



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL[®], INC.

Statement Paper on Workforce Development

SVdP National Workforce Development Task Force

May 2023

I. Introduction

From its genesis, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has sought to serve persons experiencing poverty by not only helping to meet their material needs, but also by accompanying them as they work to discover their own dignity, becoming more fully the person that they were created to be. “The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the...structures that cause it. It is...committed to identifying the roots of poverty and to contributing to their elimination” (Rule, I,7.1). The identification and achievement of a professional vocation that allows persons to work and to earn wages that enable them to achieve stability is a critical part of this path to self-sufficiency.

II. What our Church and the Society Calls us to Do

Enmeshed in much of the writing and thought that makes up the body of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the consistent idea that engagement in fruitful, meaningful work that ensures dignity and self-sufficiency is both a right and a responsibility. **The CST tenet of The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers** holds forth the balance of the *right* and the *duty* to work. “All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions...all people, to the extent they are able, have corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families and an obligation to contribute to the broader society” (USCCB). As Pope Francis writes in ***On Care for Our Common Home [Laudato Si]***, nos. 127-28, “Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work”.

Our **Rule** calls for the promotion of self-sufficiency (I, 1.10): *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.* As noted in **SVDP’s Position Statement on Fair Wages**, Frederic Ozanam was a leader among Catholic thinkers of his era in putting forth the idea that workers had inherent rights; in fact, his writings and ideas played a significant role in the creation and framework for *Rerum Novarum*, considered the primary encyclical related to labor and workers. This position statement also calls for the creation and support of “private and public programs that seek to train workers so that they may acquire the skills needed to fully participate in the job market to the fullest of their ability”. As it relates to SVDP employees, and to Workforce Development programs that employ participants/graduates, Past SVDP USA National President Sheila Gilbert writes in **SVDP’s Position Paper on A Self-Sufficient Wage for Employees of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul** “The Society’s help for the poor cannot be based upon injustice to employees...acting justly with our own employees significantly strengthens our moral authority”.

National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.

66 Progress Parkway • Maryland Heights, MO 63043-3706 • (314) 576-3993 • www.svdpsusa.org

III. Current Efforts Within the Society

The 2021-2024 SVDP USA Strategic Plan calls for the promotion of deeper and more meaningful relationships with those we serve (FA IV 4-2); as part of this work, a National Workforce Development Committee has been convened. The committee consists of servant leaders from Councils around the US who are engaged in the development and administration of Workforce Development programs. Among these programs are initiatives focused on:

- Neighbors served by the Society
- Employees of the Society
- Partnerships with external employer/workforce development partners
- Programs for Returning Citizens
- Hybrid models that bring together elements of the above models

These programs include the Back2Work program, as well as a variety of customized Council-and Conference-based initiatives. Some of the programs are administered by paid staff; others are entirely led by Vincentian volunteers.

One of the key values of the Society is the principle of Subsidiarity, wherein decisions are made as close as possible to the area of activity to ensure that the solutions created to address local needs are relevant, self-directed, and as effective as possible. With this value as a guidepost, the National Workforce Development Committee does not seek to prescribe specific approaches, goals, or curricula, but offers itself as a resource for Conferences and Councils seeking to walk alongside those seeking this type of development.

The committee does offer the following recommendations in the spirit of offering best practice guidance:

- Prior to developing or implementing a workforce development program, Conferences/Councils should determine what needs and resources exist in their community, in order to avoid duplication of services and to offer the most relevant, effective content and support.
- Councils should make an intentional effort to explore the need for and the feasibility of the development of a Workforce Development program within their footprint.
- If a Council or Conference determines that such a need exists, during the planning phase of the program's development, the best practices for the type of program that the Council/Conference plans to administer should be considered and integrated into the program design. The National Workforce Development Committee is a resource for this type of guidance and information.
- Programs developed by SVDP should strive for a holistic approach to workforce development that goes beyond technical, vocational, or workplace-specific skills, to addressing the social, material, emotional, and spiritual needs of participants, accompanying them as they more fully discover and actualize their own dignity and gifts.

As we move together as One Society into our 191st year as a ministry, we are eager to continue to seek the most efficacious ways to address the most pressing and relevant needs of our sisters and brother experiencing poverty. We humbly ask that you consider what role Workforce Development might have in the works of your Conference or Council.

Sunnie Johnson-Lain, for the National Workforce Development Committee, May 2023

National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.

66 Progress Parkway • Maryland Heights, MO 63043-3706 • (314) 576-3993 • www.svdppusa.org