



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Media Relations Guide 2021

MEDIA RELATIONS

Our Story

The story of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the story of the poor, and it's a story of triumph over adversity. Vincentians are uniquely qualified to tell this tale, because we visit our neighbors in need in their own homes and become their friends, hearing their stories from their own mouths.

The public needs to know the nature and extent of the problems faced by our neighbors in need. They should know about the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and how we provide help to those who need it, so that they can help, too. If we don't tell them, who will?

When we tell our story in a compelling way, we're encouraging others to *retell* it, helping to grow the Society's sphere of influence and impact.

Your Role in Telling Our Story

Your local Conference or Council has a unique role and relationship with the community you serve. Yet each Conference is still part of the larger Society. Consistent messaging creates a powerful impact identity for our organization and our communities at both the local and national levels. Each Conference or Council should consider appointing a spokesperson (with approval from the President) who can help tell the Society's story in your community.

Helping to Tell Our Story

Generating media coverage is one of the most important ways to help support the important work being done by the Society. Positive media coverage can help to:

- Encourage more people to donate.
- Highlight the Society's good works, which helps to recruit others to support the Society, either as a donor or a volunteer.

How do we get the media to tell our story? Here are several methods worth implementing:

- Identify Conferences who successfully get their story told, and do what they do. Here are some places you can find those stories:
 - a. Read the stories in Frederic's e-Gazette that have been culled from newspapers and websites around the country.
 - b. Learn which Vincentian stories are carried by the media in other communities, then pitch those same types of stories to your local media.
 - c. Sign up for Google Alerts on the Society.
- Build relationships with your local media so that the Society is regarded as a trusted source of information and content. When the media is working on a story that's germane to our work, a strong relationship helps the Society become top of mind as source for them.
- If you have data or hard numbers on the impact of your work, release a study or report announcing your findings.

- Publish a statement in response to an event or something topical in the news.
- Issue a press release. You can write your own, or customize one from the National Office. More details on successful press releases are below.

Press Releases

Whether you're submitting a formal press release or pitching your idea by phone or email, make sure the story you want to share is clearly defined, that you have specific examples to illustrate it, and that you provide contact information for anyone who may be interviewed.

A press release usually includes these five elements:

1. Contact info, including a name, phone number, and an email address.
2. A headline summing up the news or event you're promoting.
3. A compelling lead sentence, which will include the 5 Ws: Who, What When, Where, and Why.
4. Additional details, and perhaps a quote from a Conference member or leader.
5. A boilerplate description of the Society (standardized language used in press releases, fact sheets, and media responses, to help define the Society consistently).

Sample Boilerplate Text

Founded in 1833, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide organization serving neighbors in need. Our founding activity, still practiced today, is the face-to-face Home Visit, in which Vincentian volunteers visit the homes of those they serve, to identify both immediate and longer-term needs. The National Council of the United States, Society of St. Vincent de Paul was established to organize and represent local SVdP Conferences and Councils, providing resources, training, and spiritual development for nearly 100,000 Vincentian volunteers across the country.

Connect With Media

Don't hesitate to ask for help. Connect with local reporters via email or social media and ask: What types of stories interest them? What's the best way to pitch a story idea? Better yet, ask your local media (the daily paper, the diocesan paper, the alternative weekly, the city monthly, major TV stations, popular radio stations, the Catholic station, etc.) to attend a local Walk for the Poor, tour your foodbank or area thrift store, or attend another event.

By connecting with local media, you get their attention and learn something from them, while showing that you recognize and appreciate their expertise. Whether they accept your invitation or not, you'll establish relationships that can grow and prosper. If you do get them to participate, make sure they enjoy the experience — the next time you pitch a story, you'll be pitching to a friend.

Preparing for a Media Interview

As a representative of the Society, you'll want to put your best face forward at all times. Everything you say and do will be "on the record." Most reporters won't give you their questions in advance of the interview, or show you the story before general release. But they're not out to get you, so don't feel intimidated.

You'll want to develop 2 – 3 key talking points that you want to come out in the story; distill these down to one sentence each, and look for ways to work them into your interview. It's okay to have notes with you, even for a TV interview. You'll need to be brief; most TV and news segments are quite short. And of course, the more familiar you are with your message, the more convincing you'll come across. Practice, practice, practice!

It can feel awkward or unnatural to prepare for a media interview. But with preparation, the more confident and at ease you'll be in delivering your message, which will help you come across as warm and credible.

Here are some common points you should be prepared to address in an interview:

- Tell us a little bit about yourself and your role with the Society.
- What's the mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul?
- Who does the Society serve?
- How would you describe the work done by your local Conference?

Tone of Voice

Vincentians are caring, can-do people, and our tone of voice should reflect that through a positive and cheerful attitude. No work of charity is foreign to us. There is no problem we won't tackle, and no problem, with God's help, that we cannot solve. We really do believe that it's better to give than to receive. We know that doing good does a person good: In the words of St. Francis, "It is in giving that we receive."

We are the ones who benefit most. We, the benefactors, are really the beneficiaries, because our acts of charity help us to grow in faith and become better Christians. Our tone of voice should be relentlessly upbeat and cheerful, reflecting our gratitude for the opportunity God has given us to serve those in need.

What to Wear When You're on Camera

Solid colors work well. Vincentian Blue is quite flattering to most skin tones, and adds some extra brand recognition. If you have Society-branded apparel, consider wearing it as well.

Avoid patterns and prints, which can look busy on screen. We also recommend avoiding white or black, as they tend to wash out your complexion in the glare of the camera.

Remember to dress from head to toe. This isn't a Zoom call where you can wear business casual on top and pajamas on bottom! Many interviews show only your head and shoulders, but some might show you walking, or feature multiple camera angles.

Other Interview Tips

- Feel free to make small talk with the reporter, but remember you might be quoted for anything you say, whether it's part of the official interview or not.
- Be concise. In this age of short attention spans, your message needs to be brief to keep the audience engaged. Try squeezing any answer into no more than 10 – 12 seconds per response. The interviewer will ask a follow-up question if they need further information or clarification.
- Avoid using the phrase “no comment,” as it will make you appear that there's something to hide.
- Make sure your cell phone is off, especially for TV or radio.
- Know that it's okay to ask for a pause or a drink of water.
- Incorporate the question within the start of your answer to create a better soundbite. For example, if the question is “Who does the Society serve?” You might answer, “The Society of St. Vincent de Paul serves neighbors in need throughout our community.”
- If you feel like you've gotten off track or stated something incorrectly, it's okay to ask to start over.
- It's okay to use your hands when speaking, but be careful not to fidget.
- Smile and show enthusiasm for the conversation. Your energy will inspire others!
- At the end of an interview, many reporters will ask, “Do you have anything else to add?” This is a great opportunity to reiterate your key message, even if you addressed it before.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity and their time.

A Final Note

The Society's media guidelines will continue to evolve as we work together to tell our story. Please check back regularly for updates, and feel free to share suggestions and ideas with the National Council communications team. You may also reach out to the National Council communications team (or the communications team of your local Conference or Council) if you have questions about media coverage.