

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Greater Toronto Central Council



Conference Member Recruitment Guide

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Introduction

Recruiting new members to the Society is crucial to the ability of Conferences to carry out their work of meeting the needs of their neighbours. New members help to share the workload, provide energy, and bring new ideas to even the most active Conference.

Ideally recruiting new members is an ongoing activity. If parishioners hear good things about the Society, they may seek to become members on their own. You may also extend a personal invitation to specific parishioners you know to join the Society.

Even if you have enough members to manage the workload, you may want to increase the diversity in the Conference. To the extent possible, the Conference should reflect the diversity of the people needing assistance: by age group, by ethnic origin (including languages spoken), income levels, balance between men and women. Of course, most if not all the members will be Catholic, but in other respects we should try to reflect the diversity in the community we are assisting.

If these techniques are not providing enough new members, then a more proactive approach is needed. Before we begin on this approach some consideration should be given as to why the Conference is short of volunteers.

- Are more Neighbours in Need calling for assistance?
- Are members leaving the Conference? If so, find out why.
- Are the meetings run well?
- Are new ideas by the members listened too?
- Are the visiting pairs changed up occasionally?

If there are problems with the Conference, then try to fix them before new members are introduced. Otherwise, there is a strong possibility the new recruits will just leave and not return.

Three Methods of Recruitment: An Overview

1. Ongoing (low key) Approach

- a. New members may join the Conference because:
 - they heard about the great work the Conference is doing through bulletin announcements, or from someone who was assisted by the Conference, or
 - the Pastor suggested they consider joining the Conference, or
 - they were personally invited by one of the members.
- b. The success of this method is enhanced with:
 - regular updates to the Pastor and in the bulletin on what the Conference does,
 - an active, well-run Conference, and
 - Conference members connected with other parish groups.
- c. Regular introduction of new members makes the process of mentoring and training new members a regular part of the Conference activities. This will avoid creating a big commitment on the part of the Conference members to mentor and train many new recruits all at once, and perhaps, letting some of their regular duties suffer as a result.



2. Parish Bulletin Inserts, Posters and Social Media Notices

- a. If the Conference already provides regular communication to parishioners, then this is likely to generate 1 or 2 new members.
- b. Requires a Recruitment Plan (see following section).

3. Recruitment Drive

- a. Use if you need 3 or more members or if the parish bulletin and social media notices have not produced the types of members you need.
- b. Requires a Recruitment Plan (see following section).

New Member Recruitment Process

In order to hold a successful recruitment drive, your Conference needs to develop a clear and thoughtful strategy.

Bringing new members into your Conference requires commitment so you must carefully consider your Conference's needs, motivations, and desired outcomes in pursuing a program of recruitment and renewal. This Recruitment Guide lays out some of the key elements you will need to consider in pursuing these efforts. Please read it carefully and consider how you might best undertake your recruitment efforts. Greater Toronto Central Council can assist you with your efforts. For more information, please contact your Particular Council president or Central Office (416-364-5577).

The following steps outline the recommended process. Each step is explained in detail in this guide.

Recruitment Steps:

1. Form a Conference Recruitment Team
2. Consider Your Membership Needs
3. Analyzing the Status Quo
4. Make the Appeal
 - a) Bulletin Announcements
 - b) After Mass Announcement or Pulpit Talk
5. After Mass Follow-up Part I: Immediate Personal Contact
6. After Mass Follow-up Part II: The Telephone Contact
7. First Conference or First Information Meeting
8. Second Information Meeting
9. Home Visitation
10. New Member Orientation



1. Form a Conference recruitment team

After making sure that you are ready to support new members in your Conference it is time to develop a clear plan of action. Map out a reasonable timeline with clearly defined roles and tasks for each Vincentian taking part in the recruitment drive. Don't forget that your Conference is not alone in this effort. A number of people and resources are available to assist you with your recruitment efforts including your Particular Council President, experienced Vincentians (contact your Particular Council president or Central Office), and Central Office staff. Get in touch with these people as early as possible in order to draw on their experience and maximize your efforts.

- This team, ideally made up of three or four members will take the lead in planning and carrying out the recruitment drive, with the support of the rest of the Conference.
- Remember that your Particular Council President, area Vincentians, and Central Office staff can offer support to your Conference team.

2. Consider Your Membership Needs

Depending on the unique needs of your Conference, you may wish to target your recruitment efforts to reach out to specific demographics. In all cases you will be looking for members who are willing to serve those in need and who wish to respond to Christ's call to serve. By targeting specific experience or skills, you might also catch the attention of some who may not have considered this type of service. Knowing ahead of time who you are trying to reach can help focus your efforts.

- Are you mainly looking for younger members? What are some things you might need to consider in order to attract younger parishioners to participate?
- Are you mainly hoping to attract more women? Or more men?
- Are you hoping to attract members that are more representative of the diversity within your parish or within the community you serve?
- Do you need members with specific skills or experience (e.g., finance, immigration, etc.)?



3. Analyzing the Status Quo

A successful recruitment drive requires a strong understanding of your Conference's current situation. A clear assessment of the current realities and the future needs of your Conference will help to focus your recruitment efforts and deliver more fruitful results. The following questions may help you assess the current needs in your Conference:

- ✓ Why do you want new members?
- ✓ Are your current members open to welcoming new members?
- ✓ Why would a parishioner want to join your Conference?
- ✓ If you were coming to your first meeting at the Conference that currently exists in your parish would you feel welcome and valued?
- ✓ Would you be inspired by the level of commitment and the depth of the members' spirituality?
- ✓ Would you enjoy the meetings?
- ✓ Would you want to come back?

Knowing how to *attract* new members is the easiest part of recruitment. *Keeping* them and helping them to become fully contributing long-term members is the bigger challenge. We strongly recommend that your Conference be confident that you are willing and able to handle the tough part of keeping Conference members before embarking on the easier part of recruiting new ones.

4. Make the Appeal – Strategies for Delivering the Message

With your Conference recruitment team in place and your membership needs identified, it is now time to plan how you will share your invitation to your fellow parishioners. There are several ways you might carry out this direct outreach, however we will highlight the two most common strategies. Feel free to adapt these for your Conference or use another strategy if your team feels that might generate better results.

a) **Bulletin Inserts, Posters and Social Media Notices:**

Consult with your pastor about making use of parish communication tools such as a notice in the church bulletin or a poster announcement on parish bulletin boards or posts to parish social media outlets to get the word out about the Society and your desire to bring in new members. Be sure that your message is clear and concise with all the necessary information prospective members might need (contact information, time and date of an information meeting, etc.). We have prepared some sample bulletin announcements (see Appendix 1) to assist you. Feel free to change these for your particular needs.

Note: If you are planning to give a talk from the pulpit, it might help to have the bulletin announcements both the week before and the week of the pulpit talk.

b) **Pulpit Talk:**

Aside from personal invitations, a brief and focused talk from the pulpit inviting parishioners to join your Conference will probably be the most effective tool for recruiting new members. Consult with your pastor and your fellow Vincentians to choose an appropriate date to speak from the pulpit and engage the wider parish. While only one Vincentian needs to deliver the message from the pulpit, a number of Conference members (and area Recruitment Team members) should be available at the back of the church after mass to do the important direct engagement as people are leaving.

Before delivering the pulpit talk, take some of the following suggestions into consideration:

- Choose the best person to deliver the talk. Ideally the same person will speak at each mass and she or he should be an experienced Vincentian and an effective speaker. A nervous speaker can get in the way of the message you are trying to share. If no one in your Conference is comfortable speaking, consider asking your Particular Council President for support.
- Decide on the content of the message. We have enclosed two sample pulpit talks (Appendix 2). Choose the one that you feel is best and edit the message according to your specific needs. Get feedback from the rest of the Conference, and even from some non-Vincentians, about the clarity and effectiveness of the message. The pastor can be very helpful in shaping the message and suggesting the best ways to reach parishioners.
- Be aware of time constraints. Has the pastor offered you five minutes to speak at the end of mass? Or only three? Be sure to respect these limitations as you prepare your talk. You do not want to alienate the pastor (and the parishioners) by going too long.
- Practice, practice, practice! The best way to be comfortable with the talk, and to be sure that you are within the time constraints, is to practice the delivery many times.



5. After Mass Follow-up Part I: The Immediate Personal Contact

You've achieved your first goal. Your message has caught the attention and interest of 5 or 25 or 75 parishioners. They're thinking about it and perhaps talking with family about it as they leave the church. **If you don't follow up immediately with personal contact and written information, you will likely lose them.** Have several team members available and visible at the back of the church after each mass.

Each team member should be wearing a badge that clearly identifies them by name and as members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. They should smile and greet each parishioner as they leave. If anyone comments on the talk or shows interest of any kind, the team member should:

- Chat a little with the person.
- Get some written information into their hands (Information Pamphlets are available from Central Office. Be sure to write in a contact name and phone number on each pamphlet).
- Try to get them to leave their name, email and phone number.
- Inform them of the date and time of the Information Meeting where they will be able to learn about serving with the Society (this should be within 2 weeks of the pulpit talk)

Caution: *Try to avoid getting into a long discussion with one parishioner. While you're doing this, other potential members may be walking by. Ideally, you should have team members make initial contact and give the written info, and then direct anyone who is curious over to a table where they can leave their contact information and chat further with another team member.*

6. After Mass Follow-up Part II: The Telephone Contact

Once you have chatted after mass with some people that seem very interested, and have obtained names, emails and phone numbers, it is important to follow-up by phone within a few days.

Be sure that you have prepared ahead of time for this conversation. Ask them if they have had a chance to read the material they were given on the weekend and allow them to share their reactions to what they read. Try to think of some of the questions a prospective member might ask you so that you are ready to give them as much useful information as possible during this conversation. If the person continues to show some interest, remind them of the date, time, and location of the information meeting and invite them to attend. Before ending the conversation give the person your name and contact information in case they think of additional questions before the meeting.

This phone call and the conversation that results will either encourage people to find out more or will indicate that membership in the Society is not really for them. In either case, the conversation will have been very productive.

7. First Conference or First Information Meeting

If there are only one or two interested people, you can invite them to your next regular Conference meeting, however be sure that there is plenty of time devoted to providing information and answering questions for these prospective members. If your regular meetings are fraternal, spiritual, productive and enjoyable, then interested candidates should experience this. If this is not the case, you may wish to consider making some improvements before inviting new members to a regular meeting.

If you have more than two or three interested parishioners, it is advisable to hold special information meetings for them to get a better sense of the Society and the work of your Conference.

In either case, Conference members should be prepared to share how they came to be involved with the Society and why they continue to live out this vocation within the community. While you shouldn't paint an unrealistically positive portrait of your work, you should also be sure that you are not spending too much time talking about the challenges and frustrations encountered.

If you are having a separate meeting for new candidates, we would suggest an agenda similar to the one in Appendix 3. This meeting will cover the Vision and Mission of the Society, the workings of a Conference and an overview of the 5 Guiding Principles. The agenda should be emailed to each candidate and to the Recruitment Team members in advance of the meeting. This separate meeting will allow more time for the candidates to learn about the Society and to ask questions.

8. Second Information Meeting

Following the first Information Meeting, a further phone call within 2-3 days to each candidate is very important. Thank them for coming to the meeting and offer them a chance to share their reaction and ask any additional questions. Remind them of the date, time, and place of the Second Information Meeting and leave them with your contact information should they need to get in touch before then. The agenda for this meeting (see sample in Appendix 4) should also be sent to each candidate and the Recruitment Team members. This meeting

will cover the practical side of Home Visits and the membership application process, including the screening requirements of the Archdiocese.

A special effort should be made to ensure that the candidates are helped to feel welcome and valued by the Conference at this meeting. These first few meetings will make a lasting impression on them, for better or worse.

9. Home Visitation

Generally, soon after the first meeting, candidates who continue to express interest in joining your Conference should accompany an experienced Vincentian on at least one home visitation.

Since this is a very important part of the screening process, the person accompanying and supervising the new candidate on the home visitation should observe the candidate carefully. The experienced Vincentian should give the president a verbal report on how the candidate conducted themselves on the visit and should make a recommendation to the president regarding the candidate's suitability as a member.

Mentoring and accompanying is usually the most appropriate and effective way to train new members as it offers an opportunity to learn by listening to and observing experienced, committed members. It is essential, however, that this mentoring be done in a planned, deliberate manner to ensure the new member is acquiring the attitudes, knowledge and skills that you believe a new member should have.

“To love God and neighbour is not something abstract, but profoundly concrete: it means seeing in every person the face of the Lord to be served, to serve Him concretely.”

- Pope Francis

10. New Member Orientation

At least twice each year the Central Office will be offering an Orientation Session for new members. This session will help new members to know and appreciate the history and traditions of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, with a particular emphasis on The Rule. Contact the Central Office for information regarding the next session.

Summary of Key Points:

- Recruiting new members is relatively easy. Attracting the **right** members and **holding on** to them is more challenging.
 - Be prepared. Form a team and develop a plan.
 - With those interested: follow up, follow up, follow up.
 - Draw on available support and resources: Particular Council, neighbouring Conferences, and Central Council.
 - Welcome, nourish, encourage, and mentor your new members. Those first few months are critical.
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Appendix 1 Sample Bulletin items

Sample 1

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Turning Concern Into Action - Around Our Community and Around the World

We are seeking new members – parishioners who are looking for the opportunity to put their faith into action in service to their Neighbours in Need.

Please join our information meeting – (details of meeting)
Please contact _____ for further information

Sample 2

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

We visit the poor and others in need in their homes.

We are called by faith to serve our community. We believe we have a responsibility to turn our concern into action.

Are you looking for a meaningful form of service? Your local Conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is seeking new members to help serve our Neighbours in Need.

Information meeting: (details of meeting) Contact _____ for questions or further information

Appendix 2 Recruitment Talk #1 from the Pulpit (Approximately 4 minutes)

Note: the speaker will naturally want to modify the talk to fit their style, time constraints, and the specific circumstances of your Conference.

Thank you Father, and good morning. My name is _____ and I am a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Since 1850, the Society has been working in the Archdiocese of Toronto to bring God's love to our Neighbours in Need by turning concern into action. Here in _____ Parish we have supported a group of the Society, which we call a Conference, since _____, reaching out to our neighbours who have found themselves unable to make ends meet. Every week many of you drop coins and bills into the poor box in support of our work and we are immensely grateful for these contributions, which are distributed to the those in need. Today, however, I am not here to ask for money. Instead, Father has allowed me this time to appeal for something even more valuable to our work: your time.

One of the beliefs of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the Society, was that members of the Society should go about their works of charity in a humble, anonymous manner. We have obviously succeeded! Even though there are 113 parishes in the Greater Toronto Area with Conferences of the Society and we have over 1300 members in the GTA, we've managed to keep a pretty low profile. Most Catholics know little about who we are and what we do – other than that we help those in need.

Obviously, it is very appropriate for us to go quietly about our service. This only becomes a problem when parishioners don't become members because they aren't sure who we are or what we do, or don't contribute to the poor box at the back of the church because they're not sure where the money goes.

For over 180 years volunteer members of the Society around the world, called Vincentians, have chosen to respond to Christ's call to know Him and serve Him by serving the most vulnerable in our communities. We do this by using the money collected in the poor box to provide food, clothing and basic furniture to those in need – sometimes on an emergency basis and sometimes for longer periods. Members of the Society, working always in pairs, visit the homes of those who request assistance. When we visit those in need we try to bring more than just material assistance. We try to bring hope, caring, compassion, and respect. We strive to be the face, the hands, and the voice of Christ, putting our faith into action.

Appendix 2 Recruitment Talk from the Pulpit (continued)

Although the Society in the GTA runs 22 programs, including emergency shelters for women, homes for those working to get their lives back from addictions, supportive housing for people with mental health needs, and two children's camps: Marygrove Camp, and Camp Ozanam, the core of our parish-based work is in-home visits to those who request our assistance.

We visit single mothers. We visit the elderly. We visit the working poor as well as those on social assistance or disability allowance.

We visit those who have suddenly fallen on hard financial times as well as those who are struggling over a longer period. We visit people of any faith or race. Quite simply, we visit anyone who is in need and requests our assistance.

Here in _____ Parish, we receive approximately _____ calls for assistance every month. Although our current members do their best to meet these requests, we are currently seeking new members to help us better serve our neighbours. We have people in need in this parish and the larger community and we need parishioners who are willing to respond to that need and offer their services.

Most of us come to a point in our lives when we feel called to act on our faith and beliefs and to give something back to our community – be it our faith community or the larger community. Are you someone who is looking for a meaningful, concrete, hands-on way to serve those who are less fortunate? Are you willing and able to devote a few hours a month to helping turn your concern into action? **[If your Conference has specific needs, such as more women, or people with a finance background, mention it here]** If so, would you take a moment after mass to say hello to me or one of our team members in the foyer and take a brochure that tells you more about our Society and our work. If you leave your name and number we'll invite you to an information meeting here in the parish where you can learn more about the work of the Society and decide whether this type of service is what you've been looking for. The meeting will be held on _____ at _____ in the hall, where you can learn more about being a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Thank you again, Father, for giving us these few minutes but, more importantly, for your support of the work of our Saint Vincent de Paul Conference. Thank you for your attention and God bless.

Appendix 3 Recruitment Talk #2 from the Pulpit (Approximately 3 minutes)

Note: the speaker will naturally want to modify the talk to fit their style, time constraints, and the specific circumstances of your Conference.

Hello everyone. Thank you, Father, for welcoming me. My name is [NAME], and I'm a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul here at [NAME] Parish. Today I want to tell you about the Society. I want to share with you our work for the poor in the neighbourhoods around this parish. And I want to extend an invitation: for you to join us in this important mission. I am inviting you to become a Vincentian and serve the most vulnerable people in our parish. To do what God asks of each of us: to love our neighbour through concrete acts of service.

Today there are over 1,300 Vincentians in 113 parishes across the GTA portion of the Archdiocese of Toronto. Vincentians do many things, all focused on our mission of serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, joy, and justice.

We visit our neighbours in their homes. We bring them food vouchers to help them enjoy full and healthy meals. This is so important at a time when food is expensive. Many of the most vulnerable cut back on meals just to get by. To others, we bring clothing vouchers so they can stay warm in winter. We provide tables to eat at and beds to sleep in. These material supports are all critical. They are only possible because of your generous donations to the poor boxes in our parish. We're so grateful to you for making this possible.

Yet more important than any food voucher is friendship. We visit many people who are alone in our parish. Single mothers who struggle to support their children. New immigrants and refugees, with no family in Canada. Elderly shut-ins living alone. To them we offer conversation, a listening ear, and the hope of someone who cares. Across the GTA, we also offer special programs for those in the most challenging situations. Shelters for those overcoming addictions. An apostolate to prisoners. Summer camps for kids who otherwise couldn't afford to go. And much more.

Why do we do these things? Each of us has our own story about what drew us to this work. We share something in common. We have heard Christ's Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger, for they will be filled." Each of us has responded to this call to find and love Christ in those who are suffering. Responding to that call has changed our lives. It is changing my life. I invite you to respond to that call by joining our Society.

And we need your help. There's so much good we can do together. Here in our parish, we receive [NUMBER OF] calls per month. The need is great in our neighbourhood, and it is only growing. God is calling us to lend a helping hand. If you are hearing that call in your own life, we would love to talk to you. Please come chat with me after Mass, or with one of my fellow Vincentians. We would be so happy to tell you more and get you involved.

Even if you don't join us, I would ask you to pray for us, and for all the most vulnerable residents of our parish. We appreciate your support.

Thank you and God bless you all for offering your charity, your prayers, and your time to our mission. I look forward to telling you more and making a difference for those suffering in our community.

Appendix 4 Agenda for Information Meeting #1



Society of Saint Vincent de Paul **New Member Information Meeting #1** Location, Date, Time **Agenda (1 to 1½ hours)**

Welcome

Opening prayer (Vincentian prayer)

Spiritual Reflection (carefully chosen to be appropriate to the situation)

Sharing

- Current Vincentians talk about how and why they became members. They share some of the benefits and the challenges, using actual examples from their experience.
- Candidates are encouraged to share their experiences with volunteer work and talk about what attracted them to the Society. What are they hoping to give to and get out of this type of service?

Vision and Mission of the Society

The Conference: Working as a Team

5 Guiding Principles:

- Home Visits
- Equity of Service
- Continuous Learning
- Renewal
- Sharing

Next step - Next Meeting

Should be the following week, but it could be on a different day of the week, if that is likely to be better for most of the interested members.

Closing Prayer (Vincentian Prayer)

Social Activity. Some time to chat over light refreshments

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

New Member Information Meeting #2

Location, Date, Time

Agenda (1 to 1½ hours)

Welcome

Opening prayer (Vincentian prayer)

Spiritual Reflection (carefully chosen to be appropriate to the situation)

Home Visit

- Home Visitation: Quick Reference Guide #1

Membership

- Explain the process involved in becoming a member, as required by the regulations of the Archdiocese, including police records check, interview and references.
- To those still interested, give them the Applicant Folder that contains all the information and forms.
- Make it clear that the Conference and the Society are not just looking for new members. You are looking for the right new members. Not everyone is willing or able to serve those in need in this way.

Next step - Next Meeting

- Those present should decide on a regular meeting night. Two meetings a month is recommended in the first year.

Closing Prayer (Vincentian Prayer)

Social Activity. Some time to chat over light refreshments