





THE RULE

PART I:

**THE RULE OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFEDERATION OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

PART II:

**THE STATUTES OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFEDERATION OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

PART III:

**THE STATUTES OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF THE UNITED STATES (Revised: December 2018)**



PART III

STATUTES

OF THE

NATIONAL COUNCIL

OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Approved:

**General Council
Paris, France
December 2018**



PART III

STATUTES OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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All areas highlighted in Part III of the Rule were revised, meaning that the language changed better defining the statute or an item/issue was added to the original statute.

This reference was created to help you locate changes from the Rule dated October 2003. The new Rule (adopted by the Council General International Dec 2018) now displays RULE in red.

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PART III

STATUTES OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The objective of these Statutes is to help nurture Vincentian Spirituality, enhance the relationship among members, and enrich Vincentian service to those in need – the Essential Elements of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Essential Elements are fully described in the Rule (Part I) of which Statute 1 provides a brief summary.

Statute 1: The Essential Elements

The Essential Elements of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are Spirituality, Friendship and Service.

Statute 2: Cultural Beliefs **REVISION USED TO BE CORE VALUES**

The following are the Cultural Beliefs that make up the Society's creed and therefore define our Ministry so that as Vincentians we are committed to:

Spiritual Growth:

Grow in holiness through prayer, service, friendship and formation.

One Society:

Contribute to the success of our Vincentian work when we support One Society.

Servant Leaders:

Develop ourselves and others to become Servant Leaders.

Today's Society:

Strengthen the Society by embracing new and diverse ideas and people.

Embrace Accountability:

Build a strong Society by holding each other accountable to our Mission, to the Essential Elements of the Society and to good Governance.

Inclusive Planning:

Foster ownership by involving all members in planning and decision-making.

Advocate for Justice:

Advocate along with the poor for just policies and practices at the local, state and national levels.

MEMBERSHIP

Statute 3: Membership and Admission

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States has two types of membership: Active Members and Associate Members. Active means Full membership.

Active Members are those who participate regularly in the prayer life, meetings and charitable activities through personal contact with the poor of the Vincentian Conference or Council into which they have been received.

REVISION FROM FULL MEMBER TO:

***An Active Member** accepts the Rule and Statutes of the Society, belongs to the Catholic Church and is received as a Vincentian brother or sister into the Society's Conference or Council with which he or she is affiliated. Normally, membership implies Conference affiliation. Less commonly is membership obtained through direct Council affiliation. Only Active Members hold office in the organization.*

CONTRIBUTING MEMBER – REMOVED

Admission Process for Active Members

The names of persons proposed for Active membership are to be submitted to the President of the Conference or Council concerned. The President will provide information concerning the recommended person to the Conference or Council. If approved, the candidate will be admitted as a member and given a Vincentian welcome at the next meeting. If a prospective member wishes to test their Vincentian vocation, that person may defer for a time formal admission into the Society. A candidate for Active membership is afforded a period of training and discernment which includes formation in the Essential Elements and values of the Society as well as its Rule.

Before being commissioned as a member, according to Statute 4, the Conference President or the Spiritual Advisor should consult with the candidate to discern readiness for Active membership. The Conference then takes formal action, normally by a resolution, to accept the candidate into Active membership.

Associate Members are those affiliated with the Society by formal action of the Conference or Council with which the member will be joined. Associate Members include those who sincerely and publicly accept the Society's Rule but may or may not belong to the Catholic Church and may or may not attend Conference meetings or engage in the works of the Society on a regular basis. Associate Members are kept informed of the

developments and activities of their immediate groupings, as well as the general progress of the Society, particularly in the local area or diocese. They are invited to attend the general meetings and special observances of the Society and to participate in its charitable activities.

REVISION -YOUTH ADDED

While membership in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States is open to all ages, *in honor of the youthfulness of our founder Frederic Ozanam youth and young adults are encouraged to become members. Youth and young adults may be Active or Associate Members of any Conference or Council or of a Conference designated as a Youth or Young Adult Conference.*

Statute 4: Commissioning and Renewal Ceremonies

The commissioning of new members of the Society should take place at an appropriate time and occasion after they have gained experience in the Society.

All members shall annually renew their promise of service to the members and to the poor, thereby deepening the spiritual dimension of their vocation.

The normal occasion for commissioning and renewal is at a Conference or Council liturgy or at a Festival Meeting.

CONFERENCES/COUNCILS AND THEIR WORK

Statute 5: Conferences Meet Frequently

Members of the Society traditionally gather in communities called "Conferences" which meet weekly or at least twice a month. This is to affirm the importance of the spiritual and social dimensions of Vincentians coming together as a community of faith and love, prayer and action.

After prayerful consideration of all circumstances involved, Vincentians should apply themselves to their maximum ability in fulfillment of the mission and Essential Elements of the Society. Vincentians are available for work in the Conferences after fulfilling their family and professional duties.

Conference members consistently strive to develop a three-fold relationship with God, the poor and one another – mutual support and friendship.

Statute 6: Aggregation and Institution

All Conferences and Councils are full members of the Society when they are respectively Aggregated or Instituted by the Council General International.

All Conferences seeking Aggregation and Councils seeking Institution are required to follow the procedures established by the National Council at the time of application. The National Council complies with the appropriate criteria of the Council General International.

Statute 7: Conference Meeting Agenda REVISION: FROM MEETING ESSENTIALS

A Conference meeting shall incorporate Spirituality, Friendship, Service and our Cultural Beliefs, and could include the following components:

- A punctual call to order
- Roll call
- Opening prayer (which should always include a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and a prayer for those whose suffering they wish to share)
- Spiritual reading (or meditation, address) on which members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith
- Approval of minutes of previous meeting
- Home visitation reports
- President's report
- Secretary's report (including correspondence received, information about the Society or training points)
- Treasurer's report
- **REVISION** *A review of one or more parts of the Rule*
- Committee reports (including Formation Committee report)
- Membership reports
- Resolutions
- Special Works reports
- Old business
- New business
- Time and place of next meeting (the calendar should include Festival Meetings and Conference Liturgies)
- Secret collection
- Closing prayer
- Adjournment

Statute 8: Visits to the Poor Are Made in a Vincentian Spirit (Rule, Part I, 1.7 to 1.12)

Visits to those in need should be made in their environment. This contact with friends in need should always be made in a spirit of friendship, respect, cordiality, empathy and affection. It should also promote self-sufficiency whenever possible for those who suffer and show concern for their deepest needs.

Services are provided regardless of race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, criminal justice status, disability, marital status, veteran status, national origin, age or physical handicap.

Home visits always are made in pairs.

Statute 9: Festival Meetings and Conference Masses

Conferences and Councils celebrate liturgical ceremonies, particularly Vincentian ceremonies, throughout the year, endeavoring to maintain a spirit of friendship among the members.

The Council of the United States has designated six days for religious observances. On these occasions the members of Conferences and Councils demonstrate the spiritual nature of the Society by attending the Eucharist together:

- + Ozanam Sunday (the last Sunday of April)
- + The feast day of Blessed Frederic Ozanam (September 9)
- + The feast day of St. Vincent de Paul (September 27)
- + The Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the Society (December 8)
- + A Conference Mass celebrated at least once a year for all members, including spouses and children. During this Mass, it is most appropriate to commission new members into the Conference, pray for those we have visited, pray for our benefactors, pray for the poor, pray for deceased members, and for continued good work.
- + Another feast day of local custom, such as December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Statute 10: Councils – The Minimum Number of Levels

Conferences are organized under the following different levels of Councils in the simplest manner possible:

- 1) The National Council which coordinates and represents the general activity of all the Conferences in the United States.
- 2) (Arch)Diocesan Councils which represent a minimum of three District Councils and represent Conferences in a specific (Arch)Diocese to which they belong.

3) REVISION

District Councils, which represent a minimum of three and ideally a maximum of 12 Conferences in an (Arch)Diocese. Existing District Councils with more than 12 Conferences are encouraged to consider at least dividing into smaller groupings for the purpose of holding informational meetings or reviewing matters to be voted upon by Conference Presidents at a full District Council meeting. The District President will select a chairperson for each smaller grouping using whatever

procedure and criteria he or she shall choose. Ideally, large District Councils are best divided into smaller Districts for efficiency and effectiveness of Servant Leadership.

The National Council approves the creation of the (Arch)Diocesan and District Councils. The National Council President approves and requests their Institution from the Council General International in Paris.

Councils are at the service of all Conferences under their jurisdiction. They help Conferences develop their spiritual life, promote friendship among members, intensify the service of the group, and diversify their activities so that they will be constantly attentive to the needs of those who suffer (see Rule, Part 1, 3.6).

Without creating a parallel organization, Councils at appropriate levels should particularly promote Youth Committees, helping them to be fully integrated into the life of the Society. Youth Committees shall have the same relationship with the Council under which they operate as the rest of the Committees linked to the same Council.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Statute 11: Servant Leadership

Leadership positions in the Society, at any level, are always to be accepted as service to Christ, the members and the poor. Servant leadership is done in imitation of Jesus who said: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45)

Statute 12: Servant Leadership Positions

REVISION *For a specific period of time the Society chooses qualified members for the various Council and Conference leadership positions who will carry out their tasks with the same dedication with which they work within their own Conference.*

After nominations have been declared for any elected position, canvassing on behalf of a candidate or against any candidate is forbidden.

It is important that officers at all levels participate regularly in meetings and charitable activities of the Society and visit the poor as often as possible.

President

The election of Conference and Council Presidents is held by secret ballot in accordance with an approved set of procedures (by the local Council) that are consistent with the Rule, Statutes and Bylaws of the Society.

REVISION *The term of office of a Conference, District or (Arch)Diocesan Council President is three years, once renewable; for Youth Conferences the term is one year, once renewable. Once a President has served for two consecutive three-year terms, that person will not be eligible for re-election as President until a three-year term has elapsed under a different President.*

The term of office of the National President is six years, not renewable. The President is elected by secret ballot in accordance with the National Council Bylaws.

Officers

Each Conference or Council should have at least a Vice President who exercises all the functions of the President when the latter is absent, a Secretary and a Treasurer, all of whom are appointed by the President after consultation with the members. The President may appoint other officers.

All officers named by the President serve at the pleasure of the President. Such appointments terminate automatically when a new President takes office. An incoming President may reappoint an officer or officers and others who served under the previous President. To safeguard the good reputation of the Conference or Council and, therefore, that of the Society itself, appointees must not be related to the person empowered to make the appointments.

REVISION *In no event should any one person hold more than one officer position in the same Conference or Council at the same time.*

Statute 13: Regions and National Vice Presidents for Regions

REVISION *The National Council of the United States is divided into Regions. There shall be a National Vice President for each Region who shall represent the National President.*

The term of office of the National Vice President for a Region coincides with the term of office of the National President and ends when a new National President takes office.

The election of National Vice Presidents for each respective Region is held in accordance with an approved set of procedures that are consistent with the Rule, Statutes and Bylaws of the Society.

Statute 14: Employees in the Society

The Vincentian vocation by its very nature does not eliminate participation in Vincentian works by employees. It can be of benefit to the poor and the employee if they are afforded the opportunity to put into practice the spirit of the Society. Leaders of the Society are encouraged to create opportunities for employees to become members of a Conference.

Employees of the Society, of its Special Works or of organizations controlled by the Society may serve in a Conference with membership rights and privileges other than that of holding any office within the Society.

REVISION *An employee of the Society who fulfills the criteria for being an Active Member, may be a candidate for any office in the Society as long as his/her employment is terminated before taking office. An existing officer within the Society may become an employee of the Society as long as he/she resigns from office before starting employment.*

Statute 15: The Spiritual Advisor in the Society

Since the beginning of the Society, a Spiritual Advisor has been appointed to help foster spiritual life within the Conferences and Councils under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in conformity with the Rule and Statutes of the Society.

REVISION *Should a member of the ordained clergy, namely a priest or a deacon, not be available to act as the Spiritual Advisor, the President of the Conference or Council may appoint a Catholic layperson who has had training consistent with the policies of the National Council regarding the formation and training of Spiritual Advisors. At the Conference and Council levels appropriate church protocol should be observed when appointing ordained or non-ordained Spiritual Advisors. Priests and deacons are not eligible to be elected or appointed in the Society to any office outside their spiritual role.*

If a parish priest who has declined to be the usual Spiritual Advisor does occasionally attend a Conference meeting, he will always be invited by the President to contribute to the sharing during the Spiritual Reflection.

Statute 16: Subsidiarity and Democracy

REVISION *The Society embraces the Principle of Subsidiarity as its basic standard of operation. Decisions are made as close as possible to the area of activity to ensure that the local environment and circumstances (cultural, social, political, etc.) are taken into consideration. In this way, the Society promotes local initiatives within its spirit. This freedom of action of Conferences and Councils, which has been kept faithfully since the origins of the Society, enables them to help the poor spontaneously and more effectively, free from excessive bureaucracy.*

In exercising this freedom of action to face the challenge of poverty in their area, Vincentians feel called to pray together for guidance and strength and for that creative imagination which is the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

To ensure democracy in the Society decisions are often made by consensus. Consensus decision-making requires that everyone agree with a decision, not just a majority as occurs in majority-rule processes. In consensus-based processes people must work together to develop an agreement that is good enough, though not necessarily perfect. In rare circumstances, if consensus cannot be reached the decision may be put to a vote.

All decisions made by a Conference or Council must be made consistent with the Rule and Statutes of the Society, Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and governance policies of the Society.

Statute 17: Suspension of Members, Conferences and Councils

The President General can suspend members, Conferences and Councils. However, the President General has delegated authority to suspend members, Conferences or Councils to the National Council President. When the National Council President has made such a decision, the member, Conference or Council suspended will cease to exercise any office and may not act on behalf of the Society under any circumstances.

REVISION *An appeal of the suspension may be made to the National Council's Conciliation Committee which shall make a nonbinding recommendation to the National President. Should the member, Conference or Council choose not to accept the final decision of the National President, a final appeal may be made to the President General.*

Any member, Conference or Council using means other than those provided by the Society to resolve internal disputes renounces Vincentian communion and leaves the Society, unless the Council General International expressly agrees that the matter should be placed before the courts.

Statute 18: Annul the Election of a President

The President of the National Council may, for serious reasons, annul the election of a member as President of a Conference or Council. Such member will immediately cease to exercise the office and may appeal to the Board of the National Council.

Upon notification of a complaint for an election, the National Council President must issue a final decision within 60 days.

Statute 19: Removal of a President

REVISION *Periodically, difficulties due to various causes such as medical, physical, mental, time management, lack of the conciliatory spirit a servant leader needs, or even*

insufficient ability for the role of President, may impair the ability of a Conference or Council to carry out its work. If the situation becomes unmanageable, and the next higher Council cannot resolve the matter and the President refuses to resign, the next higher Council, through delegation of the National President, may remove a President in order to protect the Society. The person removed may appeal to the Board of Directors of the National Council.

Statute 20: Special Works

Only after prayer and discernment should a Council or Conference establish Special Works. Special Works can either remain part of normal operations or be separately incorporated.

REVISION In the event that the Special Work remains part of a Council's or Conference's normal operations it will be governed and managed in accord and in compliance with that Council's or Conference's Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, standing operating procedures, reporting policies and Human Resource policies. It is essential that a Special Work remain loyal to the policies and strategies agreed to by the Council or Conference to which it belongs and reports.

The President of a Council or Conference wishing to incorporate a Special Work should first consult with and obtain the approval of Council or Conference members and should also consult with the President of the next higher Council.

The Council or Conference should ensure that at the outset the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and other governance and management documents of such incorporated Special Work recognize the relationship of said Special Work to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul including but not limited to name, logo use, asset acquisition and asset disposal, and that the legal and business consequences of separately incorporating have been thoroughly evaluated.

The Bylaws of the incorporated Special Work should reserve to the Council or Conference which has incorporated it the right to replace members of the Board of Directors of the incorporated Special Work, provide that the majority of the members of the Board of Directors be active Vincentians or that the ultimate control of the Special Work is by active Vincentians, and include policies which ensure that appropriate reporting is made to the Council or Conference so that a harmonious, faithful and fruitful relationship is maintained and safeguarded.

Statute 21: National Council's Conciliation Committee

REVISION

- 1. Appeals that arise out of Statute 17 are brought to the National Council's Conciliation Committee.*

2. *Councils, Conferences and members may bring their issues to the National Council's Conciliation Committee if an issue has not been resolved at the local level after sustained prayer, goodwill and a desire to reconcile.*

Members of the National Council's Conciliation Committee shall be as defined by Resolution approved by the National Council.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Statute 22: Conference and Council Periodic Review

REVISION *Periodically, but not less frequently than once every three years, each Conference and Council must evaluate their service to the members and the poor, the effectiveness of their special works and all activities, and explore ways to provide better service. They should also consider new types of needs they may seek to alleviate and how to find those who are in need.*

Statute 23: Annual Finance and Activity Reports Are Published by the National Council, Other Councils and Conferences

REVISION *Each Council and Conference must, at all times, maintain accurate records and submit an annual report to the next higher Council on forms provided by the National Office.*

The Society preserves its good reputation for honesty and responsible stewardship. It produces finance reports that include revenue, expenses and assets, and activity reports, at least annually. Each Council and Conference shall conduct an annual audit of such type as is required.

These reports are published internally and externally and are made available to all members and the public in general. The reports are sent to the (Arch)Diocesan Bishops, and federal, state and local officials for their information.

The annual report of the National Council should also be sent to the Council General International.

Statute 24: Property and the Distribution of Funds

REVISION *Councils and Conferences zealously manage and maintain the Society's assets. The authority to manage the Society's assets remains exclusively with Councils that may delegate this authority in accordance with the Rule of the Society and the Bylaws and Resolutions of the National Council.*

Faithful to the spirit of non-accumulation of wealth, the next higher Council may determine annually the percentage of the funds of each Council or Conference within their area that

may be made available to them. The next higher Council will work with the Council or Conference to determine an appropriate reserve for unanticipated events and direct the allocation of funds which exceed the anticipated demands, which may not be hoarded as a capital sum, to the service of the poor in their own area or abroad in the poorest areas of the world.

REVISION *In the event of the dissolution of a Council or Conference, all debts and liabilities legally incurred by and on behalf of the Council or Conference shall be fully discharged by the next higher Council of the Society. Remaining money or property and all files and documents must be passed promptly to the next higher Council that is in compliance with the requirements of the Internal Revenue Service and is in good standing with the National Council.*

Statute 25: Collections for the Poor and to Maintain the Structures

In the United States, a variety of means exist to ensure the proper collections for the poor and to maintain the Society's structure, nationally and internationally, such as special collections, solidarity contributions, fundraisers, twinning and special works. All collections are conducted in the spirit of friendship, solidarity and sharing.

Statute 26: Use of Funds

The funds of the Society shall be used for the works of the Society, including Vincentian twinning and collaboration in payments for people we serve. However, no matter how worthy the cause funds shall not be diverted in the form of donations or contributions to other organizations or charities, except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family. The Treasurer is charged as the responsible officer to ensure adherence after consultation with the Conference or Council.

REVISION *Donations and gifts by donors for a certain purpose can only be applied for that same purpose and all reasonable steps will be taken to respect the wishes of donors.*

Statute 27: Council Presidents' Right to Audit and to See Correspondence

When deemed appropriate, Council Presidents should require audits or audit reviews of the Conferences (at minimum an internal review) or of Councils and Special Works under the auspices of their Council.

Council Presidents are also entitled to have access to all correspondence sent by any Conference or Council on behalf of the Society.

Statute 28: Refund of Expenses

Vincentians entrusted to undertake previously and duly authorized offices, missions or tasks for the Society are entitled to the refund of the expenses incurred.

Statute 29: Relationship with Civil Society – Work for Social Justice – Political Independence of the Society (see Rule, Part I, 7.1 to 7.9)

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.

Statute 30: Amendment of Statutes

Statutes of the National Council may be amended, altered or repealed at any regular or special meeting of the National Council with the concurrence of the majority of the National Council membership present provided, however, that 60 days written notice of the meeting at which proposed amendments, alterations or repeals of any Statute be sent to all National Council members prior to the meeting. Final approval of the Council General International is needed for validation.

Statute 31: Interpretation of the Statutes

These Statutes of the U.S. Council received the approval of the Permanent Section of the Council General International. They are subordinate to and interpreted according to the “Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul” and to the International Statutes, and shall be treated together with them as a single legal document.



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National Council of the United States
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