



Conference Presidents' Resource Toolkit



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works





Conference Presidents' Resource Toolkit

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Purpose

The Conference Presidents' Resource Toolkit is a resource for all Regional Council Presidents and Conference Presidents in NSW. It has a two-fold purpose. First, it supports Regional Council Presidents to mentor new Conference Presidents in their new role, in accordance with standards set out in the Rule (2012) and in Society policies and procedures. Second, it provides guidelines for new and existing Conference Presidents about how to fulfil the duties of their office in accordance with state-wide governance standards set out in this document.

Leading a Conference

QUALITIES OF A CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

“The main qualities that a Conference President should show are an amiable nature; sincere and ardent affection for the Conference, its members and the poor; a dislike for the spirit of routine; and, finally, working constantly with care and a conciliatory attitude.”

Manual of the SSVP, 1845

Skills and Attributes

The Conference President should have a range of leadership skills and attributes, including an ability to:

- Be inclusive of diverse individuals, groups, communities, and organisations.
- Create an environment that is friendly to, and welcoming of, everybody.
- Delegate responsibilities where it is appropriate to do so.
- Encourage reflection on the quality of Conference charitable works.
- Encourage improvement in member skills and knowledge.
- Support the Vincentian vocation.
- Adapt to change and new forms of poverty.
- Develop collaborative relationships.
- Seek assistance concerning HR, finance, and administration.



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Duties and Responsibilities

BAILLY'S WISH

“Go and make friends among the poor. Give to each family what personal help your own better training enables you to give. In one case, the help will be legal. In another, medical. To some, you may judiciously offer practical advice. For others, you will procure work. In all cases, help them to help themselves and consider it your primary duty, whether you take them tickets for food or not, to render some personal service.”

Joseph Emanuel Bailly

The primary duty of a Conference President is to lead the Conference to fulfill the Society's Mission, Vision, and Aspiration. They demonstrate this by:

- Discussing the Rule (2012) in all meetings and other activities.
- Nurturing the gospel-based Catholic spirituality of the Society.
- Consulting Conference Members when appointing office bearers.
- Appointing a Spiritual Advisor under the Rule (2012) Part III, Article 22.
- Ensuring the Conference follows higher Council policies and procedures.
- Ensuring the Conference Secretary maintains accurate minutes of meetings.
- Ensuring the Conference keeps accurate records of those it assists in accordance with the Society's record keeping policy and procedures.
- Producing monthly and quarterly reports in a timely manner.
- Ensuring Conference activities comply with the Society's work health and safety obligations and responsibilities.
- Sharing with Conference Members communications from higher Councils.
- Supporting decisions of the Regional Council and all higher Councils.

Representation

The Conference President is an active member of their Regional Council. Being an active member of a Regional Council requires that the Conference President:

- Understand the issues of the local community their Conference assists.
- Advocate for the needs of those seeking assistance from their Conference.



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- Consider the wider needs of the Society throughout their region and the State.
- Regularly, and in a timely manner, communicate Conference activities, needs and concerns to the local Parish and the wider community.

Recruitment, Formation and Training

WHAT TO AVOID WHEN ADMITTING NEW MEMBERS

“There are two dangers which seem to affect the very existence of our Society. The first is that it might simply become a benefit-sharing scheme, devoted just to distributing material assistance. The second is, that our meetings might become boring and dull, scaring off the novices.”

Circular Letter of 2nd President General, Jules Gossin, 1847

One of the responsibilities of a Conference President is to take measures to recruit new members and carefully consider their suitability by:

- Building and maintaining a Conference that is welcoming, supportive, and inclusive.
- Ensuring all applicants for membership have provided a completed Member Application Form and all supporting documentation.
- Encouraging Conference Members to complete additional training to build and consolidate their assistance skill and knowledge.
- Fostering the Vincentian vocation of Conference Members and ongoing spiritual formation.
- Actively supporting identified Conference Members to develop vocationally relevant leadership qualities for future service with the Society.
- Developing a succession plan for leadership roles within the Conference in collaboration with their Regional Council.
- Attracting new members from First Nations communities.





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Society Ethos, Values, and The Rule (2012)

The Conference President has a responsibility to ensure that all Conference Members preserve and enhance the reputation of the Society. Conference Presidents can do this by:

- Being familiar with the Rule (2012).
- Ensuring Conference Members complete Child Safeguarding, Code of Conduct, and other compliance training.
- Modelling the values of the Society in everything they do.
- Ensuring Conference Members always decline any offer of a private benefit.
- Prior to making any decision that may be affected by a conflict of interest, escalating to the Regional Council President in writing anything that may create a perception of a conflict of interest.
- Making ethical decisions on behalf of the Society.
- Being accountable for their decisions by always providing reasons.
- Ensuring members comply with Society policies and procedures.

Code of Conduct



Existing and new members, volunteers and employees must complete an e-learning or a virtual learning module on the Code of Conduct, which puts the values of the Society into practice and lays out shared standards and workplace behaviours that are expected of all Society personnel.



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The Code of Conduct reflects a commitment that members, volunteers, and employees will work together as 'One Society' and that in doing so they will promote and maintain an environment that is professional and accountable. It emphasises transparency, respect, and integrity. More details about the Code of Conduct can be found on the MAVS website.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is “a situation in which a person has a private or personal interest sufficient to appear to influence the objective exercise of his or her official duties...” The Society has developed a Conflict-of-Interest Policy to manage the risk of conflicts of interest.

The Policy outlines how members, volunteers and employees can maintain appropriate standards of conduct that protect and enhance the integrity and reputation of the Society. It also assists the Conference President to assess whether there exists a conflict of interest, or a perception of one. The Policy discusses when interested parties must absent themselves from decision-making, when not to do so would create an actual, or perceived, conflict of interest.

A copy of the Conflict-of-Interest Policy can be found on the MAVS website.

Member and Volunteer Support (MAVS)

The Member and Volunteer Support (MAVS) website provides a wealth of resources, news, and updates to support members and volunteers. Conference Presidents are encouraged to regularly check MAVS or, alternately, to request that a Conference Member regularly checks MAVS on behalf of the Conference. This will allow the Conference to remain informed of Society developments and member news.

Members can access MAVS by copying and pasting the following link into the address bar of an internet browser: <https://mavs.vinnies.org.au/home/>



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Creating a Conference

Recruitment

Bringing new people into a Conference offers many benefits, including giving them an opportunity to engage in meaningful service. When doing so, the Conference President is responsible for the following tasks:

- Actively recruiting new Conference Members and carefully considering the suitability of applicants.
- Ensuring all new members have provided the necessary information and completed the required pre-engagement checks that are associated with the member application process.
- Utilising the expertise and skills of local Society employees to bolster recruitment outcomes.

When the Conference is established, all members have a responsibility to recruit new members, and everyone needs to be ready to welcome them. Conference Presidents are encouraged to seek the assistance and support of employees when conducting the member application process. They must also be familiar with the Society's Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.

The MAVS website provides access to a copy of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy, Conference Member and Associate Member role descriptions, and a Member Recruitment Guide.

Appointing Office Bearers

CONFERENCE OFFICE BEARERS

“The Conference President, after consultation with the members of the Conference, appoints office bearers – at least a Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer – from among the members to assist the efficient operation of the Conference.”

The Rule (2012): Part III, Article 6



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Where circumstances do not allow for the appointment of all office-bearers and to give the Society greater flexibility in adapting to new forms of poverty, Part III of the Rule (2012) permits a Conference to have the following minimum requirements:

- A Conference leader (e.g., a Conference President),
- A Spiritual Advisor (e.g., a Roman Catholic Priest or Religious),
- An assistant Conference leader (e.g., a Conference Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer),
- Conference Members,
- Regular meetings, and
- Time for prayer and reflection at meetings.

The basic operational unit of the St Vincent de Paul Society is the Conference, which is usually attached to a Catholic Parish. In these circumstances and where the Conference has capacity, Part III of the Rule (2012) offers the following range of formal Conference offices for members.

Conference President

All Presidents of the Society seek to be servant leaders who provide a supportive environment where the talents, capacities and spiritual charisms of members can be identified and developed to serve the Society and people who seek assistance.

The primary duty of a Conference President is to lead the Conference to fulfil the Society's Mission, Vision, and Aspiration. The following documents can be found on the Members and Volunteers Support (MAVS) website:

- Nomination for Conference President Form
- Election Procedures- CP and RCP
- Role Description – Conference President.

Spiritual Advisor

A Spiritual Advisor should be a practicing Catholic, who engages with Vincentians grounded in faith, living in hope, and growing in love through a spirit of prayer, reflection, and a thorough understanding of Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching,



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contemporary theology, and the Rule (2012). Often, the Spiritual Advisor will be a Catholic Priest, or a Religious.

The purpose of the Spiritual Advisor is to listen to the voices that influence the Vincentian spirit of the Society: Blessed Frederic, Blessed Rosalie, Charles O'Neill and the patron saint of the Society, St Vincent de Paul. A further purpose of the Spiritual Advisor is to call people to faithfully live the mission and vision of the Society. A detailed Spiritual Advisor position description is available on the MAVS website.



Vice President(s)

A Conference Vice-President acts on behalf of the President when the President may be unavailable for Regional- or Conference-related activities. A Vice-President may be invited to undertake special projects, such as recruiting new members.

Secretary

A Conference Secretary records the minutes of Conference meetings, handles incoming and outgoing Conference correspondence, maintains records, and may be required to assist with recording statistics on visitation and those who are assisted. All Conferences should have a dedicated mailbox which both the Conference President and the Secretary have access to.

Statistics Officer / Data Entry Officer

The Conference Statistics, or Data Entry, Officer is a dedicated client data and client records entry role. The role assists the Conference to maintain accurate and timely records of who is being assisted and in what way, and may include:

- Entering client assistance data on the Client Assistance Management System (CAMS).



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- Ensuring that, on behalf of the Conference President, client assistance data is secure and remains private.
- Preparing reports for the Conference President on client assistance data using either CAMS or Power BI.

Treasurer

THE USE OF MONEY AND PROPERTY FOR THE POOR

“The Society’s funds must be handled with the utmost care, prudence, and generosity. Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. Accurate records must be kept of all money received or spent. The Society may not allot funds to other organizations except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family, save under exceptional circumstances.”

The Rule (2012): Part I, Article 3.14

The Conference Treasurer oversees all finances of the Conference. The role works with the Conference President, Conference Members, and employees of the Society to safeguard Society funds and ensure they are appropriately utilised by the Conference. Part III, article 6 of the Rule provides that the Conference Treasurer must not be related to the Conference President. The duties of a Treasurer include:

1. Financial Accountability

- a. Assisting members to understand and observe policies and procedures of the Society that relate to fiscal management.
- b. Keeping Conference Members up to date concerning available funds and expenditures.
- c. Protecting the Society against fraud and theft by ensuring safe custody on Conference monies, gift cards and other negotiable resources.

2. Banking, Book-Keeping, and Record Keeping

- a. Following Society finance systems for book-keeping, payments, lodgements, and petty cash.
- b. Issuing receipts for donations received when fundraising.



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- c. Ensuring all financial transactions are up to date when this is required.
- d. Depositing monies in Society bank accounts and submitting donation slips in line with the Society policies outlined below.

3. Reporting Payments

- a. Authorising the payment of bills with the consent of the Conference President.
- b. Regularly reporting to the Conference about Conference finances.
- c. Contributing to Conference discussions about types of financial support that may be provided to people seeking assistance and in-kind support alternatives.

4. Financial Delegations

- a. Ensuring that all client support payments are agreed upon by at least two Conference Members.
- b. Making client support payments in accordance with Society procedures.
- c. Obtaining the approval of the Regional Council President before making a large client support payment, then preparing a payment voucher, emailing it to the Regional Council President for their signature then sending it to the Society's finance department.

The Conference President, Treasurer and Conference Members should all be familiar with requirements and procedures set out in the Society's Cash Handling Policy, Store Cards Policy, and Delegations of Authority Policy. The Society has also produced a Conference Treasurer's Toolkit which contains the cost codes, forms, report templates and vouchers necessary for a Conference Treasurer to complete their duties. The Cash Handling Policy, Store Cards Policy, Delegations of Authority Policy, and the Treasurer's Tool Kit can be found on the MAVS website.

Twining Officer

Conferences and Councils help each other when in need. Twining is a program of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. It enables



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Councils and Conferences in more affluent countries to help their Vincentian sisters and brothers in less affluent countries. There are three elements to twinning:

- i. Prayer
- ii. Correspondence
- iii. Financial or material assistance.



The Twinning Officer maintains correspondence with overseas twins on behalf of the Conference. The role also promotes programs like the Assist a Student Program, which is delivered through the Society's National Overseas Partnership and Development Council (OPDC).

The role of a Twinning Officer includes:

- Ensuring the Conference establishes a pattern of communication with a Twin within 6 months of twinning.
- Writing to Twins twice-a-year.
- Advising the Central Council Twinning Officer of the status of Conference correspondence with their Twins.
- Requesting from the Central Council Twinning Officer a twinning status check if the Conference has not received correspondence from a twin for a minimum of 12 months. *

* A twinning status check may take up to 15 months to complete.

Presidents of Conferences in Australia that have committed to an overseas Twin undertake to do the following:

- Ensuring contact with their Twins is maintained through correspondence.
- Developing and maintaining a spiritual bond with their Twins through prayer at Conference meetings, at special Masses and privately.



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- Making two grants of up to \$200 per grant to each Twin every year, the first in Quarter 1 for Easter and the second in Quarter 3 for Christmas, through the Central Council Office and the Society's Overseas Partnership Development Council (OPDC).

NOTE: Money must not be sent directly overseas to Twins for any reason.

Additional information about twinning can be found on the MAVS website and in the OPDC Policies and Procedures Manual.

Conference Social Justice Representative

A Conference Social Justice Representative is responsible for encouraging members to identify, discuss and act upon social justice issues. They may do this in the following ways:

- Championing social justice issues by demonstrating how they are relevant to the charitable activities of the Conference.
- Encouraging discussion of what a 'hand-up' means, how Conference Members can offer it, and how it is different from a 'handout'.
- Sharing with, or reporting on, Conference social justice activities.
- Attending local interagency meetings, or delegating a Conference Member to attend them, to build collaborative partnerships.
- Eliciting the support of the Regional Council Social Justice Representative for local social justice events, or meeting with a local Member of Parliament.
- Attending Social Justice Forums, webinars, and local social justice events.
- Building relationships with Parish and local social justice groups.
- Maintaining regular contact with the Regional Council and Central Council Social Justice Representatives.





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Community Liaison / Local Interagency Representative

This role is responsible for keeping the Conference informed about local community initiatives and for representing the Conference at interagency events. These tasks may also be performed by the Social Justice Representative or shared amongst Conference office holders.

Delegations of Authority

On occasions, the Trustees of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (NSW) (the trustees) within the company titled the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW (the company) may formally authorise individuals to act on its behalf. In such cases, the company provides formal authority to specific personnel to commit the company or to incur liabilities on its behalf. The Delegation of Authority policy includes a Schedule of Financial Delegations for Members and can be found on MAVS.

Leading Conference Meetings

CONFERENCE MEETINGS

“The Conferences meet regularly, usually weekly, but at least fortnightly. In exceptional circumstances a Conference may meet at least monthly, but it is essential that all three dimensions of the Society are experienced by the members. Work for the poor, deprived or suffering is the first dimension. The second dimension is the spiritual development of members, and the third dimension is that of mutual support, inspiration, and Vincentian friendship.”

The Rule (2012): Part III, Article 3

The Conference President conducts the Conference meeting, which should be conducted in a manner that imbues relations between Conference Members with the qualities of charity and spirituality in the spirit of the Vincentian tradition. Meetings should begin with Society prayer, or another appropriate form of prayer, with a spiritual reflection, and end with prayer.

Decisions made by a Conference should be made by consensus. Where possible, this should occur after members have spent some time in prayer, reflection, and



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consultation. A democratic spirit is fundamental to the Society. When necessary, Conference Members may take a vote on a proposal.

Reflection on Conference service to those seeking assistance is an important aspect of the Conference meeting. This involves members reporting to the Conference on their Vincentian activities and considering any action that has been taken or which is intended to be taken to advance charity and justice. It is recommended that an agenda is prepared and distributed before each meeting.



Vincentian Visitation Guidelines

The Vincentian Visitation Guidelines provide numerous suggestions for how to assist people in need by examining their whole situation. The Conference President can refer Conference Members to this resource on the MAVS website. Alternately, the Conference may order hard copies by sending an email to the membership inbox at: membership@vinnies.org.au

Developing the Conference

“There are many ways of providing charity...The assistance of money or the assistance in kind that we give to the poor will not last long. We must aspire to a more complete and longer lasting benefit: Study their abilities, their level of instruction and try to get them work to help them out of their difficulties...”

Blessed Rosalie Rendu (1786-1856)

In 1965, educational psychologist Bruce W Tuckman studied group development. In 1977, he made observations of small group dynamics in a range of different settings. He concluded that there are five stages to group development, and that members of every kind of group need to go through each of the five stages in group development



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before the group can achieve its maximum effectiveness. Tuckman identified the following five stages in group development, which are relevant to building a cohesive and collaborative Conference.

Stage One: Forming

During this stage, members may privately ask themselves such questions as 'What am I here for?' 'Who else is here' and 'Who am I comfortable with?' It is important at this stage for Conference Members to introduce themselves, engage with each other, and that the Conference leader demonstrates strong leadership. This will ensure members feel comfortable and clear about the purpose of the Conference.

Stage Two: Storming

Members begin to voice individual differences, join with others who share the same beliefs, and jockey for position in the group. It is important for Conference Members to be highly involved with each other in Conference life and in their charitable works, so Members should be able to voice concerns. They should also be able to feel their interests are understood and are being represented by the Conference leader. This will make it easier to achieve consensus (or commonality of views) about the purpose and priorities of the Conference.

Stage Three: Norming

Members share a common commitment to the purpose and goals of the Conference, and how each goal is to be achieved. The Conference leader should establish clear roles and workable structures and processes that members can follow. Ideally, members should now begin to reflect on their experiences and to learn from them.

Stage Four: Performing

Conference Members should now work effectively and efficiently as a team toward achieving the goals of the Conference. During this stage, the leadership style of the Conference leader may become less prescriptive. Members now participate more



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fully in the roles, systems, and processes of the Conference. Members continue to reflect upon their experiences to consider how they can learn from them.

Stage Five: Adjourning, Closing and Celebrating

By this stage, members should be clear about what goals (or major milestones along the way) the Conference is attempting to achieve. It is critical the Conference leader acknowledge this progress, or there is a risk members will feel unfulfilled and sceptical of future team plans.

Care of the Conference

CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS

“The presidents of the Conferences are the most important leaders in the structure of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, because the proper functioning of these Vincentian units and the faithful observance of the Rule depend on them.”

Circular Letter of the 16th President General, Renato de Oliveira, 2020

Fraternal Charity

The Conference President, in accordance with the lay tradition of the Society and the Rule (2012), is responsible for supervising the activities of the Conference, serving those in need, caring for members of the Conference and caring for themselves. In fraternal charity, the dedication of the Conference President to those seeking assistance extends to Vincentians in the Conference who may also be in need. As well as seeking support from their Regional Council President, a Conference President may contact local Member and Community Engagement staff for the contact details of the following additional sources that can offer support to themselves and to members of the Conference:

- Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral Care Partner.
- Work, Health, and Safety Partner.
- Employee Assistance Program.



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Making Decisions

DEMOCRACY

“All decisions are made by consensus after the necessary prayer, reflection, and consultation. The democratic spirit is fundamental at all levels of the Society and, when appropriate, matters are put to a vote.”

The Rule (2012): Part I, Article 3.10

Consensus

Conference meetings should be conducted in a spirit of Christian love with decisions made by consensus. Consensus is the best outcome, although, it is sometimes difficult to achieve. For this reason, consensus decision-making is a skill. It requires that everyone work together to achieve a mutually acceptable outcome.

Any member may suggest a proposal / idea / recommendation / solution which members then discuss and consider. Members should feel free to raise concerns. Wide discussion should be encouraged. The original proposal can be modified.

The Conference decides what is acceptable to all even if there may be individual reservations or differences of opinion. It is important that members feel the consensus outcome is the best one that can be achieved at that time.

Consensus reflects the principle of inclusivity, and respect for other people’s right to hold differing views while seeking the best direction for the Conference. When consensus decision-making, there may be no voting. There are no ‘winners and losers.’

Consensus decision-making allows people to feel a sense of responsibility for the outcome and a sense of commitment to make it work.

Consensus decision-making is an excellent way for a Conference President to ensure thoroughness when the Conference makes decisions. This ensures that all feasible options are covered.



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This approach may take longer than a quick vote, but it can produce far more reliable outcomes. This is because it is a process that elicits the best effort from everyone by ensuring everyone has their say.

The following features apply to the consensus decision-making process:

- It requires a commitment to open debate concerning all the implications of each proposal.
- It allows for sufficient debate, where people agree to support the decision.
- It is not necessary for the final decision to be one that everyone has decided upon as if it was their personal preference.
- It creates a sense of responsibility to support the decision.
- Discussion removes the temptation to rehearse one's personal opposition.
- Leaders must be willing to transcend their own views for the greater good.

Achieving Consensus

Vincentian Discernment

"In the Vincentian tradition, members are not asked to make the perfect decision but only to make a reasonable one, which members arrive at by using their good will and their best efforts."

'The Vincentian Question' (De Paul University)

The Conference President or leader should strive to achieve consensus amongst Conference Members when making major decisions.

The following steps set out how to achieve consensus decision-making.

Step One: Identify a Need

This stage requires Conference Members to identify concrete initiatives, projects, or solutions. This may require up to half of the meeting time to be spent on this step alone. To achieve consensus, use active listening (repeating back to someone that you have understood what they have said) and be assertive in stating views.



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Step Two: Brainstorm Ideas

Brainstorming is a technique that involves quickly developing as many ideas as possible. When brainstorming, Conference Presidents are encouraged to keep the following rules in mind:

- Invite all members of the Conference to share any ideas they have.
- Jot down the ideas without editing or evaluating them.
- When this is finished, expand on each member's ideas as they are offered.
- Refrain from attaching a different name or label to an idea.

Step Three: Choose the Solution

After brainstorming, the Conference President should invite the Conference Members to select one idea that they all agree would be a realistic and achievable solution. Conference Presidents should keep in mind the following principles:

- Clarify ideas that are unclear before evaluating them.
- Ask members to select the idea they believe might be the best solution.
- Note which ideas are most favoured by members.
- Assist members to jointly identify what they 'sense' might be the right idea.
- Lead discussion on the possible implications of the joint decision.

NOTE: Consensus decision-making is neither compromise nor unanimity. Rather, it ensures that all the best ideas are considered.

Step Four: Articulate the Proposal

The Conference President should now lead members to detail how the initiative or solution will be implemented by identifying who does what, in what circumstances and when. Detail the aim, and roles and responsibilities in writing in an Action Plan.

Step Five: Implement the Plan

In the implementation phase, the Conference President should ensure that all Conference Members remain supportive of the solution. This is also an opportunity for the Conference President to ensure the actions and outcomes the Conference has agreed upon in the Action Plan remain on track.



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Step Six: Evaluate the Outcomes

In the evaluation stage, the Conference considers how well the solution has achieved the intended goal and how well the Conference has worked together to achieve it. This can be included in the Annual Conference Reflection and Review Guide. The evaluation process can be an enriching experience for members. A copy of the Annual Conference Reflection and Review Guide can be found on the MAVS website.

The Regional Council

COUNCILS

“Councils are formed to provide a link between Conferences and Councils and between Councils at different levels. They facilitate joint action and communication and provide resources to assist the effective, efficient, and appropriate working of Conferences and Councils.”

The Rule (2012): Part III, Article 9

Conference Presidents are also members of their Regional Council, which has its own Regional Council President. The following skills are required of a Conference President as a member of a Regional Council:

- Preparing and distributing Conference Reports before the Regional Council meeting and, once a year, submitting a Report on Conference activities.
- Discussing and making decisions with other members of the Regional Council on common concerns and actions to be taken.
- Declaring any actual or perceived conflict of interest to the Regional Council.
- Keeping confidential discussions that the Regional Council agrees should remain confidential.
- Passing on to Conferences communications from the Regional Council.
- Inviting members to discuss their activities at a Regional Council meeting.
- Cooperating with all decisions made by higher Councils in the Society.
- Making decisions based upon consensus in a democratic spirit.



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- When they are unable to attend, ensuring they are represented at Regional Council meetings by a member of their Conference, who will have the same rights and responsibilities as the Conference President they represent.
- Together with members of the Regional Council, continually evaluating the Regional Council's services to members and to those in need.

The Parish and Community

CONFERENCE CHARITABLE WORKS

"Yours must be a work of love, of kindness; you must give your time, your talents, yourselves. The poor person is a unique person of God's fashioning with an inalienable right to respect. You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long-term improvement."

Blessed Frederic Ozanam

The Parish

The President of a Parish-based Conference should always collaborate with the Parish Priest and the Parish Council. Conference Presidents can maintain clear communications and good relations with the Parish Priest in the following ways:

- Scheduling regular conversations, e.g., monthly, bimonthly.
- Asking how best to share with the Parish what the Society does locally.
- Eliciting his ideas on addressing local needs and social justice issues.
- Inviting the Parish Priest to a Conference meeting.
- Reporting to the Parish Council on Conference activities.
- Inviting Parishioners and local Catholic School students to donate Christmas Hampers or food for a 'Vinnies Pantry'.





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- Meeting with leaders of local Catholic Schools to discuss how they can support Conference and Society activities.
- Maintaining close relations with Mini Vinnies and High School Conference coordinators.
- Conducting joint commissioning ceremonies of students in a local Mini Vinnies and High School Conference, with Conference Members.

Vinnies Retail Shops

Members and volunteers who engage in the charitable work of the Society at a Vinnies Retail Shop make a vital contribution to the work of the Society. The service they provide to the local community contributes to raising funds for the Society. Vinnies Retail Shops are often the public face of the Society. This is because they deal directly with customers, donors and people seeking assistance. Regional Directors and the State Retail Team support Vinnies Retail Shops.



The first contact that people seeking assistance may have with the Society can be through a Vinnies Shop. The Conference President should ensure a procedure is in place that enables their local Vinnies Shop to provide the Conference with the contact details of those seeking assistance from the Society.

Conference Presidents can promote membership to volunteers who are engaged in Vinnies Retail Shops but who are not members in the following ways:

- Hold combined celebrations in National Volunteer Week or at Christmas.
- Invite Retail Shop volunteers to member festival days, celebrations, and training.
- Attend Retail Shop staff meetings to promote the rewards of membership.



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Vinnies Support Centres

A Vinnies Support Centre ('VSC'), sometimes called a Hub, is a common way that people seek assistance from the Society as an alternative to contacting a Conference. Ordinarily, a VSC will have a procedure in place to refer those seeking assistance to an appropriate Conference once the VSC has assessed their needs. Conference Presidents should maintain good relations with their local VSC. Useful strategies to do this include:

- Meeting with the VSC manager to discuss areas of common interest and concern.
- Informing volunteers about the Society and its work.
- Promoting the Conference and the rewards of membership to VSC volunteers.

Community Engagement

The needs of people in the local community remain the primary focus of the charitable work of the Conference and its members. The following are suggestions about how the Conference can engage more with local communities:

- Prepare 'Back to School' packs containing school supplies for local children in need.
- Prepare and distribute mobile food packs for people experiencing homelessness and for those sleeping rough.
- Negotiate with local laundromats to accept Vinnies vouchers from people to launder their clothes.
- Elicit community support for the Society's social justice campaigns.
- Consult with local First Nations leaders and groups to ascertain how the Conference can support Reconciliation.





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- Invite members of First Nations communities to join the Conference.
- Attend interagency meetings to collaborate on community projects.

Safeguarding Practices

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, so they thrive in their families and communities, is a fundamental aspect of our work in providing a hand up to those facing adversity. The Society's Children and Young People Policy outlines our commitment to being a Child Safe Organization, ensures compliance with relevant legislation and explains your role in keeping children safe.

Members are required to report concerns about children and young people to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Safeguarding Team, who are your partners in protecting children, young people, and vulnerable adults and can assist you with concerns for the safety or wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults. The Safeguarding Team can be contacted by phone or email:

Vinnies Safeguarding Team

Phone: 1800 4SUPPORT (1800 478 776)

Email: childprotection@vinnies.org.au

Where members have concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a child outside of business hours, members can contact the following:

NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) (formerly FACS)

Phone: 132 111 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

After making a report concerning a child or young person to the DCJ, please inform the Vinnies Safeguarding Team as soon as possible after making the notification.



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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Guide to Taking Minutes

Minutes should summarise key discussion points and document any decisions made during a meeting. As well as providing an important historical record, minutes serve as a useful reminder of what has been agreed and can help ensure continuity from one meeting to the next.

Minutes should:

- Include a record of people present at the meeting, apologies, and non-attendance.
- Match the agenda, by providing a summary of discussion and decisions against each agenda item. If an agenda item is not discussed, this should be noted in the minutes.
- Be brief and factual.

Minute-takers should be mindful of people's privacy. Minutes should not include the names of people being assisted by a Conference, or any other personal information that would enable a person seeking assistance to be identified.

Appendix 2: Conference Meeting Template

Date:

Place:

Attendees:

Apologies:

1. *Welcome and reflection*
 - 1.1 Welcome to Country
2. *Opening Prayers*
 - 2.1 Reflection
3. *Previous meeting*

ACTION:

- 3.1 Recruitment –



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- 3.2 Twinning –
- 3.3 Social Justice -
- 4. *Items for decision*
 - 4.1
 - 4.2
- 5. *Items for information/discussion*
 - 5.1
 - 5.2
- 6. *Correspondence received*
 - 6.1
 - 6.2
- 7. *Correspondence sent*
 - 7.1
 - 7.2
- 8. *Treasurer's Report*
 - 8.1 Collection:
 - 8.2 Other income:
 - 8.3 Income account balance:
 - 8.4 Accounts for payment:
 - 8.5 Treasurer's Report adopted and read as accounts paid:
 - 8.5.1 Moved:
 - 8.5.2 Seconded:
- 9. *Visits since the last meeting (discussion)*
 - 9.1
 - 9.2
- 10. *Roster*
 - Monday
 - Tuesday
 - Wednesday
 - Thursday
 - Friday



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Saturday

Sunday

11. *Visits*

Hospital:

Social:

Aged Care:

12. *General Business*

12.1

12.2

12.3

13. *Next Meeting*

13.1 Date -

13.2 Spiritual Reflection led by -

14. *Closing prayers:*

15. *Meeting ended at:*

Appendix 3: Conference Presidents' Regional Council Report Template

Complete and send via email to the meeting convenor **10 days before** the Regional Council meeting

Conference Name:

Date of Meeting:

Submitted by:

Donations Received

From	\$ Amount
Total Amount	\$

Spirituality Activities

Key Conference Activities Underway



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Recent Conference Achievements

Challenges/Issues

What are the challenges/issues your Conference currently faces? Have you any ideas of how to overcome them? This may be something you wish to discuss or for advice at the Regional Council.

Social Justice Activity

What is your Conference doing in advocacy or awareness-raising at present? What actions are you engaged in to increase the Society's capacity to give more than a handout, e.g., raising housing issues with local council.

Schools Engagement

Activities / relationship building with Mini Vinnies or High School students, parents and/or teachers in your area.

For Discussion

From the above or other matters, is there anything you would like to specifically discuss at the meeting?

Appendix 4: Sample Conference Annual Report

Regional Council: Daffodil Regional Council

Conference: St Marys, Joyville Conference

Conference Area

Since 1974, when St Joseph's Conference was amalgamated with St Mary's Conference, the boundaries of the Conference cover the Catholic Parishes of St Marys, Joyville and St Joseph's, Huntingwood.

Membership

There are 19 Conference members and nine Associate members. The Conference's fortnightly meetings are usually attended by 8 – 15 Conference members.

Most of the Conference members have been members for many years and, health permitting, remain very committed to our activities. Due to the age of some members, ongoing recruitment is



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important. Most of the administration and organisation fall to two or three members.

Seven of the nine associate members focus on supporting our participation in the special project with refugees on Fridays. One is active in supporting our twinning officer. Four of the associate members were recruited about a year ago through the “school Mums” network at the Joyville Parish School.

Their participation is most welcome as some Conference members are less available due to ill health and we hope that, over time, they will become active in the Conference more broadly.

We are considering how best to recruit more members and associate members (although the latter will probably be easiest by using the current “school Mums” as ambassadors). This would be to address the increase in clients that we are experiencing in certain areas.

Spiritual Advisor

Fr Juan Puebla joined the conference early in 2015 to provide spiritual guidance. He is gradually working through a program of broad views on the role of faith in our lives and most recently focussed on the recent papal encyclical – ‘Laudato Si’.

Client Numbers within Conference Area

A review of the number of clients assisted in our local area for the six months to May 2015 numbered 64 plus 14 for Beauty Point.

Conference and Member Activities

- Conference meetings are held fortnightly with a short break over Christmas.
- The average number of home visits in our local area is 6 – 8 per fortnight. These are organised by allocating a bag (or incorporating the recently released Client Visitation Toolkit) to one of 8 members on a fortnightly rotation who then organises a second member to accompany them on visits as they arise.
- One of our members volunteers one day every week at the Joyville Vinnies Retail Shop.
- Two of our members make regular visits to local nursing homes as well as one of the associate members and her son.
- Five members participate in the Parish Supper Night Special Work.
- Four members help at the Matthew Talbot Hostel on a regular basis with bread from Bakers Delight for the Hostel and/or Vincentian House.
- Assisting with several Bursary applications. There are currently five students in receipt of school bursary funding, and we were pleased to see one of these students awarded student of the month for his year at Sacred Heart Parish School.
- Organising hampers donated through Sacred Heart School in June and December and Blessed Sacrament School in December. These were provided to Joyville. There were 54 delivered at Christmas 2014 and 30 in June 2015. We also attend a special Mass at the churches to accept the hampers from the children on each occasion. At the Mass for the Christmas Hampers, the Year 5 class also donated \$500 to the Winter Appeal.
- Running the Christmas and Winter Appeals across the four parishes within our Conference.



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As well as the visits arising from client requests, we are also supporting several clients and needy people including:

- Ongoing attendances at Court with a client during a prolonged child custody process
- Keeping in touch with mothers of our bursary recipients who need some ongoing support

Financials

For the year ending 30 June 2015:

- Beauty Point (which operated for the full year) had total income of \$2,895 and expenditure of \$1,830 – a surplus of \$1,065; and
- The SHN Conference totals (excluding Beauty Point) for the year were:
 - Winter Appeal \$24,018 (up approx. \$3k on the previous year).
 - Christmas Appeal \$10,911 (up approx. \$4k on the previous year).
 - Other income \$6,607.
 - Expenses of \$23,827 of which close to \$10,000 was vouchers. The largest other client expenditure related to relocation and furniture and whitegoods.
 - Surplus for general St Vincent de Paul funds of \$17,169.
- Regional Support: We are very reliant on Sally and Nada at the Regional Office and RCP, Sam Smith.

John Adams, Conference President