



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

January 20, 2021

The National Governance Committee advises all Society of St. Vincent de Paul Councils and Conferences who own and operate separately-incorporated Special Works to adapt and adopt the newly-approved Special Works Bylaws. For the purposes of this document, Special Works includes Stores. For those Councils and Conferences that own and operate special works and stores that are NOT separately-incorporated, the principles in the Special Works Bylaws should be followed by the Council or Conference Special Work or Store Committee. The Special Works Bylaws were designed to ensure the following:

1. No Special Work can be established by a St. Vincent de Paul Council or Conference to be totally autonomous and standalone.
2. All Special Works must be under the control of the Council or Conference that established them.
3. All Special Works are accountable to the Members and/or Board of Directors of the Council or Conference that established them.
4. The structure of the Board of Directors of the Special Work or the Special Work/Store Committee must correspond to the structure for all other SVdP entities.
5. Elections/appointments of Special Works Board Officers or members of the Special Work/Store Committee and terms of office must correspond to elections, appointments and terms of office required of other entities of SVdP.
6. The SVdP Council or Conference that owns the Special Work must have veto power over decisions made by the Special Work Board of Directors or Special Work/Store Committee.
7. As with any SVdP entity, funds received by the Special Work may not be distributed to any non-SVdP entity except in payment for services or materials contracted for.

All of these considerations have been built into the Special Works Bylaws and apply as well to Special Work/Store Committees. Minor adaptations may be made to the Special Works Bylaws, but all deviations from the standard must be approved by SVdP National Leadership or the National Governance Committee. This requirement is absolute for all new separately-incorporated Special Works. It is expected that all existing separately-incorporated Special Works and Special Work/Store Committees will adapt/adopt the principles in the Special Works Bylaws as soon as possible.

SPECIAL WORKS CONFERENCE – WHAT IT IS

THE PHILOSOPHY AND REQUIREMENTS OF FORMING A SPECIAL WORKS CONFERENCE

A question has been put to the Governance Committee about what constitutes a “Special Works” Conference. This has come about in the context of one or more conferences that limit its activity to operating a food pantry.

Our Rule says that members are “to follow Christ through service to those in need” (Part I, Sec. 1.2) and that no “work of charity is foreign to the Society” and “includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.” (Part I, Sec. 1.3).

The Rule also calls us to journey together towards holiness primarily through visiting and dedicating ourselves to the poor, attending meetings of the Conference or Council where a shared fraternal spirituality is present, and promotion of prayer and reflection with fellow members. (Part I, Sec. 2.2).

Part III of the Rule says active members participate regularly in the prayer life, meetings, and personal contact with the poor (Statute 3), that Conferences meet at least twice each month, that members apply themselves to the Society’s mission and Essential Elements, and that we strive to develop a three-fold relationship the God, the poor, and one another. (Statute 5).

With the above in mind what might be called a Special Works Conference must, in order to be considered a SVdP Conference, (a) hold conference meetings that comply with what is prescribed by the Rule at least twice a month in addition to engaging in its special work, (b) promote Spirituality, Friendship, and Service which are our Essential Elements, and (c) promote, follow, and live both individually and as a group the Society’s Mission and Identity Statements.

If therefore a conference that only operates a food pantry, a thrift store, housing, a free pharmacy, a meal program, or other special work and also interacts with those being served on a person-to-person basis, holds meetings that are compliant with the Rule twice a month, promotes and lives out the Essential Elements of the Society, and reflects the mission and identity statements, it is a SVdP conference.

REQUIREMENTS FOR A SPECIAL WORKS CONFERENCE

A question has been put to the Governance Committee about what constitutes a “Special Works” Conference. This was in the context of a Conference that limits its activity to operating a food pantry.

Special Works Conferences are rare. In the event one is proposed, the following has been provided to guide the formation process:

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If, therefore, a Conference that only operates a food pantry, a thrift store, housing, a free pharmacy, a meal program or other special work, also:

- Interacts with those being served on a person-to-person basis,
- Holds meetings that are compliant with the Rule twice a month,
- Promotes and lives out the Essential Elements of the Society, and
- Reflects the Mission and Identity Statements – ***then it is an SVdP Conference.***

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