

PHILOSOPHIES POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

AN
INTRODUCTION
TO THE
SOCIETY OF
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



New Member Series
Booklet #1

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Conference
2121 South Rural Road • Tempe Arizona 85282 • (602) 966-1974



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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Dear Friend:

Welcome to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We appreciate your interest in serving the poor. Regardless of the task(s) you will perform within Mt. Carmel's conference, you will find your efforts rewarding and a powerful spiritual influence on your life.

Training is an important commitment we make to you. We will try to quickly get you into an "Ozanam School" -- a four hour basic orientation session on the Society (includes breakfast and lunch!). In the meantime, we have prepared a "New Member Series" of booklets to help orient you to our history, philosophy, policies, guidelines, and work details.

We don't want to "swamp" you with things to read. This is the first booklet. We will send the second in a week to ten days, and the third three weeks later. In this way, you will have time to read, absorb and understand the material.

On the other hand, we all learn by doing. If you're ready to go, give us a call and we'll pair you up with an experienced Vincentian to make food deliveries even before you completely understand the written material.

God bless you for your commitment.

Sincerely,

Mary Helen and Paul Kelley
Co-Presidents





THINGS WE DO (POSITIONS WE HAVE TO FILL)

PHONE ANSWERING. This person answers the phone one day each week in the SVdP office at the Parish Rectory, usually from 9 to 11 am. S/he takes down information, asks basic questions, completes an information card on the person requesting help, and organizes delivery assignments for the SVdP home visit team(s) working that day. This commitment requires two hours a week. We answer the phone Monday through Saturday. "*Regulars*" work a specific day every week. "*Subs*" are those who can fill in when a regular gets sick, has car trouble, goes on vacation, etc.

CURRENT SITUATION: *NEED SUBS*

FOOD DELIVERY. A two-person Vincentian home visit *team* delivers food boxes to those in need. They first pack the food boxes in SVdP's parish pantry, then deliver them, sometimes also collecting information from the person/family served regarding other needs -- rent, utility, medicines, etc. They can provide vouchers for clothing and some furniture needs. This commitment requires about two hours each week (we try to give each team no more than four deliveries). We deliver Monday through Saturday. "*Regulars*" work a specific day every week. "*Subs*" are those who can fill in when a regular gets sick, has car trouble, goes on vacation, etc.
NEED TWELVE TEAMS, HAVE ELEVEN NOW (Fri open), PLUS SUBS

HOME VISITS. A two-person Vincentian *team* visits individuals/families requesting non-food assistance -- financial help with rent, utilities, transportation, medicines, furniture, etc. They follow-up with apartment managers, utilities and others to assess the need. They network with other churches, SVdP conferences and government agencies. This commitment requires about two hours each week. We prefer to have a specific team assigned to (available on) a specific day, but "floating" availability is possible. These positions are generally filled by more experienced Vincentians or those with training in social service.

NEED THREE TEAMS, HAVE TWO NOW

FOLLOW-UP. A two-person Vincentian *team* visits individuals/families two weeks to a month after initial assistance has been provided. They try to determine how the person/family is doing -- whether our help was beneficial, whether their situation is stable or improved, whether they still have critical needs. This commitment requires about two hours each week, on the day of your choice. Team members contact the person/family by phone, then schedule a home visit whenever possible.

(continued)

This job does not necessarily require experienced volunteers, but we ask that new people do some home food deliveries first. It also helps to have someone on the team with a financial/accounting background, since many of those in trouble need counseling with basic household budgeting and grocery planning/shopping.

NEED THREE TEAMS, HAVE NONE NOW (A new undertaking)

PANTRY MANAGERS. This team helps unload food from bi-monthly and other allocations from food banks, coordinating with the food allocation pick-up person (*see below*) as to the time when the food arrives. Stocks pantry shelves as needed. Checks the food barrels in the church twice a week. Brings non-food items in the barrels or by the Rectory Annex (clothing and other items) to the Mesa Thrift store once a week. Mops the pantry floor once a week. Probable time commitment: two to three hours a week.

NEED TWO PEOPLE (ONE TEAM)

BREAD PICK-UP. Bread must be picked up at 3:00 pm from a Mesa bakery on Monday and Thursday and sometimes from a Tempe supermarket. Requires a full-size pick-up or large van since up to 35 trays of bread are sometimes received. The bread is delivered to up to four nearby locations and to Mt. Carmel's SVdP pantry. When larger amounts are received, it may involve delivery to SVdP Central in Phoenix and to other charities. Probable time commitment: two to three hours on Monday, same on Thursday. (Great job to split between two volunteers).

NEED ONE OR TWO PERSONS

FOOD ALLOCATION PICK-UP. We must pick up our monthly food allocation from SVdP Central in Phoenix in three or four loads each month (roughly one per week). Requires physical strength and a full-size pick-up or large van since each load is about 25 banana boxes. The load is brought to the Mt. Carmel SVdP pantry and unloaded into the pantry (*with the help of the pantry managers, above, who stocks the shelves*). Visit food bank four other times a month to pick up additional meat and frozen goods, purchase jelly, peanut butter, detergent, bar soap, etc. Probable time commitment two to three hours a month.

NEED ONE OR TWO PERSON

FURNITURE PICK-UP & DELIVERY. Parishioners offer us their used furniture which we deliver to persons/families in need. Requires physical strength and a full-size pick-up (we will often get a sofa-couch, queen/king mattress, large dresser, etc.). Having a "buddy" helps, although other Vincentians are often available to help. Unpredictable time commitment, but averages a pick-up and/or delivery once every other week (two hours every other week).

NEED TWO OR THREE PERSONS, HAVE ONE NOW

Basic Food Policies

- ◆ Food is available *every other month* for most adults, but this should not continue for more than one (1) year.

Clients are encouraged to use FoodCare and similar food cooperatives for long-term food needs. Reasons for food deliveries more frequently than this should be noted on the Record Card for the benefit of other telephone workers and home visit teams.

- ◆ Food is available *monthly* for cases involving young (pre-teen) children, but this should not continue for more than three (3) months.
- ◆ Food is available *weekly* for individuals in dire need, but this should not continue for more than four (4) weeks.
- ◆ We have an obligation to provide information to people on how to find a long-term solution for their food needs -- FoodCare and similar programs, for example. SVdP is an *emergency* food provider, not a regular or long-term supplier.
- ◆ Exceptions may be made to any of these policies when, in the judgment of the home visit team, there are special or unusual conditions.

Basic Policies About Rent and Utilities, Clothing and Furniture

- ◆ Rent assistance should be limited to \$100 for all adults, plus \$25 for each child involved. This should not be repeated more than once a year.
- ◆ Utility assistance will be for power, water and gas only (no telephone), limited to \$100, and not more than twice (2) a year.
- ◆ We will provide clothing vouchers to families, especially those with children, which a home visit team judges to be in need.
- ◆ At present, we will pay for furniture and household supplies only to those in a desperate situation. Other families or individuals will have to wait until our “furniture registry” acquires the desired furniture.
- ◆ Exceptions may be made to any of these policies when, in the judgment of the home visit team, there are special or unusual conditions.

The “undeserving poor” remind us that something deeper needs to change -- whatever it is that makes them feel so hopeless and helpless. We need to address that something deeper. In the meantime, help them. Do not be judgmental or overly careful.

Solution: *If you're going to err, err on the side of largess.*

4. If you try to help the poor, you will sometimes get taken.

Every SVdP team member can tell stories of people who have come with a sad tale. You check it out very carefully, give them money, and later find out that they did the same thing at three or four other neighboring parishes.

Helping the poor has its risks. You will sometimes get taken: The same is true of forgiveness. If you try to forgive seventy times seven, as the Lord suggests, you will sometimes get stepped on. It's a darn shame. Be generous anyway. Don't be foolish, but don't get overloaded with rules.

It's like playing racquetball. You're going to get hit with the ball now and then, and it hurts. You can wear safety goggles and learn how to step out of the way of certain shots, but you are still going to get hit now and then. The only way to avoid getting hit is to stand in the corner and not play.

If you are going to be generous to the poor, you are sometimes going to get taken. If you don't get 'taken' every so often, your rules are too strict.

Solution: *Learn to write off your losses.*

5. Helping the poor is not always a pleasant experience.

It's no picnic helping the poor. There is often no feeling of fulfillment. It's work, like a lot of virtue is work, like taking care of an elderly parent is work.

The poor, as fate would have it, are just like us. They are mixtures of virtues and vices. Like us, they are not always grateful. Like us, they are both generous and greedy. Like us, they are sometimes wonderful and sometimes awful. Whatever happened to the noble poor? Some are out there, but mostly they are in Charles Dickens' novels.

The poor poor are not always so noble, and they are the hardest to deal with, which is probably why we don't.

Solution: *When you help the poor, you always receive more than you give, but it may not seem that way to you at the time.*

6. Food baskets at Thanksgiving or toys at Christmas are good as far as they go, but they don't go very far.

We tend to focus on direct help to the poor on special occasions. Clothes, food, money, at Thanksgiving, Christmas, back-to-school. Those fine things shouldn't be taken lightly. But that is the easy part. The hard part is trying to do something about the poor's state in life.

Where do you begin? What do you do?

It's hard when you have to deal with the causes instead of the symptoms. How can we give them basic skills to manage their lives?

- ◆ Can we get banks and credit unions to make loans available to them despite the considerable risk?
- ◆ Shouldn't the state make better provision for dependent children?
- ◆ What about health insurance?
- ◆ How do we help them find work?
- ◆ How do we help them find work that pays a living wage?
- ◆ Why are single parents, usually women, abandoned so easily by their spouses?

Solution: *Direct assistance is good; tackling the causes is better.*

7. Sometimes the poor are overwhelmed into inaction.

People who deal with the poor can tell a hundred stories about how the poor waste money and opportunities.

You bring food to their home and notice a large screen TV. You give them money and they buy groceries at the nearby convenience store, where prices are much higher, and send their youngsters to the mall to have a good time. You arrange to have their car fixed and find out it is a Buick Riviera while you're driving a Ford Escort. Whenever you visit, they are just sitting around, watching television.

Why? Let's try to put ourselves in their shoes. You are thinking about cleaning the garage. Actually, you have been thinking about it for weeks. Well, to tell the truth, you have been thinking about it since last winter when you were trying to find room in the garage for the new Christmas decorations.

It is a big mess, but today you are going to tackle it. Getting started is the problem, because with a mess like that, there is no logical place to begin. So you decide to have a beer first and watch a couple quarters of the football game.

Hold that thought. Right there, in that moment, you are in their shoes. You may spend only half an hour watching the game, and you will eventually get to your task, but in those 30 minutes of doing nothing, you know exactly how they feel, *all day every day*.

At least with cleaning the garage, there is an end in sight. But for the poor, the task seems to have no beginning and no end. They can't get enough together even to get started on a down payment for transportation, to seek protection from an abusive husband, or to begin an education.

Their life is like that *all the time*. It is too big a mess even to know where to begin. So they try to forget it by enjoying some "luxuries," having a beer and watching TV.

Solution: *Don't judge their "laziness" too quickly.*

8. The poor also help the poor.

People who work with the poor can tell a hundred stories about the "generous poor." The family who took in a neighbor's child without a second thought because the child needed a home. The person who has next to nothing gives money to others who have nothing at all, simply saying, "Well, they need it more than I do." A poor family in a small house takes in another family because they had their heat turned off in the dead of winter. Food is shared even though there isn't enough to begin with.

There are a hundred true stories about the generous poor. The widow's mite wasn't a parable that Jesus made up. It was a true story that unfolded before His eyes. And it still happens every day in poor communities.

How often have you delivered food to a bedraggled, unemployed near-beggar in a broken-down mobile home, only to find a couple other men in similar straits sharing his already cramped quarters? The poor, in their own way, sometimes have more pity on their fellow poor than do we.

If *they* can do it, so can we. And we should help *them* help, so *they* get the credit and are encouraged to continue their generosity. The affluent say that charity is its own reward. That's an easy philosophy when you're not poor. The poor who help the poor tend to be believers that "*what goes around comes around*" -- so let's help them make that come true.

Solution: *The good Lord loves a cheerful giver, which is one of the reasons why God loves the poor.*

Bishop Kenneth Untener
Saginaw, Michigan

This booklet prepared
by and for the use of



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