

Conference President's Guide

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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

Mission

The Mission of the St Vincent de Paul Society in South Africa is to deepen the faith of its members – to go out into our nation to heighten the awareness of Jesus Christ.

We do this by sharing ourselves (who we are and what we have) with the poor on a person-to-person basis.

We seek to co-operate in shaping a more just and compassionate South African community,

Our preferred option in this mission of service is to work with the poor in development, by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their destiny

Introduction

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a diverse organisation seeking to bear witness to Christ by giving personal service to those in need.

Congratulations for taking on the responsibility of Conference President!

As a Conference President you have a very important task to be an example to your members and support them to live out this personal service, through their commitment to the Mission and Culture of the Society.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with ideas, general guidelines and expectations of the role of Conference President.

These can be adapted to suit your Conference and circumstances; we hope you find it useful.

Spirit of the Conference

It is at the Conference Meetings that Members can experience Christ's presence in each other and in the workings of the Holy Spirit. The meetings are opportunities for personal renewal and fellowship, in an atmosphere of simplicity and Christian joy.

Conference meetings also serve to develop a Vincentian lifestyle based on Christian spirituality, while emphasizing personal attitudes and actions geared towards living a life of love and compassion towards those in need and each other.

Members support and care for each other, and this, in turn, creates a process of growth through which each person reflects more and more the example of Christ.

This can only truly be achieved through openness, co-operation and sharing of responsibilities. When people feel they are making a worthwhile contribution and are appreciated for their contribution, their own sense of worth is heightened and they will often contribute more. As the Conference President you have the responsibility to ensure that your Members are supported and encouraged in every aspect of being a Member.

Roles and responsibilities of Members

As in any team, members need to be given particular duties and the Society is no different.

President

- Welcomes and cares for new members
- Offers support and guidance to all members of the Conference
- Offers support and leadership for the other office bearers in their roles
- Develops members' talents and skills
- Communicates with Members about events and activities
- Co-ordinates Conference activities and meetings
- Represents the members on the District Council
- Ensures the Conference works from the spirit of the Society and complies with the Rules
- Ensures the Conference Members are informed of, and adhere to organisational policies
- Offers leadership and direction when needed
- Ensures the Conference has a Spiritual Advisor / Facilitator
- Encourages all members to pray and reflect on their work
- Undertakes public relations with the Parish, wider Church and the community
- Liaises with other agencies and Society Members
- Identifies potential successors for the President's role and other positions within the Conference

Vice President

- Supports the President when needed, and assumes the duties of the President should he/she be unavailable
- Provides support and guidance to new Members and auxiliaries
- Takes on other duties of Members when required
- Supports other Office bearers in their roles

Secretary

- Takes minutes at meetings and distributes them thereafter
- Organises and prepares any correspondence for the Members
- Maintains case records and statistical data
- Liaises with the President and Vice President

Treasurer

- Maintain financial records of the Conference according to the Society's standards
- Co-ordinates all money collections, including the poor box
- Promptly banks donations or incomes and is responsible for payment of accounts etc.
- Liaises with the District Treasurer or Society finance department

Spiritual Advisor / Facilitator

- Actively promotes and encourages spiritual reflection at meetings
- Encourages Members in the development of their spiritual lives
- Promotes the practice of charity, humility and brotherly and sisterly love at meetings

Twinning Officer (National Appointment)

Twinning is a Special Work of the Society. It takes place when councils and Conferences in more affluent countries reach out to help their Vincentian sisters and brothers with their work

The three basic elements of Twinning are: prayer, correspondence and financial / material assistance. Assistance can be interpreted broadly and may, for example, include technical experience in a specific field.

Overseas Conferences may seek assistance with a special project which does not require a large financial outlay. The Twinning officer would then liaise with the overseas Conference to provide the support.

Conference Members

Members need to be aware of other responsibilities. By allocating these responsibilities to members you are helping to include everyone in the life and energy of the group

- Liaising with the Youth on a District or local level and in schools. This may include supporting the school development
- Liaising with the Parish and representing the Society on the Parish Council, organising displays and information for Appeals, recruitment and events and being the contact person for enquiries about the Society

- Liaising and maintaining contact with Special Works and other volunteers and reporting relevant information to the Conference about Special Works or other Conferences where applicable
- Maintaining contact and updating necessary information with auxiliary volunteers and liaising with the Secretary re statistics for recording and other correspondence where appropriate

NOTE: Any of these duties can be performed by a second Vice President or shared among all participants

Policies and procedures

The St Vincent de Paul Society under the direction of the Central Council and National Council will from time to time, implement relevant policies and procedures that meet our legal and ethical responsibilities. The Society has a responsibility to ensure you are adequately informed about, and trained in any policies, procedures or practices that will impact on your work.

The Society makes a commitment to:

- Consult, where practicable, with its volunteers and staff in relation to any relevant internal and / or external legislation or policies
- Continuous review and improvement of policies and procedures
- Adequate resources and appropriate internal and / external expertise when required
- Communicate any relevant information in an appropriate manner
- Appropriate and timely response and feedback in so far as is practicable

As the Conference President you have the responsibility to ensure your members are made aware of, and adhere to, any relevant policies and procedures as required by legislation or the Society

Please contact your District President for further information.

New Members

A probationary period of three months for prospective Members should apply. This is so their suitability can be assessed by the Conference President or other appointed persons, as well as giving the new Member the opportunity to assess his / her own appropriateness and commitment to living out the Mission of the Society. The reasons for the probationary period must be carefully explained to new Members.

A prospective member should be given work as soon as possible. He / she should be given sufficient responsibility to make a meaningful contribution to the work of the Conference. However, the prospective Member must be given adequate support and assistance during this time, so they do not feel overwhelmed. It is important that a support person or mentor is allocated to the new Member. This may be the President or another appointed person to follow up on any action, debrief the person in case of any critical situations, answer questions and be a welcoming friend.

Visiting Special Works such as Frederic Place, Polokong Children's Village and talking with other people of the Society is very important when someone first starts. This will provide the prospective member with a bigger picture of the good works of the Society, assist them with having a broader connection to support and an information network for when they are visiting or assisting people in need.

After the probationary period has been completed and both the prospective Member and Conference want to continue the relationship, a Membership application form is completed, followed by a formal commissioning as part of the local Parish / Festival or National Mass.

Commissioning Ceremony for new Members

A Commissioning Service is then arranged to welcome the new Member into the Society.

Spiritual Development

The motivation for the Members of the St Vincent de Paul Society is found in the spirituality of the Society. The spirituality of the Society involves both prayer and action.

We are called to reflect on:

- The spirit and inspiration of St Vincent de Paul and blessed Frederic Ozanam
- Living according to God's will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- Commitment to the Mission and Culture of the Society, which calls us to a life of simplicity, integrity, honesty and humility
- Our experience of solidarity with people who are poor, marginalised or without power
- Our unique role working as volunteers, and the richness of experience we have in entering the lives of others and honouring their story

“Every person, as a child of God, has an irreplaceable dignity and mission as an agent of God’s love in the circumstances of daily life”

At Conference meetings, it is important for all Members to reflect on the work they are undertaking in the light of their faith.

By reflecting on, and sharing the experiences of each person, participants can be both supported and challenged to live out the Mission of the Society, to provide quality witness and service to those in need. The quality of service and the love of Christ will be reflected in the relationships among the Members and between the Members and the person in need.

Prayers, reflections, song, story sharing and more formal activities, like retreats, are ways to engage participants to explore their beliefs and spirituality.

Leadership

To be a Vincentian leader, one needs to understand who Vincent and Frederic were, and what motivated them to do what they did. Looking at the lives of these two men, they did not work in isolation. They had people who helped and worked with them to achieve all that they did. For Vincent it was Louise de Marillac, and for Frederic, it was Rosalie Rendu. Frederic was the principle founder of the Society, but he worked with the other young men as a team, to establish and develop their good works.

These Holy men and women lit the flame, but they were also the “keepers of the fire”. While the Spirit of Life that animates the Community belongs to all, the keeper has a direct responsibility to watch over the Spirit – the fire, to nurture its life, to pass it on from group to group, untarnished and unblemished. As the Conference President, you are the keeper of the fire, to lead your Members to live an authentic life of service to the poor, to see and know the Lord.

To keep the flame alight as a leader is not always easy, especially when the demands of our world can be overwhelming. Leaders can become overwhelmed with problems and pressed by crises. Effective leaders make things happen. They see what needs to happen, plan a way to make it happen, and take steps to see that it does. They are an example to others, and they encourage and support the contribution of all people around them.

Leadership is:

- About caring, not controlling
- Creating a place of meaning where all can share equally and openly
- Accountability, trust, honesty, integrity, courage, challenge, support and love
- Creativity and innovation in decision making, especially when dealing with obstacles or problems
- Building community with each other and within the organisation

Characteristics of leadership are:

- Listening
- Empathy
- Awareness
- Foresight
- Accepting responsibility
- Commitment to others
- Community building

Leadership continued

Grace-filled Vincentian leadership needs:

- Trust in God
- Seeing God in the mundane and simple actions of each day
- Peace with human weakness and fragility
- Compassion for all
- To live the Vincentian virtues of humility, simplicity and charity
- To pray for those having difficulties
- To have a broad vision of God, the Church and the world
- To see Christ in their brothers and sisters and especially those who are poor or in need

Vincentian leadership is not something we do, but the person we are. The Vincentian leader needs to keep the flame alive through prayer and contemplation and being grounded in the lives of people who are poor or in need

“If love is a fire, zeal is its flame” St Vincent de Paul

The Power of Learning

The St Vincent de Paul Society is committed to ensuring the members are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to perform both a good quality service to people in need and ensure they have a sound knowledge of information that affects their work, including safety issues.

Having the appropriate skills and information is important, as is the spiritual development of the person. By choosing to participate in living out the Mission of the Society, each person is making a commitment to enhance the life and opportunity to those in need and deepen their own personal faith. To do this we must be supported and offer to support each other.

Training is one way for this to be achieved. The training may be focused around a specific topic, or involve a series of smaller discussion topics that offer skills development, information, spiritual formation or reflection. The training may be specifically Vincentian focused, or could involve working with other agencies and individuals.

It is important that as the Conference President, you show your leadership by participating in training and development opportunities, and you encourage and support your Members to do the same. Training can be daunting for some people, as can the thought of sharing their faith. So, your support and encouragement will help people feel more comfortable and safe to do this.

There are people in the Society who can help you with organising training, or can assist with resources for you and your Conferences. This may include referring you to external services, depending on your needs.

Please contact your District President who will direct you to the appropriate person in your Central Council.

“You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis; you must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long term improvement.”

Young people

“Founded by young people, for young people whose bond continues throughout their life, the spirit of youth is an original and permanent characteristic of the St Vincent de Paul Society. It was from the outset written into the rules and it will remain there. The spirit of youth is dynamism, enthusiasm, moving toward the future. It is generous acceptance of risks, it is creative imagination – in other words – above all ADAPTABILITY” The Rule, 1991, St Vincent de Paul Society

Young people have much to bring to the St Vincent de Paul Society. They have a very important part to play in living out the vision of Frederic Ozanam. Young people belong here, and we have much to learn from them through the vitality, energy and enthusiasm with which they bring.

Young people have a great capacity and commitment to social justice. Many young people live out their faith by taking action to address and change social inequality and disadvantage. The Society is a wonderful environment for young people to do this, and one which we can learn from.

Young people will often focus their action on works that are dedicated to responding to the needs of other young people or children. This is often by way of youth / young adult camps or similar activities. However, they are also involved in other areas of the Society, including fundraising and actively supporting other Conferences and Special Works.

Young people may have different ways of socialising and will express their spirituality in ways that are relevant to their faith development. This must be encouraged at all times, by offering support to them, and including them in decision making and discussions, as equals, within the Conference, as well as allowing them to share in ways that they are comfortable with.

It is important to encourage and include young people in all aspects of your local Conference, District Council and Central Councils. Inclusion of young people in all aspects of the Society as equal participants will encourage better opportunities to maintain the youthful spirit and energy for all members that Frederic Ozanam believed in for the Society.

Young people have a great capacity to adapt to changing needs and circumstances, and by being open to their ideas and suggestions you can learn and grow in your own faith and skills. By encouraging young people's input, you provide young people with greater opportunities to deepen their faith and action for social justice.

“I invite the laity, and in particular young people to show courage and imagination in working to build a more sisterly and brotherly society , where the less fortunate will be esteemed in all their dignity and will have the means to love in respect” Pope John Paul II

Young people have a unique place in the life of the Society, and their participation, input and inspiration is vital to ensure the future work of the Society. Young people have a place here and now, in living out the Mission of Frederic Ozanam.

There are various Youth activities in each Central Council and you can contact your Youth Representative for further information.

Conference Meetings

The Conference Meeting is the foundation on which all other activity of the Society is developed. The Conference Meeting is the place in which all Members can experience the sisterly and brotherly relationship that should exist in the Society and where the work of the Members is organised.

Conferences meet regularly at a place and time suitable for the Members. It is desirable to meet weekly and at least fortnightly. It is important to regularly review this arrangement, as work and family commitments may necessitate a change in Meeting time for Members.

Make sure your Meeting space is comfortable and private enough to allow uninterrupted and confidential discussion. Ensure that the location is accessible for all Members. You could utilise a Parish hall, a local community agency or even share the responsibility to have it at people's homes. You may consider an occasional rotation process of venue to keep the "newness" and vitality alive in your Meetings.

As the Conference President you have a wonderful responsibility to lead and support the Members, and how you conduct the meetings will go a long way to determining your success as President. Preparation is very important to leading a positive, life giving and effective Meeting.

Any correspondence should be sorted through prior to the meeting, and relevant information summarised for the meeting. Flyers or information sheets should be available for people to look at or take with them. Check with the Secretary prior to the meeting about anything you think needs attention.

If Members have concerns or questions about something raised in the correspondence, they can be referred to appropriate people for further discussion if necessary.

"Conferences are units of action" and your role as President is to ensure that people do not get distracted by debating or presenting their personal views about issues arising from correspondence. You have the responsibility to keep the focus on the Mission and the Work of the Society in serving the poor.

Below is a suggested Agenda for the Meeting with some explanatory notes. Variations may be made to suit your particular circumstances:

1. **Welcome**
2. **Opening prayer** (prayed together)
3. **Spiritual reflection and discussion:** This is a very important time in the meeting for Members to reflect on their life, their work and any issues that impact on their commitment and ability to live the Mission and Culture of the Society. Use of prayers, songs, readings, articles and the Spiritual Readings Booklet is encouraged. The Spiritual Advisor should lead this and encourage participation.
4. **Apologies:** Encourage people to let you or the Secretary know prior to the meeting if they are unable to attend
5. **Minutes:** These should be brief and factual, recording the final decisions made.
Matters arising: There may need to be some discussion on the business arising from the previous minutes - that is, whether or not decisions have been effected and actions taken. **Refer the action list which should be attached to the minutes of each meeting**
6. **Correspondence:** You should have a sound knowledge of all correspondence prior to the Meeting. Most of it will only need to be summarised. Ensure that dates of events, sessions and activities are included, which Members may like to attend. Only selected letters need to be read in full. The Secretary can assist you in this area as well as support you in preparing correspondence for appropriate action.
7. **Treasurers Report:** A written Conference document of receipts, expenditure and present balance should be presented at each meeting.
8. **Collections:** One secret collection is to be taken up at each Meeting. One for the work of the Conference,
9. **Visitation overview:** This is a very important part of the Meeting. Reflection, thoughtful attention, and discussion of each of the families visited must be given, to ensure that the most suitable response and care is offered. The reports should not be long, and the person's privacy and dignity must be respected at all times. It is a time to share insights and learning, helping us to respond to other people's needs. This is the time to discuss issues such as referrals to other agencies, resources or further support that can be offered.
10. **Allocation of tasks:** Keep in mind that not everyone is comfortable undertaking certain responsibilities, including visits. An individual can decline to undertake a particular visit if they want to. Other duties may also be required, such as, making phone calls, pick ups organizing jumble, making up parcels or other Society / Parish-related responsibilities that impact on the Work of the Conference.
11. **Reports:** Reports from Social Workers or other activities undertaken by Members on behalf of the Society
12. **General business**
13. **Closing prayers**

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

- Home visitation must always be done in pairs. The hours should be convenient to the family being visited, as well as the Society Members. Where the need is urgent, a person can take an auxiliary Member along for support and assistance.
- The Conference Meeting is the time for self reflection and renewal of heart, mind and action. It is the place for all people to reflect on their work, discuss joys and experiences and also share any concerns they may have.
- The purpose of gathering together regularly is to support each person in their spiritual growth, discuss new opportunities for living out the Mission of the Society and strengthen the friendship between Members. The Conference is a sacred place of joy, love and fellowship for those who attend and for those who will receive help from those in the Conference.

Work for your Conference

“No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes, by person-to-person contact, any form of help that relieves suffering and promotes human dignity and integrity.

The Society is concerned, not only with relieving need, but also with redressing situations that cause it. It serves persons in need, regardless of creed, opinion, cause and origin.” The Rule – Part 1 – Basic Principles.

Within the capacity of your Members and available resources, your conference should attempt to meet the needs of the people you encounter, materially, socially and spiritually.

Each Conference should regularly review its work and the needs of the people in the area.

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. How have you been since the last time we met?
2. Who have you seen since last week? What have you achieved with the householder you have visited? (Give an example of someone that you have visited and assisted)
3. How has the Spirit helped you in your visitations? (Any insights that you have discovered about the person / family which has helped you to understand / support them better?)
4. What concerns / issues have arisen for you regarding the Work this past week?
5. What further action(s) can you take to do something “extra” to express your personal concern for the person / family you visit?

What can your Conference do for those in need?

***“Don’t walk in front, I may not follow.
Don’t walk behind, I may not lead.
Walk beside me and be my friend”***

The needs of the people we encounter are always changing. It is our responsibility to update our knowledge and skills to provide the best service we can. If we are unable to provide a solution to a long term problem, or help in a specialist area, it is advisable to refer the person or family to another organisation with the specialist skills. The Society could then co-operate in the solution arrived at as a result of this referral.

The concern that the Society should show to its friend in need will be evidenced in the following ways:

- Regular visits to get to know the person or family better
- A neighbour to neighbour approach with no evidence of any superiority or judgement on them
- Perseverance with the family, even when your visits seem to be achieving no results.
- Follow up contact, after the initial problem is solved
- Realistic and appropriate help

It is in the relationship that develops over a period of time that the love of God will be manifested.

Acting with integrity, clarity and honesty through your contact with people in need, will enable you to develop a relationship of trust, to help them retain their dignity, and work collaboratively with you to find long term solutions to addressing their needs. Not only should we visit people regularly, but we should do little extra things for them to demonstrate our personal concern. (See – Ideas & Suggestions)

As the Conference President, one of the most important responsibilities you have is to match the members who are best suited to each particular family to be visited. If it is possible, you should have a personal knowledge of all the families that your Conference Members visit regularly.

Types of aid your Conference can give

It is your responsibility to monitor the kind of aid your Conference gives.

Here are some suggestions:

1. **Advice:** Give advice that is correct and practical. Make sure the person / family clearly understands what you are saying. If your Conference is not sure what advice it should give in a given situation, consult someone who does. (This could be a Member of your Conference, someone else from the Society or someone from another organisation / group.) Your Conference should keep an up to date directory of persons and organisations that can help.

Not only should the Conference be able to refer families / individuals to such people and organisations, but it should also help them to make the contact and follow-up with them afterwards. The approval of the family or individual concerned is required before referring them to other people or agencies. We must never force our will onto those we help.

You can also assist by providing the person / family with information (flyers / brochures) about any programme, activity or support that they might like to know about, either from within the Society or another organisation. (Most organisations have these available.) All Conference Members should have access to this type of information, so that they can pass it on to people during their visits, when necessary.

2. **Material help:** Give the type and amount of help that is required by the family at the time of your visit. Be sure it is relevant to their present need. Too many Conferences limit their aid to a food parcel or clothing, even though the immediate need is the payment of rent..

Ensure that the food or parcel covers the basic groceries they need, Be generous with clothing and furniture etc. The donated goods are given to us primarily for those families we help.

3. **Discernment and alternatives:** Discernment is the ability to come to a decision without being judgemental Should people be seeking material or financial help only, on a regular basis, alternative ways of obtaining such aid should be offered to eliminate dependency on the Society. Referring the person to other services for budgeting support or other assistance, will allow members to provide quality care and service in the long term to other people.

Can we say NO

Conference Members often seem confused and perturbed in relation to whether or not they can say “No” to the giving of material assistance to people in need.

The answer is “Yes”, you can say “No”! It is how and when we say “No” that is important! However, one should only say “No” when the following has taken place:

- The family / person has been visited on a regular basis on a number of occasions and there is mutual trust in that relationship
- The Conference has considered and prayed about the matter, having regard for both the financial needs of the person / family, as well as the real underlying needs that may be present.
- The Conference Members visit the person / family and explain gently and honestly the decision that has been made. It is totally unacceptable that a decision should be made and not communicated directly to the person / family involved. We must have the strength to be able to discuss, honestly, our concerns with the person / family involved.
- We should continue to visit the person / family even though no material assistance is provided, and constantly be open to changed circumstances. “Black lists” should never be developed.
- We must always come down on the side of generosity and compassion, and not on the side of harshness and cynicism. Often it is said that “this isn’t our money – but the donors money” and that we must exercise prudence, but it has been given to us in generosity. We too must give, with the same sense of generosity.
- Many families have sufficient resources but cannot handle them properly. The Conference should be prepared to assist them in preparing and adhering to a budget. If appropriate, following discussions with the person / family refer them to a budget counsellor.
- Our time is the most sought after kind of help, especially by the aged and the lonely. They want us to talk with them and listen to them; maybe do some small jobs around the house or taking them somewhere. There are many things that can be done. When visiting them, remember the little things like birthdays, or their favourite sweet. Arrange something different for them now and again. The aged or lonely should not be given a lesser priority
- Some people want assistance to do things that we take for granted in our everyday lives. Obtaining and filling in forms for Government services or benefits, contacting other services for assistance or information, applying for grants preparing and cooking meals, or cleaning the house are some of the extra things that the Conference Members can do to offer real friendship and care.

Helpful suggestions when visiting

Material support: Food parcels; Clothing; Budgeting advice; Filling in forms; Cleaning; Odd jobs and repairs

Social support: Having a cup of tea and a chat; Reading out loud; Linking them to people in the Parish for on-going support; Inviting the person to a neighbourhood or Parish event Providing information about other services / support networks; Follow up calls to stay in touch; Making an effort on special occasions with a card or a small gift e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, birth of a baby, first day of work etc.

Spiritual support: Praying before you visit to bring the Spirit of God's love and compassion with you; Praying with the person / family; Taking them a card / bookmark with a relevant prayer on it; Invite them to local Mass celebrations (e.g. Easter or Christmas); Leave small gifts for children (e.g. Easter eggs); Saying "God bless you" when you leave.

Your Conference, the Church and the community

Your Conference is an integral and important part of two communities: The Catholic Church (in the wider field, Christian churches) and the community at large.

It is essential that your Conference participates fully in the life of these communities.

The Church

The Society exists to manifest Christ by serving the poor. Our particular role as Christians is to live out our faith, by serving the poor and marginalised. Through Christ's example, we are called to work on behalf of justice as advocates for the needy. We must provide excellent care with gentleness and kindness.

As far as humanly possible, we must offer the poor the best and most appropriate service we can. Providing services that are inadequate or are judgemental of the person does not respect their dignity as people for whom Christ died.

We must work with other organisations, especially those within the wider Church community.

All Christians are obliged to practise Christian charity. It is important to encourage and include people in your local Parish communities who may want to help the work of the Society. However, many people do not want to join an organisation, but are willing to help out when needed. Do not exclude them because they cannot attend your Meetings. Support them, to offer their skills and abilities in other ways that will help the Conference to continue its work.

The Community:

The needs of the people we visit are always changing, and often they have multiple or more complex needs that we can assist them with. It is vital that the Society as a whole and each individual Conference works with each other to address these needs.

Your Conference should develop a close working relationship with other people and agencies that are engaged in social welfare and charitable works, especially with those in your local area. It is important to develop relationships and contacts with people from these agencies, so you can provide a more comprehensive support network for the families and individuals that you visit.

If there is a need in the community that is not being met, rather than attempting to meet it in your Conference, you may become the spearhead in the community effort to provide it. Discussions at your District Council can provide you with opportunities to co-operate in any project, to improve the situation for disadvantaged families in your area.

Publicity

You should have direct contact with other agencies, including your Parish and other Church groups in your local area, to inform them of the existence of the Society, what you can do and how they can contact you.

In particular, you should promote any appeals or events that the Society is involved in, as well as distribute the conference Annual Report to parishioners (especially benefactors) so they are aware of what you and the Society do. This lets them know how the Society is spending the money they donate and encourages their ongoing support. It will also inform people in need about the service we can provide for them if needed.

Emergencies –Disasters

During and after a disaster the Society has a responsibility to assist people. As a volunteer group, our members' first priority is to look after their families and homes. As a local group and being experienced in helping people, the members have much to offer in the field of emergency aid and subsequent support and assistance.

Emergencies demand maximum assistance in minimum time, and no organisations can work alone. A co-ordinated and collaborative effort with others will provide the quickest and most effective aid.

There are several actions that we can take to achieve this:

Firstly, contact the Organisation that will be co-ordinating the emergency response activities (each National or Province will have their own).

Secondly, tell them what you have to offer - A group of voluntary people experienced in helping others and willing to help; financial assistance – food vouchers, blankets, clothing and furniture; A Centre and perhaps a vehicle that can be used.

Thirdly, tell them what you can get if needed - More voluntary people experienced in helping others from nearby Conferences; Family Centres and parishioners who can offer assistance in a compassionate and sensitive manner; Funds from the National Council Disaster Fund and Church collections; Blankets, clothing and furniture.

Fourthly, things you can do – Work with the relief centre and agencies to distribute food parcels blankets and clothing; Visit people in need, during and after the disaster; Provide friendship and emotional support to the victims; Appoint someone from your Conference or District Council to be the Emergency Officer who can co-ordinate activities for the Society.

Contact your District President or Central Council to clarify the Society's action plan, including any specific responsibilities they have or available resources for such situations.

Correspondence

Communication between all areas of the Society is an important aspect of maintaining unity and support for the Members. At times you will receive correspondence that is relevant to your Conference. Not all correspondence should be read out – most of it can be summarised.

It should be your first priority that any notification about families in need will be attended to and replied to within 24 hours. Any Conference which does not attend to a call for help immediately, is not justifying its existence.

Similarly, Society correspondence should be answered quickly. The Secretary can be utilised better and more effectively by the Conference by giving them the responsibility to respond on behalf of the Conference.

The sisterly and brotherly spirit of our Society demands that Presidents do their best to make everyone's job easier. By responding to correspondence when required, you are helping to ease the work load for everyone.

Information about Social Works, Conferences and Councils around South Africa, can be obtained through either your District or Central Council.

The Conference and the Society

The Conference is one of many important elements that make up the good works of the Society. Everyone contributes in serving God's poor. To ensure the Society continues to grow as a strong advocate for the poor, and a positive presence in the lives of our wider Church and community, the Conferences must remain effective.

Just as personal contact with the poor is essential to our work, personal contact between the local members, as well as with other Conferences and Special Works is necessary. Relationships with others within the Society are the essence of our Society structure, and strengthen us to be better servants to the poor.

District Council

With your election as President, you become a member of your Council, which is usually the District Council. As a member of the District Council and under the leadership and guidance of the District President, you, along with the other Conference Presidents, have the responsibility of keeping the Conferences functioning as effectively and efficiently as possible.

It is your joint responsibility to develop the spirit of unity and solidarity among the Members by visiting other Conferences, pooling resources, praying together, encouraging attendance at District Meetings, Festival gatherings and Spiritual and social gatherings at both the Local and National levels.

One of the worst things a President can do is to isolate the Members from the other local Conferences and the broader Society. No one benefits from this, and the Conference Members could be missing out on great friendship and support from others.

The District Council is the forum to discuss any issues affecting the people you visit across the Region, address concerns that impact on the Members, share ideas about joint projects, explore common concerns and hopes, and plan District activities. The District President is the contact between the higher Council (usually the Central Council) and the Conferences.