

STATE LEADER ROLE DESCRIPTION

Voice of the Poor



MISSION STATEMENT

In the spirit of Christian love and justice, the Voice of the Poor Committee upholds Catholic values by researching, validating, documenting, advocating, and promulgating issues related to the condition of the poor and disenfranchised for the purpose of helping Vincentians to live their faith by acting knowledgeably and credibly as a unified body speaking with one voice for the purpose of building up the Kingdom of God.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING ISSUES

- Close to the Heart of Vincentians
- Is there something positive we can do about it?
- Does the issue affect many/most of the people SVdP encounters?
- Probability of success?
- Application and consistency with Catholic Social Teaching

DUTIES

The Voice of the Poor State Leader (VOPSL) organizes the advocacy work of The Society at the state level through regular communication with the Regional VOP Leader. The State Leader collaborates with other like-minded advocacy organizations to identify state legislative issues of concern to Vincentians. The VOPSL enlists Vincentian support for those issues through email alerts, webinars, and workshops. Vincentian advocacy must be present in the public political arena but it is always non-partisan.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Track state legislation and communicate with local VOP representatives as well as Council, District, and Conference leaders in support or opposition to issues.
2. Spread Vincentian advocacy by increasing local Voice of the Poor Committees and leaders.
3. Identify like-minded organizations for collaboration.
4. In states with multiple Diocesan Councils/Districts, foster consensus to agree on a unified position on issues.
5. Attend appropriate Voice of the Poor calls and meetings.

Hence, those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2448. 2nd Ed.)

During Pope John Paul II's first visit to the United States, he commended American Catholics for their generosity in supporting the Church's charitable works that minister to persons in need.

"But this is not enough," the Pope said. Christians in cooperation with others must "seek the structural reasons which cause poverty ...Do not recoil before the reforms — even profound ones — of attitudes and structures that are necessary to create over and over again the conditions needed by the disadvantaged if they are to have a fresh chance in the hard struggles of life."
(usccb.org/cchd/po_p excerpts.shtml)

- Due to the time sensitive nature of the legislative process, **the VOPSL must have regular access to email and be adept at creating & using email lists and electronic newsletters.**
- VOP should strive to take positions that reflect the unanimous approval of all Councils in a state. However, individuals are encouraged to take a personal stand on issues that reflect their personal views as well as Catholic teaching of the preferential treatment for the poor.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A VOICE OF THE POOR VINCENTIAN

1. Willing to share time, talent, and love.
2. Recognize the unique perspective and stories that the Society brings to the political landscape.
3. Exhibit flexibility and willingness to analyze, discuss, and communicate facets of social concerns by working in the spirit of Vincentian friendship. Exhibit openness to others and their opinions.
4. Understand the duty of the Voice of the Poor Committee in upholding the Rule and mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
5. Individual who upholds gospel values, with a desire to serve Jesus by the examples of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, Blessed Rosalie Rendu, and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

"As followers of Christ, we cannot fail to be concerned for the welfare of the weakest; we must also draw the attention of society and the civil authorities to their plight."
— Pope Francis, 2/7/15

"We need to participate for the common good. Sometimes we hear: a good Catholic is not interested in politics. This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader can govern." — Pope Francis, 9/16/13

RULE 7 ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY — WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

| RULE | EXPLANATION | HOW YOU AND YOUR CONFERENCE CAN BE ADVOCATES |
|--|---|--|
| <p>7.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions</p> | <p>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.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time budgeting with neighbors in need to look for their mid- & long-term solutions. • Discuss similarities in cases to find common causes of needs in your area. Share these with the Voice of the Poor Committee. |
| <p>7.2 A vision of the civilization of love</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>Educate your parish about the situations your neighbors in need face. Without revealing any names, breaking confidences, or sensationalizing neighbors' stories, become a Voice of the Poor to your parish.</p> |
| <p>7.3 Vision of the future</p> | <p>The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach basic budgeting classes at apartment complexes that have a lot of requests from neighbors in need. • Recruit parishioners for this activity to find experts while building Vincentians for the future. |

7.4 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.

When talking about issues, take care to put aside your personal views to reflect those of neighbors in need.

7.5 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.

- Talk about SVdP when dropping off payments to apartment & utility people. Let them know about the work that we do.
- Invite apartment/utility managers to a meeting. Let them learn more about our work.

7.6 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.

- Take on a project to change reconnect fee policies with local utility.
- Call a city councilperson or county commissioner to ask their ideas to deal with homelessness, substandard housing, challenges of the working poor, etc. Get to know them.

7.7 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.

- Invite a neighbor in need to a meeting to share their story.
- Recruit neighbors in need to become Vincentians.

7.8 Political independence of the Society

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

It is good that some members 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.

Know that when you support a candidate, you do so as an individual — not as a representative of the Society. However, you are encouraged to give a preferential consideration of our neighbors' needs when forming your conscience.

7.9 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.

Find other groups (church's, agencies, etc.) who help those in need and learn about what they do and how they help.