided by National Council. To demonstrate the relevance of the conference to parish life, a summarized report should be submitted to the parish priest. (Refer to Article 14 of Part 3 of the Rule for full details)

8. COMMISSIONING AND DEDICATION CEREMONIES

All incoming presidents shall be commissioned, and members shall annually renew their promise of service to the members and to the poor, thereby deepening the spiritual dimension of their vocation. These ceremonies usually take place during a festival meeting.

(Refer to Appendices 3 and 4).

(For the complete criteria, see Article 2 of Part 1 of the Rule).

9. OFFICERS AND DECISION-MAKING

9.1 Subsidiarity and democracy

The Society accepts the principles of subsidiarity and democratic consensus as for the basic rules of its functioning.

(For the complete criteria, see Articles 3.9 and 3.10 of Part 1 of the Rule).

9.2 Servant leadership

Officers in the Society, at any level, are always to be accepted as service to Christ, the members and the poor.

(For the complete criteria, see Article 3.11 of Part 1 of the Rule).

9.3 Board members, other officers, election of presidents, terms of office and duties

9.3.1 Board members and other officers

For a specific period of time, the Society chooses members to fulfill the various council and conference offices, each of whom must always be a full member of a conference.

Similar to the Board of the Council General, each conference or council should have a board comprising officers referred to in paragraph 3.1.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 of Part 3 of the Rule, appointed by the president after consultation with the members. All such officers shall retire and vacate office prior to the assumption of office by the president-elect.

To safeguard the good reputation of the conference or council, and therefore that of the Society itself, the principal officers of a conference or council, such as vice-president, treasurer, and secretary, should not be relatives of the person empowered to make the appointments.

The president is elected by secret ballot at a meeting of the conference or council at which a quorum of at least 50% of the members with voting rights are present. The president shall be elected by a simple majority. Nominations must be submitted at least one month before the election date. The election must be conducted at the meeting immediately prior to the first meeting at which the new president assumes office.

Following Christ's example, the presidents at all levels of the Society endeavor to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charismas of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The president of the conference or council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality. The presidency should be considered by him or her to be a responsibility, not an honour.

9.3.2 Terms of office and duties

9.3.2.1 President

The term of office for all presidents must not exceed three (3) years.

However, the National President shall be eligible for re-election for one additional term not exceeding three (3) years. Under exceptional circumstances, a National Council may request the Council General's permission to extend further the term of office of its President. The Council General, through the Permanent Section, will authorise or refuse such a request and, in the case of its authorisation, will set the maximum period of time for that extension.

Councils, at any level, have the same power as Council General to authorize a second term of office for the presidents of the councils and conferences they coordinate, on their written request. If it is authorized, the council will set the maximum period of time for the extension. Council and conference presidents cannot, therefore, be re-elected without requesting, and obtaining the agreement of the next higher council.

9.3.2.2 Vice President

The vice-president acts for the president when the latter is absent. He or she cooperates constantly and effectively with the president.

9.3.2.3 Secretary

9.3.2.3.1 The secretary prepares minutes of the meeting.

9.3.2.3.2 Keeps a record of the names and addresses of members and of those being visited.

9.3.2.3.3 Conducts such correspondence as may be required.

9.3.2.3.4 Compiles the annual report of the conference on the prescribed form.

9.3.2.4 Treasurer.

9.3.2.4.1 The Treasurer is responsible for the conference funds.

9.3.2.4.2 He or she keeps the accounts and submits the prescribed returns.

9.3.2.4.3 The treasurer draws up and presents to the meetings of his or her conference, a schedule of income and expenditure which has to be approved by the conference.

-the principal forms of income are:

- Collections at meetings,
- Other gifts, collections, contributions, and offerings,
- Grants received from conferences and councils of the Society,
- Legacies, subsidies,
- The income from all fund-raising efforts by the members.

The principal expenses are:

-Help in cash or in kind to the persons or families, for whom the conference has made itself responsible,

- Contributions to projects of the conference or councils of the Society (subject to Articles 3. 34 and 15 of Part 3 of the Rule),
- Expenses in connection with twinning,
- Expenses of meetings and entertainments or outings arranged by the conference for the poor,
- A levy to the councils of the Society according to a formula decided on by the National Council,
- General administrative expenses (which should be kept as low as possible, the conference being only the administrator of funds belonging to the poor.)

9.3.3 The treasurer and president shall exercise strict control over conference funds and shall endeavour to co-operate with banking officials and auditors in safeguarding funds and cheque books. All cheques paid by the Society must be signed by two duly authorised members.

10. THE SOCIETY MUST REMAIN VOLUNTARY

Employees of the Society, of its special works or of organizations controlled by the Society, may not be elected or appointed to any office of a council within the Society. They may, however, be members and hold offices in a conference, provided it is not the conference responsible for the work in which they are employed.

(For the complete criteria, see Article 1.12.2 of Part 2 of the Rule).

11. THE SPIRITUAL ADVISER

As traditional since the beginning of the Society, a spiritual adviser should be appointed to foster spiritual life within the conferences and councils. Being a lay society, priests, permanent deacons and other members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office outside of their spiritual work.

Should a priest, permanent deacon or another member of a religious order not be available for the spiritual advisory function, the president of the council or conference, after consultation with the president of the co-ordinating council may appoint a member who has had the appropriate training as spiritual adviser.

12. PROMOTING UNITY WITHIN AND BETWEEN CONFERENCES

Festival meetings and conference Masses should be maintained.

Conferences and Councils celebrate liturgical ceremonies, particularly Vincentian ceremonies, together throughout the year, endeavouring to maintain a spirit of profound

friendship among the members, to deepen spirituality, to share experiences and to provide information to improve the Society's service to the poor. (For the complete criteria see Articles 2 and 3 of Part 1 of the Rule). '

In South Africa four festival meetings should be convened; one on each of the Sundays nearest the following Feast Day, i.e. :-

19 March - Feast of St Joseph

29 June - Feast of Saints Peter and Paul

27 September - Feast of St Vincent de Paul

8 December - Feast of the Immaculate Conception

At least once a year, members should together attend a Mass for the work of the conference, the members themselves and those visited.

13. AUTHORITIES OF THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT

13.1 To suspend members, conferences, and councils

In accordance with Article 6.8 of Part 2 of the Rule, the presidents of national councils have the delegated authority to suspend members, conferences or councils of the Society within their area as a precautionary measure.

When the National President has made such a decision, the member, conference or council suspended as a precautionary measure will cease to exercise any office and may not act on behalf of the Society under any circumstances. However, such member, conference or council is entitled to appeal to the President General. (For the complete criteria, see Article 6.8.1 of Part 2 of the Rule).

A suspended member may alternatively appeal to the National Council so that the case may be reviewed at a plenary meeting of the latter, which will listen to the member and make its decision by vote. Should the member choose this process, and should the appeal fail, a further appeal to the President General may be made by the suspended member.

13.2 To annul the election of a president

The National President may, for serious reasons, annul the election of a member as president of a conference or council. Such member will immediately cease to exercise the office but may appeal to the National Council.

13.3 May establish a conciliation committee

The National Council may establish a conciliation committee, to which councils, conferences, and members may appeal.

Councils, conferences, and members trust the integrity of the Society and its life of prayer and communion, so that they may not appeal to civil or legal authorities to resolve internal differences, without the express permission of Council General.

Any member, conference or council which uses means other than those provided by the Society to, resolve internal disputes renounces Vincentian communion and leaves the Society. (*For the complete criteria, see Article 6.11.1 of Part 2 of the Rule*).

14. TRANSPARENCY IN USING MONEY AND OTHER ASSETS

14.1 Annual finance and activity reports are published by National Council, other councils, and conferences

The society shall preserve its good reputation for honesty and responsible stewardship. It will produce finance and activity reports annually as at the 31st March. The consolidated reports will be submitted to the South African Department of Social Development by no later than 30 September each year (or to fulfill the requirements of relevant legislation from time to time).

A detailed, comprehensive report shall be submitted to the Council General annually on or before 30 September. Such reports will be presented in the format specified by Council General International and will encompass the year ending the previous 31 March.

These reports should be sent to the diocesan bishops to keep them informed of the Society's work. (*For the complete criteria, see Article 3.19.1 of Part 2 of the Rule*).

National Council will be, to all legal effects, the sole responsible party before any national or international jurisdiction for the events occurring within the Society in South Africa.

14.2 Property and the distribution of unused funds

Conferences and Councils zealously manage and maintain the Society's assets. The authority to dispose of, purchase, mortgage, lease or rent the Society's real estate assets belongs exclusively to National Council.

National Council may, on behalf of the Society, acquire or dispose of immovable property, and erect thereon any buildings or facilities required by the Society for the furtherance of its objectives, provided that the National Council may delegate its authority or part thereof to a central council.

All documents relating to the acquisition or disposal of immovable property shall be signed by the National President, subject to a prior resolution of the National Council authorizing the transaction. Should the National President not be available, the National Vice-President shall sign in place of the National President, subject to the adoption of a resolution by the National Council to authorize the transaction, and to authorize the Vice-President to sign all documents relating to the transaction on behalf of the Society. In the event of both the National President and the National Vice-President not being available, the National Council may by resolution authorise the transaction, and authorise an office bearer to sign the necessary documents on behalf of the Society.

Any document that is to be lodged in a Deeds Office including those relating to the transfer of immovable property shall require two of the following signatures - a National President or a National Vice-President, and a National Treasurer or a National Secretary.

National Council will assess annually the quantum of unused funds held by each of the councils or conferences within their areas, and will accordingly determine the allocation of such excess funds, to the service of the poor in their own areas or abroad. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.14 of Part 1 of the Rule).

15. COLLECTIONS FOR THE POOR AND TO MAINTAIN THE STRUCTURES

Each conference shall assume its responsibility in assisting other conferences and councils with greater needs.

Likewise, conferences should feel responsible for the maintenance of all levels of the structure of the Society. In order to achieve this, they must take up special bi-annual collections in the first and third quarters respectively from members in the spirit of friendship, solidarity, and sharing.

The proceeds should be allocated as follows: in the first quarter, an internal collection for the poorer conferences within South Africa; in the third quarter, a collection in solidarity with the structural expenses of the councils to which the conference belongs, to be

distributed by National Council. The proceeds of all such collections shall be paid to National Council for distribution.

16. NATIONAL COUNCIL'S INCOME

National Council's income is derived from support, in the form of levies given by other councils attached to it and from sundry receipts including gifts, legacies, and subsidies.

The National Council shall determine the levy which each council shall contribute annually.

17. COUNCIL PRESIDENTS' RIGHT TO AUDIT AND TO SEE CORRESPONDENCE

When deemed appropriate, council presidents should authorize audits of the conferences, councils and special work under the auspices of their council.

Council presidents are also entitled to have access to all correspondence sent by any conference on behalf of the Society. The same authority is vested in any council over other councils under its auspices.

The president of the council to which any of the Society's special work belongs shall be entitled, after due consultation with National Council, and evaluation of the legal consequences, to replace the members of the board of that special work and any of its employees regardless of their functions. (For complete criteria, see Article 1. 12 of Part 2 of the Rule).

18. REFUND OF ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES

Vincentian officers entrusted to undertake duly authorized tasks for the Society are entitled to the refund of the administrative expenses incurred.

19. ASSISTANCE TO MEMBERS IN NEED

19.1 As a general principle, members should not be excluded from receiving assistance just because they are members. All people in need, of whatever status, are eligible for assistance by the Society.

19.2 A member should apply to his or her president in the conference and one other office bearer. Other members of the conference should not be involved but will be informed that a "special case" is being dealt with.

19.3 Conferences should deal with such requests and provide the finance unless the amount required is beyond their means. In such event, district councils or even central councils are to be asked to assist. The decision to give assistance is to be taken by the conference president, one other office bearer, and the district council president.

- 19.4 Members being assisted may continue to be active members of the conference.
- 19.5 Members so helped are to be given the option of repaying the amount requested, unlike the circumstances when non-members are assisted.
- 19.6 If the person assisted is an office bearer, then, he or she must step down from office.
- 19.7 Any assistance given should, where possible, be paid by the treasurer direct to the creditor and not to the member.
- 19.8 No case should be taken as a precedent for any other case.
- 19.9 No assistance is to be given to members for educational purposes, or any other purposes such as those when an ordinary member of the public would or could approach a bank for a loan.

20. DECEASED MEMBERS

It is recommended that, in November of each year, we remember with gratitude the foundations laid by our deceased brothers and sisters. Accordingly, wherever possible, their names should be mentioned in the De Profundis prayed at the conclusion of each meeting in November.

21. DISSOLUTION

Decisions regarding the dissolution of a central council shall rest with the National Council.

In the event of the dissolution of a central council, its funds and assets shall revert to the National Council to be utilized in such manner as the National Council may decide in the furtherance of the objects as set out in Articles 1.2, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 of Part 1 of the Rule. For this purpose, the persons authorised to sign documents for the National Council shall be similarly authorised to sign the documents for the central council.

The Society may close down if at least two-thirds of the members present and voting at a special national meeting convened for the purpose of considering the matter are in favour of dissolving. If the Society should close down it will need to liquidate all its debts. After doing this, any property or money remaining shall not be paid or given to members of the Society. These assets shall be given to another non-profit organisation which has objectives as close as possible to those of the Society. Members at the special meeting so convened will decide what organisation this should be. If the meeting cannot reach a decision then the Directorate for Non-profit Organisations will be asked to decide.

22. INTERPRETATION OF THE STATUTES

These Internal Statutes received the approval of the Permanent Section of the Council General on 10 May 2006. They are subordinate to and interpreted according to Part 1 of the Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and to Part 2, the Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and shall be treated together with them as a single document.

APPENDIX 1

AGENDA

1. Opening prayers.
2. Spiritual reading or a short reflection by the spiritual adviser.
3. Recording of apologies.
4. Welcome to new members. Short explanation by the president of the aims and objects of the Society.
5. Reading, approving and signing of the minutes of the previous meeting.
6. Matters arising from the minutes.
7. Correspondence:
 - i. Letters from the district, central or national councils.
 - ii. Circulars, notices, etc.
 - iii. Letters addressed to and received from the twin conferences (if applicable).
 - iv. Any other correspondence.
8. Proposals for admission of new members.
9. Treasurer's report.
10. Reports on visits:
 - i. In the homes.
 - ii. Hospitals.
 - iii. Jails, etc.
 - iv. Other

(N.B. Each visiting member, or pair, should report on families visited in their homes. Reports on visits to hospitals, institutions, jails and the like, the number of patients or inmates visited should also be given.)
11. Reports of new cases investigated and decisions taken.
12. Secret collection.
13. General business (including suggestions and matters of interest to Society).
14. Projects (if any).
15. Closing prayer.

APPENDIX 2

OPENING PRAYERS

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

In Common: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Your love.

Spiritual Adviser: Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created.

Response: And you will renew the face of the earth.

Spiritual Adviser: Let us pray.

In Common: O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit instructed the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise, and ever enjoy his consolation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Father..... Amen.

Hail Mary..... Amen.

SP. ADV: Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,

R: Have mercy on us.

SP. ADV: Mary conceived without sin,

R: Pray for us.

SP. ADV: St. Joseph,

R: Pray for us.

SP. ADV: St. Vincent de Paul,

R: Pray for us.

SP. ADV: Blessed Frederic Ozanam,

R: Pray for us.

APPENDIX 2 (continued)

CLOSING PRAYERS

Jesus, our merciful Saviour, you made Saint Vincent an apostle of charity. Through his intercession give us the grace to follow his example in dedicating our lives to the service of the needy. Help us to be able to recognise You in the least of our brothers and sisters so that we may feed them, clothe them, visit them, and help them in every way possible out of love for You.

Show your mercy in its full abundance to the poor whom we serve. Give them consolation in their distress; help them to recover their dignity and to find cause for hope. Above all, may their hunger for love be satisfied.

We thank you for all the ways in which you have blessed our Society and we ask you to strengthen and guide it. May it always be filled with your spirit of mercy, simplicity and fellowship. Through example may we inspire many others to take up and continue our work. (Bless the members of our twin conference that their work and ours may jointly bear good fruit). We pray that through your miraculous intervention, Blessed Frederic Ozanam will be declared a Saint by the Church.

Help us, O Lord, to bear our difficulties with courage and patience. Bring us in peace and joy to our home in Heaven. May we all be reunited there in your presence, with our Blessed Lady, our patron St Vincent, and the poor whom we serve, to celebrate forever Your mercy and love.

We ask this of you who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DE PROFUNDIS

Out of the depths, I cry to You, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!
O let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading.
If You, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive?
but with You is found forgiveness: for this we revere You,
My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on His word.
My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak.
Let the watchman count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord.
Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption,
Israel indeed He will redeem from all its iniquity.

Sp. Adv.: Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord.

Response: And let perpetual light shine upon them.

Sp. Adv. : May they rest in peace.

Response: Amen.

Sp. Adv. : O Lord, hear my prayer.

Response: And let my cry come unto You.

Sp. Adv. : The Lord be with you.

Response: And with your spirit.

LET US PRAY

O God, the Creator, and Redeemer of all the faithful, grant to the souls of your servants departed remission of all their sins, that by pious supplications they may obtain that pardon which they have always desired. Who lives and reigns, forever and ever.

Response: Amen.

Sp. Adv. : May they rest in peace.

Response: Amen.

PRAYER FOR UNBORN LIFE

O God of life and love,
You have given us the power
to bring new life into the world.
but all too often a mother's womb,
that should be a nursery of life,
becomes instead a place of its destruction
help us to remove this evil
and ensure respect for all life
made in Your image and likeness,
called to fulfill its promise on this earth
and destined to find a home with You
for all eternity.

We ask this through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord. Amen

APPENDIX 3

COMMISSIONING CEREMONY FOR A NEW PRESIDENT

Presider: The life and vitality of parish societies depends on leaders who are willing to give their time and talent. We pray for the new central council president who has been elected to lead the council for the next three years.

Retiring President: The St. Vincent de Paul Society is an international Christian organization of lay people, Catholic in origin, character, and tradition, founded in Paris in 1833 by Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions. It is made up of councils and conferences. The office of president. is a responsibility, not an honour. It is one of service, where the president is first among equals.

The retiring president lights a candle and says:

Brothers and sisters, I present to you the new president, (name) who has been elected as president of the central council. This lighted candle represents the faith and love which, with the help of God, I have tried to encourage and nourish.

Presider: New President (name) receive the light of Christ. May you be filled with the warmth of His love, so that the light of His presence may burn ever more brightly in this council and throughout the Society.

Do you promise to carry out your duties with diligence and imagination, serving the council and its members, the structures of the Society and those in need for the greater glory of God, and to seek consensus and not to insist on your own opinion. To see every member as a friend, to recognize their talents, to encourage the reticent, to develop harmony and respect among members?

President: I do

Presider: New President (name) you have accepted a serious responsibility and I ask all those present to share in the responsibility and to pray for the grace to carry it out.

The candle is extinguished.

The Rule is held by the retiring president as it is blessed.

Presider: Let us pray.

O God, by whose word all things are made holy, bless this Rule of the Society and grant that whoever reads it with a receptive mind, may with the help of the Holy Spirit, come to know Jesus better, to see with His eyes and love with His heart. May their souls be protected and their hearts filled with joy, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rule is handed to the presider, who hands it to the president and says:

Receive the Rule of the Society as a sign of your leadership and responsibility. With the help of God, may you hand this Rule on to your successor after a fruitful and successful presidency.

With hands outstretched over the president the presider says:

Almighty God, we give thanks for the many and varied ways you build up your Church. Bless the new president of this council. Grant that with vision and leadership, he/she and all the officers, may serve the Council and the Society with humility, and bring honour and glory to your name. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Retiring President:

In the spirit of Jesus and in the name of our Patron, St. Vincent de Paul, and our principal founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam we commission you, (name) as president of, (name of town) central council, to lead not as one who dominates, but as one who serves, and to encourage your brothers and sisters in the Society "to go to the poor with love", and to share their burdens and joys as true friends.

APPENDIX 4

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Lord Jesus Christ, we the Brothers and Sisters of the family of St. Vincent de Paul, come before you today to re-dedicate ourselves to the service of the poor.

Increase our faith so that we may always see you in those we serve.

Increase our hope that we may undertake our duties with courage and patience.

Above all increase our love so that we may grow in love for both you and our neighbour, for it was You who said we cannot love you without loving our neighbour.

We ask you to show your approval of our Society through the canonization of our founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

We also ask you to give eternal happiness to our deceased members and hope that at our time of judgement you will say "Come you blessed of my Father for I was hungry and you gave Me to eat, thirsty and You gave me to drink, naked and you clothed Me".

All this we ask, dear Lord for Your greater glory.

AMEN

Our Lady, Queen of the Poor, pray for us.

NOTE: It is suggested that this prayer is recited at Festival meetings.

OUR PATRON

ST VINCENT de PAUL

Vincent de Paul was born about the year 1580, near the village of Pouy, some sixty miles north-east of Lourdes. He knew illiteracy, poverty and the simple way of life: But he also shared the qualities it bred - notably, patience when the going was tough. He studied theology at Toulouse and was ordained at the age of 20 on September 23rd, 1600.

During his early days in the missions, he was captured and enslaved in North Africa. After his release, he was assigned to the court of King Henry of France.

During his stay in Paris, Vincent visited the "hospitals" of the day and realized his true vocation lay in the service of the poor and suffering and not in the high places and courts of the wealthy. It was at Chatillon Vincent was able to organize assistance for the poor and establish the collection and distribution of supplies for the needy.

In later years, Vincent founded the "Congregation of the Missions" - more commonly known as the "Vincentians and then the "Daughters of Charity" a religious order of nuns whose vocation was to care for the poor. As a result of his organising abilities, the Ladies of Charity (a lay society of women) was established to participate in person-to-person service of the poor and needy. All these foundations are very active today in many parts of the world and they have not departed from the original spirit of their founder.

Vincent died on September 27th, 1660, some 173 years prior to the foundation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul by Frederic Ozanam and his companions. As the aims and objects of the newly formed Society were guided by the example of St Vincent de Paul, it was agreed to name the Society after the great Saint.

St Vincent de Paul is universally accepted as the Apostle of Charity and it was not without sound reason that our founders when selecting a patron for their Society of Charity, chose the great but gentle St Vincent de Paul. His qualities and application to works of charity were very modern, even compared with the practices and procedures of our world today.

St Vincent realised that charity needed the minimum of organization, just sufficient to ensure the personal efforts of his co-workers were maximized in the service of the poor. He had a great appreciation for the value of utilizing time by advising those who visited the sick and lonely to "try and visit, first, those who have companions so as to have all the longer to spare for those

who are lonely” Vincent aimed at forming leaders, and nothing broke his heart more than the failure of any of his men to persevere. He urged his priests to speak with simplicity and from the heart, his reasoning being that the best results were achieved by being natural and sincere.

After years of experience in working for God in France he thought seriously of the prospect of Christianity being transferred to pagan parts of the world; thus Africa and Asia became part of his plans for expansion.

History records that St Vincent was very conscious of the necessity to raise money for the expansion of the many and varied works required to assist the poor and infirm. He was outstandingly successful in an era when there was no advertising, no press, no radio and no television.

St Vincent relied on word of mouth and example to publicize his needs. His work was blessed by Almighty God, and money was forthcoming for his requirements.

One can understand why early members of the Society followed so closely the pattern set by St Vincent. As the efforts of our Patron were blessed, so too were the activities of Ozanam in the manner of unobtrusive but practical and active personal charity.

Our efforts will likewise be blessed if we follow the same pattern as St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. The spirit of the Society must be nurtured in the original pure motives of Ozanam, and allowed to develop through the giving of ourselves to the poor.

Vincent was a creative artist in the performance of his work. From where else could Ozanam draw richer inspiration or find a more suitable name for his Society whose conferences are found the whole world over?

ALEXANDER WILMOT

FOUNDER OF THE SOCIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Alexander Wilmot was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on 9 April 1836, and arrived in South Africa in 1853. Inspired by the good works of the Society which he had joined in Glasgow, he soon persuaded Bishop Griffith, the pioneer Bishop of South Africa, to permit a conference to be formed at St Mary's Cathedral, Cape Town.

This historic event took place on 17 November 1856. Wilmot was the same age as Frederic Ozanam when the latter founded the Society. Despite their youth Ozanam and Wilmot shared that great Christian virtue of humility, and spiritual maturity. Both were the first members of the Society in their countries, and yet both stood aside in favour of older men as first presidents, Bailly in Paris and Begley in Cape Town.

Alexander's relocations in the Cape Colony coincided with the early extension of the Society. He was first moved to Port Elizabeth and there in 1859, South Africa's second Conference of St Augustine's was aggregated. Two years later, the heart and hand of Alexander Wilmot inspired the establishment, on 16 February 1860, of the third Conference of St Patrick's, Grahamstown, the settler city where Irish soldiers, in the years of the frontier wars, assisted the redoubtable Monsignor Murphy in building the very distinctive church still solidly standing today.

On 17 January 1860, in St Augustine's, Port Elizabeth, Monsignor Murphy joined in wedlock Alexander Wilmot and Alice Mary Slater, the daughter of an 1820 settler family.

This happy marriage was blessed with sixteen children, and the happy pair lived to celebrate, firstly their golden, and the diamond jubilee of their marriage, surrounded by numerous descendants to the fourth generation.

The home life of the Wilmots was a happy and holy one. Throughout their lives, they were daily communicants. Of their children a son Christopher John, became a Jesuit priest, and another, Aidan, a magistrate and civil commissioner, A daughter, Margaret Mary, joined the Dominican Nuns as Sister Thecla, another Louisa Mary, married James Stratford, later to become Chief Justice of the Union of South Africa, whilst a third daughter, Alice, married a pioneer Transvaal educator, Charles Douglas Hope, well remembered as Headmaster of Potchefstroom Boys' High School.

As a civil servant Alexander Wilmot worked for the Government of the Cape Colony. Wherever he was stationed, he endeavoured to establish a conference of his beloved St Vincent de Paul Society. After Grahamstown, it was established in 1866 in Oudtshoorn. The second Cape Town conference was started at the Sacred Heart Church, Somerset Road, and was followed by

conferences at King Williamstown, Kimberley, Uitenhage, and thereafter a third Cape Town conference at St Dominic's, Wynberg.

After retiring from the public service, Alexander Wilmot entered the old Cape Parliament in 1889, where he continued to play a prominent part in the life of his adopted country. When he retired after twenty years in Parliament, he had earned the proud title of the Honourable Alexander Wilmot.

Nor was he forgotten for his outstanding lifelong devoted service to his church. Firstly, he was created Knight of the Holy Sepulchre, to be followed by the bestowal of the Order of Knight of St Gregory the Great. He was appointed Chamberlain to three successive Holy Fathers and was ultimately made a Count of the Holy Roman Church by Pope Benedict XV.

Despite his busy public life, Count Wilmot found time to promote the development of the Society in South Africa. He travelled extensively and, by his encouragement and example, he saw the Society established in Johannesburg in the early years of the twentieth century, where it has continued to expand and to flourish.

His beloved Countess Alice passed away on 12 September 1922. Not many months thereafter, on 3 April 1923 at St Monica's, Waterloo Green, Wynberg, Count Alexander Wilmot, with the last blessing from Jesuit son Father Chris, breathed his last after a life of almost 87 years - a life of intense spiritual and physical wellbeing during which he devoted himself to his church, to his family to public service, and to developing and encouraging his beloved Society of St Vincent de Paul.

THE FOUNDING OF THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT de PAUL

The Society was founded on the 23rd April 1833, in Paris, France, at a time when the Church in France was at a very low ebb as a result of the bitter hostility engendered by the French and Industrial revolutions of 1789 and 1830.

An 18 year-old student, Frederic Ozanam, began his studies at the University of Paris in 1832. Coming from the security of a sincere and committed Christian family in Lyons, he was appalled by the circumstances in which he found himself in Paris. Fortunately, through the good offices of a holy priest, Abbe Noirot, and the care and friendship of the eminent scientist, Ampere, his faith, his balance of mind and clarity of thought were restored. He then quickly realized that the University's open attacks on religion should be resisted. At lectures, he looked around to see if he could find fellow students who might support him. After one such lecture, he was approached by a fellow student who had noticed his concern.

These two soon saw that they shared the same views, and it was not long before they had contacted several other students with like concerns. They saw that they would need organization and regular meetings if they were to plan successfully to defend the Church both in the lecture rooms and at public debates. They also decided that something more than intellectual discussion was needed to prove the vitality of the Church, but were not sure what this "something" was. These meetings and the research done by these few students enabled them to bring both pieces of knowledge of historical facts and logical thinking to bear in their response to attacks.

Whilst enjoying the activities of the group, Ozanam realized that what they were doing was of limited value. Shortly prior to this time one Emmanuel Joseph Bailly, had founded the "Catholic Tribune", a newspaper expressing the same views as Ozanam's group. Attached to this Journal was a sort of literary society or study group which Ozanam and his friends joined. The debating ability of Ozanam's friends began to overshadow the rest of the activities of this group and so was born the "Conference of History" to cater for the debaters while leaving the rest to study in peace.

The "Conference of History" became so successful that they shortly had to limit membership and restrict the number of visitors attending the meetings.

From his early days, even as a scholar at the Royal College in Lyons, Ozanam was resolved to write a book proving the truth and validity of the Church's teaching from history. That ambition remained with him throughout his life. So it was somewhat daunting to him when, at one of the

Conference meetings, a visitor politely admitted the good of the past and then asked, "But what is the Church doing now, in this new industrial age in which we are living?"

This at last brought home to Ozanam and his friends that the time had come to discover what that "something" was. Deeds speak more loudly than words.

This was a critical time in the spiritual development of Ozanam and his friends. They were beginning to realize that the Halls of Academe did not constitute the whole world, that the Church was the universal church, the Catholic Church embracing everyone. The idea of doing something had been brewing for a long time. The question asked, "What is the Church doing now," and the form in which it was put, was merely the catalyst forcing them to act. They thought of many ideas. While doing this they continued attending lectures and also meetings of the "Conference of History," where, without doubt, the Holy Spirit was at work. Once, after many fruitless discussions, they were sitting in front of a warm fire discussing possibilities once again, when someone said, "perhaps someone has no firewood, and is cold", and immediately they went across the street to a poor man with a gift of firewood. Their reception was encouraging. Eventually, it was Ozanam, ever the leader, who proclaimed "we must seek the blessing of the poor." They went to M. Bailly and he encouraged them. They went to their parish priest, and he said they should rather just teach catechism, but they persisted. Is this an example of simple lay-leadership, or of the Holy Spirit proclaiming our royal priesthood?

At first, they operated on a trial basis. They continued to meet at the premises of the Catholic Tribune but on a different night to the Conference of History because not everyone was interested in charitable works.

For the rest of that first winter, the group continued to distribute firewood. When spring came they collected gifts from shopkeepers and others for distribution to the poor. From the beginning, visiting the poor in their homes was regarded as the prime necessity, to bring the world of the "haves" and the world of the "have nots" together.

On the 23rd of April, 1833 this small group decided to take on a more permanent character. They met at M. Bailly's premises and there constituted themselves as the Conference of Charity. Of all the members of the Conference of History only seven met to constitute the Conference of Charity. M. Bailly was appointed the first President and Frederic Ozanam the first Vice-President. It is important to note that all these first seven members, except only M. Bailly, were teenagers. The Holy Spirit does not need the experience of man to operate a successful Society.

After this formal founding, and encouraged by the words of M. Bailly, "If, you wish to help yourself and the poor, sanctify yourselves in seeing Jesus Christ suffering in the person of the poor," this small group operated more zealously than ever.

At the third or fourth meeting of the Conference of Charity one of the members, Lallier by name proposed a new member but the proposal was met with general opposition. The members felt that the intimacy of their small group would be broken. Ozanam supported Lallier and eventually they prevailed, and de la Noue was admitted as the first recruit of the Conference of Charity. Thereafter recruits joined more rapidly, and by November of the following year, membership stood at one hundred, or more. Later, after several weeks of discussion it was decided to break up into separate conferences, and the Conference of, St Etienne du Mont developed three new branches: the Conference of St Sulpice, the Conference of St Phillippe du Roule and the Conference of Notre Dame de Bon Nouvelle. Later, in 1835, the first conference outside Paris was formed, at Nimes.

Ozanam, always acting humbly under Bailly, continued to exercise a decisive influence over the various conferences. It was he who insisted that while all the conferences remained united to each other and pursued like ends, each should be allowed to develop its own individuality, a fruitful principle which enabled the Society to spread all over the world.

Within two years of the founding of the Conference of Charity it was decided to place it under the protection of Mary and under the Patronage of St Vincent de Paul, and thereafter to adopt the name "St Vincent de Paul" to embrace all the individual conferences. The words used by Frederic Ozanam on that occasion are worth remembering: "The patron shows a way of life to be pursued, a heart at which we should warm our hearts, an intellect at which we should seek enlightenment". From this humble beginning, the Society has spread and continues to grow throughout the world.