



**INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION
OF THE
SOCIETY OF SAINT-VINCENT DE PAUL
COUNCIL GENERAL
RULE AND STATUTES**



Confédération Internationale
Société de Saint-Vincent de Paul
Conseil Général

6, rue de Londres – 75009 PARIS - FRANCE • Tél : + 33 1 53 45 87 53 • Fax : + 33 1 42 61 72 56
www.ssvpglobal.org • E-mail : cgi.information@ozanet.org



Paris, November 2011

Dear Vincentian Brothers and Sisters,

We have pleasure in sending you an updated version of the Rule and Statutes of the Society. It is identical to the previously issued documents, except for the correction of some minor typing errors.

This document is composed of:

- **The Rule,**
- **The International Statutes,**
- **The Basic Requirements for drafting the Internal Statutes of Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils.**

Because of these minor corrections, any Superior/National Council that has yet to submit its Internal Statutes for CGI approval, should use this version.

Every Superior/National Council must print the Rule in full, as it is a complete statement of our spirituality and must, therefore, be made available to every member in the world. It is not mandatory to print the Commentary on the Rule, but this is highly recommended.

These texts are also available in the official languages from our website www.ssvpglobal.org, and can be downloaded from there. If one of these languages is suitable for you, such a download makes it unnecessary to type these documents, as a publisher will prefer to receive the document in electronic form, and this will avoid any errors in the printing.

Yours in the spirit of St Vincent and Blessed Frederic,

David Williams
Delegate for the Rule and Statutes, the Aggregations and Institutions

NEW RULE AND STATUTES

The presentation of the Rule of the Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in the world and of the International Statutes that govern its operations, approved during the Rome extraordinary General Meeting in October 2003, is a special moment in the life of Conferences.

During its one hundred and seventy years of existence, the Society has developed only three fundamental texts, including the present one. Obviously, two of them have had quite a lengthy lifespan.

For an institution such as ours, the Rule is always important. It is even more so that the Society involves its members only in conscience. The members have the obligation to abide by the Rule from the very moment they belong to the fraternal community present in the entire world.

Indeed, such a deeply Christian and Catholic organization, with a vocation to serve poor and marginal people, and all those who suffer, and whose service - stated by God Himself as being the way towards eternal life, "He will put the sheep on his right (...)." (Mt.25,37-46) - involves us only in conscience. It implicates all those among us who have wished to unite, for the past one hundred and seventy years, with the objective of serving each other, serving the poor, and expanding the Kingdom.

Within the Rule, there are five elements above all others that we should focus on: the need for prayer, individual and collective; our personal commitment through action; the brotherhood in which we must live; the universality of our commitment to serve the poor, and our ecclesial vocation.

Without prayer, it is impossible to understand the existence of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, of Conferences. In reality, the first Conference emerged at the beginning of the 19th century from a common prayer of a few youths in Paris, who wanted to convert their prayer into action. These youths used to a life of collective prayer, wanted to extend it through serving the poor, devoting themselves to the most needy. But they did it without forgetting to reinforce the need for prayer, which precedes any tangible action for the good of others, of those who suffer,

It is also quite difficult for one to understand service within Conferences if one does not accept the necessity to serve on a personal basis, by establishing contact with those who need us, in their own environment, wherever they feel the most confident. Since the beginning, Conferences "went" to the poor without waiting for them to come to them. In other words, and as the Rule comments, Vincentians seek to help the needy precisely where they feel the most at ease, even psychologically. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has sought so much this type of contact, where the poor live, that the concept of the "visit", as the expression of what is most intimate in our commitment, has become a classic among ourselves: the "home visit" to the poor, the "visit" has the expression of a meeting that is always personal and intimate among themselves and to those whom they want to serve.

In order to succeed, to achieve an intimate commitment and meeting with the poorest, it is necessary to first have a solid fraternal community within each one of our Conferences. If the Rule, as it states, calls upon us to meet through individual and collective prayer and to benefit from it, it nevertheless invites us to a brotherly relationship among brothers. How is it possible to love others, those whom we do not know, if we do not love each other? The Rule invites us to strengthen this brotherhood that was always predominant, not only in the actions of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, but also in their very existence.

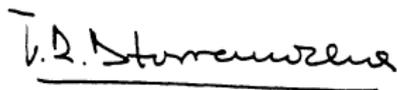
In a world increasingly open to communication and proximity, thanks to increasingly sophisticated means of communication, poverty cannot be felt anymore only in the manifestations that are closest to us. On the contrary, the phenomenon known as "globalization" must make us feel responsible for any type of poverty all over the world. We are called upon to fight against any kind of poverty we may encounter, we must feel and be responsible wherever it manifests itself, whomever it affects, and as far away as it may be. In reality, it should remind us that we must feel called upon to fight against suffering, and that the work of brothers in other regions is also our work.

Finally, we are part of the Church and we join it anywhere we are for our apostolate. The Rule reminds us to understand that whenever we approach any suffering person, whenever we contribute to alleviate suffering, and whenever we put balm on the wound of those injured by life, we pretend nothing else than to bring Christ and his Church's message of Love. We are aware of this extraordinary representation and of our responsibility in showing the Holy Church as being closer, more committed, and gentler. We are aware that in several places, the Church can be perceived as a whole and in its commitment only through the Society, through each Conference.

By presenting this new commented edition of the Rule and International Statutes, Council General calls upon all leaders of the Vincentian service to make them known as soon as possible and to put them at the disposal of each one of the members of the Society.

The Council General itself feels called to contribute to its spreading, and in the same way as it already did with the first Rule it gave us at the beginning of the XIX century, it has prepared this commented edition of the Rule and Statutes that we now present for the occasion of our General Assembly in Salamanca (Spain). Each article is accompanied by a brief commentary which shall help us understand it as well as facilitate explanation of the aspirations it presents.

May our Good Lord make each one of these commentaries useful for the Society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. R. Díaz-Torremocha", with a horizontal line underneath the name.

José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha
XIV President General

Paris, June 2005



RULE AND STATUTES OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

(With Commentary)

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I. PART

RULE

OF THE

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION

OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

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1. Origins of the Society and service to the poor

1.1 Origins

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a worldwide Christian community, founded in Paris in 1833, by a group of young Catholic lay people and an older person, who joined together to create the first Conference. The Society wishes to remember them all with gratitude, as they set an example of dedication to the poor and to the Church. From Le Taillandier, who received the first inspiration, to Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Devaux, Félix Clavé, all of them knew, in their humility, how to seek the wise advice and support of the one who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society, Emmanuel Bailly.

The Holy Spirit was undoubtedly present in all of them at the founding of the Society, fostering the charisms of each one. Among them, Blessed Frederic Ozanam was a radiant source of inspiration.

The Society has been Catholic from its origins. It remains an international Catholic voluntary organisation of lay people, men and women.

Commentary.-This first article seeks, in addition to making a firm declaration of its Christian and Catholic faith from its very origins, to make a hymn to the laity's capacity to honour the commitments acquired in Baptism. Those young people, whose names are quoted for the first time in our Rule, were more than one hundred years ahead of their time concerning the obligation of the laity to extend the Kingdom, which the Second Vatican Council would later emphasise.

The Holy Spirit was also present in the first Conference as a group, not only in each individual, as the bond of their unity, ensuring that the various charisms they were given were precisely those necessary for the Conference to achieve the mission willed for it by God. It is the founders' response to the Holy Spirit's inspiration, which enables the Society to help us, in our time, to grow every day, as human beings and spiritually, in devotion to the poor.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF OUR SERVICE

1.2 The Vincentian Vocation

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.

Commentary.-Belonging to a Conference is a vocation in itself: a vocation of personal contact with Christ in the Poor. The predominant feature of this contact must always be compassion and the will to free people from their burdens: an effort to build the coming Kingdom. Personal contact with the suffering is the most obvious distinctive characteristic of the Vincentian ministry. We bring unconditional love to the poor and seek to love in the way Jesus loved, because "the first vocation of the Christian is to follow Jesus" (CCC 2232).

"Vincentians serve in hope"

What air is to the lungs, so is hope to the human spirit. We have a real hope that our work will make a difference, both in the lives of those we visit and in a mysterious way, in the world at large. If we go through difficulties, we remember that "(hope) affords us joy even under trial" (CCC1820).

1.3 Any form of personal help...

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.

Commentary

This is also one of the basic distinctive characteristics of the Conferences: any form of help. From its origins, the Society has claimed that the freedom of action of each Conference makes it possible to adapt to the specific needs of those it visits, serving through personal contact.

"promotes .. personal integrity"

"True development concerns the whole man. It is concerned with increasing each person's ability to respond to his vocation and hence to God's call" (cf. CA 29) (CCC 2461).

Poor is the one who has no option to choose.

1.4... to anyone in need

The Society serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions.

Commentary

Members do not judge. To judge is reserved to God who sees deep into every person's heart. We serve, considering what each person needs, in keeping with what they themselves consider they lack, which we will not always understand. Vincentians do not impose: they serve in hope and wish to be able to influence by the example of their lives. "Who does not know that among the poor, very often, emotional and spiritual suffering is more acute than material poverty? What saddens them most is that there should not be a friendly hand holding theirs, nor a heart beating with theirs" (Introduction to the Manual 1845).

We should avoid the danger of forgetting those closest to us: our family, other members and friends. There is the danger that, when attending the poor, we become insensitive towards the pain of those nearest to us.

1.5 To Seek Out the Poor

Vincentians strive to seek out and find those in need and the forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity.

Commentary

*This article implies a positive initiative to seek and find the poor, rather than being content with the list of people we currently help. There is a clear need to visit "**the forgotten**". We should not expect that the poor will come to us. On the contrary, it is we who should go to encounter them and devote ourselves to share their poverty and their sorrow. Vincentians should always retain their capacity to imagine and observe, working continuously to discover the new forms of suffering that threaten people at every moment.*

1.6 Adaptation to a Changing World

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.

Commentary .-"To give priority to the poorest of the poor"

Indeed, the Conferences in their daily work must give priority to the poorest of the poor. To them, precisely to them, they have to bring comfort, to reach out and share their suffering. (See 1.5 and Commentary). Each Conference and each member, must not forget the difficulty of identifying who are the poorest of the poor. Sometimes, as stated elsewhere, not only financial poverty but emotional and spiritual suffering may result in people being rejected and becoming isolated.

OUR PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POOR

1.7 Prayer Before Personal Encounters or Visits

Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for the peace and joy of Christ.

Commentary

We are unable to achieve anything of eternal value on our own, without the assistance of God Himself (Jn 15:5). Prayer, individual and communal, is a fundamental need when the Conferences and each Vincentian undertake any action. The Society's logo: "serviens in spe", always reminds us of the need for hope in our service: a service impossible without deep prayer and reflection, that should be fostered by the community that each Conference is.

The tradition in the Society, established by the first Conferences, shows us the great value of the "Visit before the visit", prior to personal contact: the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the House of God where, with a humble attitude, we will put ourselves at his disposal in order to be his eyes, his hands and his understanding in the subsequent contact with the poor. If that is

not always possible, some moments of inner recollection are absolutely necessary: recollection to ask the Holy Spirit for his gifts: Wisdom to understand the situation, its priorities and the deeper needs; Fortitude to persevere, not to give up; Counsel to tackle the problem appropriately; Piety to feel, to feel compassion, which is nothing other than feeling what the other feels; Reverence and awe of God to visit with humility, with the humility that recognises we are ourselves finite human beings who beseech Providence for those who are our brothers and sisters. Children of God and Temples of the Holy Spirit, they and we are, therefore, equal in dignity no matter what distress they feel or how much misery surrounds them.

1.8 Reverence for the poor

Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God's image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ.

Members observe the utmost confidentiality in the provision of material and any other type of support.

Commentary

This joy should not be tarnished by the pain caused in us by the very suffering of the friend in need whom we are trying to comfort. Cheerfulness is a Christian characteristic and each Vincentian should nurture it. Vincentians respect the views and aspirations of each of the human beings in need whom they encounter. It is their needs, their longings we seek to meet. Sometimes, they will even be far away from our own scale of values; from our scale of needs. Only gentleness and example will be useful to bring about a change; never any imposition. "Another point that also deserves our attention is the discretion that should accompany zeal for the salvation of souls. Fervour is not always holy, nor is it always inspired by God. Not every moment is appropriate for new ideas and Christian teachings to penetrate hearts; it is necessary to wait for God's time and to be patient, as He himself is" (Rule, 1835, PC)

1.9 Empathy

Vincentians endeavour to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve. Rather, they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.

Commentary

Sharing is not possible without friendship. The extension of the Kingdom is not possible unless we are aware of our own frailty. Let us be thankful for our faith; for the call we receive; for having the opportunity of becoming close to Christ in the poor we serve; for being able to avoid judging; for being always available to attend to our brothers' needs. "...the member mixes his tears with those of the poor and with patience and love he makes Christian friendship spring up in that heart." (Introduction to the Manual, 1845).

1.10 Promotion of self-sufficiency

Vincentians endeavour to help the poor to help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community.

Commentary

Conferences do not wish poverty to exist. For this reason, it is implied that they fight against this unjust situation. Nevertheless, the poor should be the ones to find their own path. We, Vincentians, will accompany them wherever they wish to go. Promoting self-sufficiency and the awareness by those who suffer, that they have the ability to overcome suffering, is a basic task which can never be given up by Vincentians.

The ultimate empowerment is for the poor to gain the confidence and the skills to be able to forge and change the destiny of their local community (See 7.9).

1.11 Concerns for deeper needs and spirituality

Vincentians are sincerely concerned with the deeper needs and the spiritual well-being of those they help, always observing a profound respect for their conscience and the faith they believe in, listening and understanding with their hearts, beyond both words and appearances.

Vincentians serve in hope. They in discovering the spirit of prayer in the poor, for in the silence, the poor can perceive God's Plan for every person.

The acceptance of God's Plan leads each one to nurture the seeds of love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace in themselves, their families and all those whose lives they touch. Vincentians are privileged to foster these signs of the presence of Risen Christ in the poor and among themselves.

Commentary

We encourage them to improve their life and we try to show them the existence of a different kind of life and spiritual values, always respecting their own values.

"profound respect" :

That does not mean complicity or silence when we witness situations that are intrinsically perverse or sinful. Respect for the Gospel obliges us to state, without imposition, without contempt, our own moral vision of the world, even when this is opposite to the values of the poor whom we are trying to serve. The Vincentian, despite a deep respect for the decisions of the poor person, cannot give up proclaiming the Word of Life. He cannot give up sharing with others the best of himself: his faith. "Let us avoid arguments with the poor, not being offended if they do not accept our advice nor try to oblige them to accept it with an air of authority: let us be satisfied with suggesting to them the pattern of behaviour that seems good to us, and having encouraged them to follow it, leave it to God to enable our words to bear fruit, if this is His Holy Will" (Rule, 1835, PR).

On the other hand, we cannot and we should not forget that very often when people call poverty God's will, it is not his will at all, but is only the product of our deficiencies when distributing the Earth's resources; the result of not loving each other as Christ Himself taught us to do.

"signs of the presence of the Risen Christ"

In the commentary on 1.8, the focus is on seeing "the Suffering Christ" in the sufferings of the people we visit.

In 1.11, Vincentians are encouraged to see the "signs of the presence of the Risen Christ" in the virtues of those we visit, especially when there has been a transformation of an attitude or of actions, which is a sure sign of grace, and a confirmation that "Christians ... participate in the life of the Risen Lord" (CCC1694).

1.12 Gratitude to those we visit

Vincentians never forget the many blessings they receive from those they visit. They recognise that the fruit of their labours springs, not from themselves, but especially from God and from the poor they serve.

Commentary

Many Conferences, at the end of their meetings, thank God for the good they receive from those who suffer. It is a great truth that, in our contact with the poor, we receive much more than we can bring them with our poor donations. Only the Lord's help, only His assistance obtained through deep prayer, individual and communal, can make us useful to those we try to serve. "Many times, the member gains more benefit himself from what he hears than is produced by what he says" (F. Lallier, circular to the Conferences, August 1837)

2. Vincentian Spirituality & Vocation

Faith in Christ and the Life of Grace

"Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5,1-2).

2.1 Love in Union with Christ

Convinced of the truth of the Apostle St. Paul's words, Vincentians seek to draw closer to Christ. They hope that someday it will be no longer they who love, but Christ who loves through them (Gal 2,20 "... I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God"), and that even now, in their caring, the poor may catch a glimpse of God's great love for them.

Commentary.-Our starting point is the conviction that the Lord is infinitely good, he who has given us the gift of salvation through His sacrifice. What can we do to repay, with all our imperfections, such devotion from God Himself? We can only try to be a pale reflection of His Love, trying to grow every day in that Love for all people which He taught us. We know that we will only manage to do so if every one of us, day by day, at every moment, tries to discover in each of our actions, what Our Lord himself would do in the specific situation with which we are

faced. For this, it is necessary to know and pray the scriptures, where we find: "The Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in my name, .. will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I (Jesus) have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

2.2 The journey together towards holiness

Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness, because true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love, which is central to their vocation and the source of its fruitfulness. They aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ and to deepen their own faith and fidelity.

Vincentians are aware of their own brokenness and need for God's grace. They seek His glory, not their own. Their ideal is to help relieve suffering for love alone, without thinking of any reward or advantage for themselves.

They draw nearer to Christ, serving Him in the poor and one another. They grow more perfect in love by expressing compassionate and tender love to the poor and one another.

Therefore, their journey together towards holiness is primarily made through:

- **Visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live. Vincentians assume the needs of the poor as their own.**
- **Attending the meeting of the Conference or Council, where shared fraternal spirituality is a source of inspiration.**
- **Promoting a life of prayer and reflection, both at the individual and community level, sharing with their fellow members. Meditating on their Vincentian experiences offers them internal spiritual knowledge of themselves, others and the goodness of God.**
- **Transforming their concern into action and their compassion into practical and effective love**

Their journey together towards holiness will be all the more fruitful if the members' personal lives are characterised by prayer, meditation on the Holy Scriptures and other inspirational texts and devotion to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary, whose protection we have always sought, and to the teachings of the Church.

Commentary

"journey together". This is, without doubt, one of the most fundamental articles in the Rule. It has to be read very slowly, meditated upon deep in our heart and shared with our fellow members. We are not walking alone. We are not called to be saved alone. Each member walks next to his brothers and sisters towards perfection. He is responsible for his own actions and, when appropriate, for the example and help he gives to his brothers and sisters. Nothing good is achieved outside the Conference, if the members do not love one another. No service to the poor is guaranteed if we, the members, are not aware of the service we owe to each

other. The ignition of our love in the Conference is the fuel that will allow us, later, to devote ourselves to those who suffer. No one can give what he does not have.

"true holiness is perfect union with Christ and the perfection of love"

This definition of holiness comes from Vatican II. "We will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, holiness," (LG 50) which is "expressed by those who .. strive for the perfection of charity" (LG39). The call to become someone who radiates perfect love is nothing less than a call to sanctity. 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification' (1Th 4:3; Eph 1:4) Vincentians are called to become saints!

2.3 Prayer in Union with Christ

In every Conference throughout the world and in their personal lives, Vincentians raise their prayers to God, united with the prayer of Christ, on behalf of one another and their masters the poor, whose suffering they wish to share.

Commentary.-Alone, we cannot achieve anything of eternal value. The members' prayer, individual and communal, ensures our union with Christ and enables us to spread His Love. In this prayer, we should feel linked to the Holy Church's prayer and listen to what those who suffer have to teach us. They are undoubtedly our masters, who can teach us best the way of self-denial and of generous devotion. St. Vincent said: "Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything." He proclaims that prayer is a "fountain of youth" which invigorates us.

2.4 The Spirituality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

The spirituality of one of its founders inspires Vincentians profoundly. The Blessed Frederic Ozanam:

- **Sought to renew faith, among all people, in Christ and in the civilising effect of the teachings of the Church through all time.**
- **Envisioned the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world.**
- **Attained holiness as a layman through living the Gospel fully in all aspects of his life.**
- **Had a passion for truth, democracy and education.**

Commentary.

The Conferences should take advantage of the teachings of one of our founders, maybe the most important one for Vincentian spirituality, and whose life of perfection has been acknowledged by the Holy Church. A layman, a family man, model husband, professional man and friend. We should not miss the enlightenment that our Lord gave us with the presence of Frederic Ozanam.

"Sought to renew faith ...in Christ"

Ozanam's words and example brought others to Christ. Vincentians are called to proclaim the Good News in word and deed (see Commentary to 1.11).

"a network of charity encircling the world"

Members share in this aspiration of Ozanam by contributing to Council General. One of its main functions is to help the Society in all nations to start new Conferences and Councils, providing financial help, volunteers and always, prayer (see Rule 4.1.2).

2.5 The Spirituality of St. Vincent

Having been placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul by the founding members, members of the Society are inspired by his spirituality, manifest in his attitudes, his thoughts, his example and his words.

For Vincentians, the key aspects of St. Vincent's spirituality are:

- **To love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms;**
- **To see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ;**
- **To share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ the Evangeliser and Servant of the poor;**
- **To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.**

Commentary

The founders chose St. Vincent de Paul as patron saint and life model: the great saint of Charity. How could we forget him? How could we not know his works in depth and try to follow in his footsteps? Vincent's holy audacity and creativity should be a permanent example for Vincentians when facing the difficulties that are sometimes entailed in helping people in need. Let us be imaginative in assisting them. Let us dream of new solutions that allow us to help them rise above their current condition. Let us dream as Vincent did, when he set up the Daughters of Charity, and sent them worldwide, without being bound to a convent. They were obliged only to serve the poor, in whom they could find Christ.

"To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit"

Through this text and those about charisms (1.1, 3.11) and prayer (1.7, 3.9), the Rule is calling on the Society to become more and more open to the spiritual light and energy of the Holy Spirit. We will not experience the 'more abundant life' Jesus came to give (cf. Jn 10:10), unless we are open to the 'release of the Holy Spirit', an expression of the Holy Spirit which will frequently become manifest in modest gifts not normally considered to be extraordinary graces. Nevertheless, this intervention and these modest and simple gifts will greatly enhance our service of the poor.

2.5.1 Essential virtues

Vincentians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:

- **Simplicity – frankness, integrity, genuineness.**
- **Humility – accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts talents and charisms, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.**

- **Gentleness – friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, tenderness and patience in our relationship with others.**
- **Selflessness – dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.**
- **Zeal – a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.**

Commentary

Read these words slowly. These virtues reveal the essence of what a Vincentian should be and how we should work. Is this difficult? Everything is possible with Love, in the encounter with God. "...studying St. Vincent de Paul's most intimate actions and discovering the secrets of his thought, they know that, if he deserves the glorious title of Father of the poor, it is because he learned how to love them through loving our Lord Jesus Christ. If he provided them with bodily care, likely to elevate the deprived instead of humiliating them, it is because he honoured them as images and brothers of his Divine Master ... he considered himself as a gentle instrument of the Divine Providence, which he wanted to obey, but never to run ahead of, because he preferred that the good be done by others rather than by himself. He only appeared when the other workers left the field. After having worked hard with his arms and the sweat of his brow, his deep humility made him consider that he did nothing and that he was a useless servant." (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Manual 1845)

2.6 A vocation for every moment of our lives

The Vincentian vocation affects all aspects of members' daily lives, making them more sensitive and caring in their family, work and leisure activities. Vincentians are available for work in the Conferences only after fulfilling their family and professional duties.

Commentary.-We follow Christ as Vincentians, at every moment and in every situation of our life. Our belonging to a Conference should not be a separate department of our lives. On the contrary: our experience in the Conference and in the contact with the suffering, our prayer, individual and communal, should pervade all our life. Not only for a short time or one day a week: our whole life: as parents, as sons and daughters, as working people and professionals, as friends. We should strive to ensure that everything is presided over by the love we have for Christ.

"making them more sensitive and caring"

Vincentians should become known more and more as people who listen. This is how they will be viewed by their next-door neighbours, their colleagues at work and by anyone with whom they come into contact. Listening is another name for love.

3. Members, Conferences, Councils – Communities of Faith & Love

3.1 Membership

The Society is open to all those who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbour in need. (See Article 6.4 of the Rule).

Commentary.-Open to everyone. We do not seek to be closed and isolated groups. On the contrary: only if we grow is there evidence that we are really giving witness and a witness that inspires love. Failure to attract new members should always be observed as an indication that something is wrong within the Conference. It could be a symptom that we are asleep; that we are no longer in touch with the needs that the society we serve regards as fundamental."... let us always move ahead and keep developing our modest Works; let us hope that every year a new idea springs up in us, a new improvement and let us, thereby, avoid the apathy which is easily contented with what has already been done" (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Manual 1845)

3.2 Equality

The Society, in each of its Conferences (the primary basic unit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), makes no distinction regarding gender, wealth, occupation, social status or ethnic origin.

Commentary.-Does our Lord make distinctions? We do not aim at making them either. The "Gentile and the Jew" are the same. Men and women, the learned and the illiterate, the white and the black, everybody is the same in the Conferences, so far as they seek to serve God by devoting themselves to the poor in the community of the Conference. "... for all those who wish to do good, it is pleasant and charming to see men from all social levels, positions, views and ages, united by the sacred bond of faith, learning the lessons of charity...." (Introduction to the Manual, 1845)

3.3 Meetings of the Vincentian members

The members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide Community of Vincentian friends.

Commentary

"a worldwide community of friends"

It is recommended here that we re-read the commentary to 2.2. Very little is possible without the fellow members' love for one another. First, in their own Conference, later feeling they are

members of a single immense Conference that includes all the members worldwide. "The meeting day was a celebration, because it was a reunion of those who had lived apart during the week." (Introduction to the Manual 1845) "Following faithfully the advice of our Divine Master and of his beloved apostle John, we will love each other. We will love one another now and for ever, far and near, from one Conference to another, from town to town, from nation to nation. This deep friendship will enable us to bear with each other's failings." (Rule, 1835, PC)

Members who do not live up to their vocation

"We will never believe an evil report of a brother but with great sorrow, and when we cannot reject the evidence of facts. Then, in order to conform ourselves to the will of Him who has confided to each one the care of his neighbour, in a spirit of charity, and with all the kindness and warmth of sincere friendship, we will ourselves counsel our failing, or fallen, brother or cause advice to be conveyed to him; we will help him to become stronger in good or to get up from his fall." (Rule, 1835, PC)

"with Christ in the midst of them" Christ is in the midst when we are gathered "in his name," i.e. sharing the mind and heart of Christ, when love is present and the Conference is open to all the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see 2.5). Ozanam experienced all this in the first Conference and wrote: "God who draws the clouds together to scatter the lightning, also draws souls together to radiate love", implying an immense amplification of love, far beyond that which could be achieved by all the members as separate individuals.

3.3.1 Frequency of the meetings

The Conferences meet regularly and consistently, usually weekly, but at least every fortnight.

Commentary.-Friends wish to see each other frequently; the poor need us urgently. This article says that we should meet at least once a fortnight. But we strongly recommend that, whenever possible, a week would be the longest gap before meeting to talk about all the issues - concerning the poor, and concerning God. "Isolated virtues wither easily; together and intertwined they form immortal wreaths" (Blessed Frederic Ozanam, letter from Lyon to the Conferences of Paris, 1838).

3.4 Fraternity and simplicity

Meetings are held in a spirit of fraternity, simplicity and Christian joy.

Re-read the commentaries on 2.5 and to 2.5.1 How can it be otherwise? Everything has been given to us. Nothing belongs to us: simplicity is required. "Our mutual kindness should be warm and without limits" (Rule, 1835, PR). "To have friends means to live twice" (F. Lallier, circular letter 1 March 1837)

3.5 Preserving the spirit

Members of all ages strive to preserve the spirit of youth, which is characterised by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination. They are willing to make sacrifices and take risks for the benefit of the poor wherever they may be: by sharing their discomfort, needs, and sorrows and defending their rights.

Commentary.-We have already written concerning 2.5, about the need to dream. Youth is the period with a capacity for "daydreaming". Let us all be young and never lose the capacity to be surprised, by trying to discover new ways in the service required by the poor: seriously! Suffering is not something that we can accept without trying to eradicate it: always with charity, but without forgetting clarity.

People only become old when they lose the ability to teach or to learn. Let us not become old in the service of the poor (see also 1.9, 2.2, and 2.3).

3.6 Councils

Conferences are grouped under various levels of Councils.

Councils exist to serve all the Conferences they coordinate. They help the Conferences to develop their spiritual life, to intensify their service and to diversify their activities so that they may always be responsive to the needs of those who suffer.

Councils at appropriate levels are particularly called to: create new Conferences, to help existing Conferences to expand, to promote Special Works, to prepare training courses and encourage Vincentians to attend them, to foster interest in cooperation with the Vincentian Family, to promote cooperation with other organisations and Institutions, to develop friendship between members in the same area, to provide communication to and from Conferences and higher Councils. In summary, to promote the sense of belonging to a Society which encircles the world.

Commentary.-Councils have an enormous importance in intensifying the Conferences' life and development. This article should be read carefully. Councils exist in order to serve, and the required service is perfectly explicit in the article. Let the Councils be diligent in their task and let the Conferences value the Councils' effort to serve; "...if there is a Council at their service, this is because the highest trust prevails among us and no one wants to rule over the rest. One heart and one soul: cor unum et anima una" (Introduction to the S.S.V.P. Manual, 1845).

3.7 Young members

Young members keep the Society young. They see with new eyes and often look far ahead. The Society works constantly to form Youth Conferences and welcomes young members into all Conferences. Their experience in a community of faith and love and their exposure to poverty deepen their spirituality, spur them to action and help them to grow as human beings. The senior members assume the responsibility of assisting them along their path of training, respecting their personal choices and their aspirations of Vincentian service.

Commentary.-What a great mission for the senior members: to serve the youngest ones! It is not about leading them. It is not about commanding them. It is about serving them, being useful to them on the road they are beginning to travel – their own life - and which should be discovered by them with the support, example and humility of the senior members: just as it was when we were founded. Bailly, the first President General, was close to the young members, who dreamed of and desired the foundation of the Conferences. It was his example,

his good work that convinced the students to join the first Conference. Let us do the same. Let us be at their disposal; making clear our opinion regarding their doubts and their aspirations but allowing them to find their own way.

3.8 Aggregation and Institution of Conferences and Councils

The visible unifying link within the Society is the Aggregation of the Conferences and the Institution of the Councils declared by the Council General.

Commentary.-We are a "worldwide Christian community", says the first article in the Rule. Incorporation into the union of that universal fraternal community which is the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, is called Aggregation for the Conferences and Institution for the Councils.

3.9 Subsidiarity and freedom of action

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, exempted from an 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, "Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 3,1).

Commentary.-A certain authority and certain functioning rules are, undoubtedly, necessary for a worldwide organisation. But even more important, the principle of Subsidiarity has been enjoyed by the Conferences from their beginning. Where are the needs of the suffering best known? In the local area. Therefore, all Conferences have total freedom to serve the deprived as they think best, within the spirit of the Rule.

But this does not mean that Conferences and Councils are autonomous in all ways. Conferences and Councils have an obligation to comply with civil law, to adhere to the Rule and Statutes of the Society, and to the policies and strategies of the National Council. It is also essential for the good name and transparency of the Society that National Councils require adherence to good but simple accounting and auditing practices, including, if appropriate, central banking and consolidated accounts for the entire Society.

3.10 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.

Commentary

"consultation". *Is anybody cleverer or holier than the other members? We cannot be sure through whom the Holy Spirit will speak. Are we sure that we, like God, can see deep into the heart of each person? Obviously not. Let us consult, let us comment, with charity and clarity, about all the issues. Light will frequently arise from the one of whom we expect the least. The Lord will enlighten whoever He wishes. A dominating leader will de-motivate some people, be a source of conflict and ultimately will harm the Society.*

"consensus". *Let us take our decisions after listening to each other. 'Consensus' implies general approval with no one feeling strongly enough to continue advocating an alternative view.*

3.11 Presidents as servant leaders

Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavour to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charisms of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.

Commentary.-What is the Mission of the Presidents? To serve. It is as simple as that. As the President is, so is the Conference. Our tradition says that usually Conferences are what their Presidents are. This is not because they preside over them, nor because of what they demand, nor because of what they know. It is because of what they are able to elicit from each one of the members by listening to them, encouraging them and by accompanying them, by being concerned about them, all to achieve better service of the poor. Presidents are the key figure in the Conferences but usually this will not be obvious because of their humility. "(The President) is marked out to be the servant of the rest, to lead and direct Christian societies. He combines in himself the necessary knowledge and a sincere practice of his religion with a great spirit of prudence and conciliation. prudens est, regat nos" (E. Bailly, 1st President General, Circular Letter, 1 March 1844). A servant leader will ideally have that deep faith which is a silent influence for good.

3.12 Formation of members

It is essential that the Society continually promote the formation and training of its members and Officers, in order to deepen their knowledge of the Society and their spirituality, improve the sensitivity, quality and efficiency of their service to the poor and help them be aware of the benefits, resources and opportunities that are available for the poor. The Society also offers members higher training in order to better help to raise the cultural and social level of those who request this support.

Commentary.-On-going training is a requirement in the life of each Conference. Continuous social changes, new legislation, new resources that become available, demand from each Vincentian the effort to keep up and constantly to enhance his formation. It is not possible to dispense with this almost daily "updating", that enables us better to serve those who suffer. "Is it not true that we must study steadily, if we want to carry out our works successfully?" (Introduction to the Manual, 1845)

"essential" is a strong word which implies that every National Council should develop a programme of formation and training, either alone or with the support of the rest of the Society.

3.13 The spirit of poverty and encouragement

Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Adviser is very important.

Commentary.-Each Conference, whenever possible, aspires to enrich itself with the presence of a priest who encourages the members towards a life more and more perfect and devoted. But neither does a Conference forget the ultimate responsibility of the laity in the Conferences. This does not diminish the importance of the priest's contribution among us. On the contrary, we owe him the highest respect and consideration, and give his views special weight in matters of faith or morals. But this should never be the excuse for us to neglect or to leave in his hands the most serious decisions affecting our Vincentian work. The responsibility we acquire in Baptism demands from us our own commitment in matters regarding the poor entrusted to our care.

3.14 The use of money and property for the poor

Vincentians should never forget that giving love, talents and time is more important than giving money.

Nevertheless, the Society uses money and property to help relieve the suffering of those in need. 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 organisations, except occasionally for other branches of the Vincentian Family, save under exceptional circumstances.

Commentary.-An old member used to call money, even though it was necessary, "the devil's dung". It should be used properly, of course, not in any way hoarded. We should firmly believe that God will provide everything we need, and instead of hoarding it in excess, the Conference should put it at the disposal of other Conferences having needs but inadequate resources. Sometimes, there can be situations of real scandal, due to the lack of a commitment to share. This is an issue about which each Conference should think seriously.

3.15 Communication

The vitality of the Society's network of charity depends on the regular and rapid exchange of news and information. Such communication broadens the members' horizon and enhances the interest of members in the experiences and challenges of their brothers and sisters throughout the world. The Vincentian response to communication is a willingness to learn and a desire to help.

Commentary.-Without communication, we simply do not exist as an interdependent Society. It is one of the most frequent omissions committed by the Conferences. How can we not tell others of the things we do which we find makes it easier to serve and to tackle a specific poverty? How can we not pay attention to those things discovered by others? How can we properly serve the poor without exchanging experiences among us? Without telling what we do, is it possible to improve and to attract resources to assist the poor? Any country or Council publishing any kind of Magazine about the Society, should send it to other Vincentian nations and to the General Council itself, in order to contribute to this effort of communication.

4. Relationships Within The Vincentian & Catholic Network of Charity

4.1 Twinning

Conferences and Councils help others in need, both at the national and international level. This is one of the activities most cherished by the Society. The awareness of acute poverty in a great number of countries and the Vincentian preferential option for the poor spurs Conferences and Councils to assist others with less resources or in particular situations.

This direct link between two Conferences or Councils, consisting of sharing prayer, a profound friendship and material resources, is called Twinning. This activity contributes to world peace and to understanding and cultural exchange among peoples.

Commentary.-Could a Christian, seeing another member of his community in the most absolute poverty, refuse to reach out to help? The negative answer, arising from faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, compels us to be very attentive in providing help to the Conferences who need it. The amount sent every year by Vincentians to other poorer Vincentians in order to help them in their task, is huge. It cannot be otherwise, if we really understand the challenge of a globalised poverty, for the alleviation of which we are all responsible. The Conferences do not limit themselves to the care of poverty nearby. On the contrary, those Conferences which really feel the true nature of their mission, are always ready to send the necessary assistance so that members in other parts of the world with smaller economic resources, will be able to help the most deprived to release themselves from poverty. This is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful tokens of selfless love: to help the poor whom we only see with the eyes of faith through the work of other members in remote places of the world.

4.1.1 Prayer as the basis of friendship

Twinning promotes spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help. Funds and other material resources can be provided to enable a Conference or Council to help local families. Financial, technical, medical and educational support is given to projects which are suggested by the Society locally and which encourage self-sufficiency. Even more important is support given through prayer, as well as through mutual communication regarding what has been accomplished

and what is happening among Vincentians in each area, including news about persons and families.

Commentary.-If any kind of economic help is necessary, so is spiritual help through prayer. None of us is so poor that we cannot help someone else, and this applies even more to prayer, to offering small personal sacrifices, to help fellow members with whom we are not acquainted. We do not know them, but we feel linked to them by the universal work of bringing God's Love to all people.

4.1.2 Vincentians' personal commitment

The Society urges the Vincentians to consider undertaking a personal commitment for a particular period of time to work with Vincentians in other countries or to spread Conferences.

Commentary.-Some Vincentians, when they find the time and the capacity, volunteer to bring their experience and knowledge to other places in the world. They are called "Vincentians for Peace". These groups of the Society's members, of different ages, commit themselves for a specific period of time, either to help the Conferences in general, or to work on specific projects helping to develop certain skills in other countries. This is a sort of Twinning where the donation generously offered is personal experience and devotion.

4.2 Emergency assistance

When disasters, war or major accidents occur, the Society launches emergency initiatives on the spot and provides funds for the local Society to help victims.

Commentary.-The Society, through the Council General, always has bank accounts containing Emergency Aid Funds. For Conferences and Councils worldwide there is always a special responsibility to contribute to these accounts so that, faced with unforeseen situations of distress, the Council General, on behalf of the whole Society, can send the necessary assistance to the Conferences or Councils needing it. The action of Conferences in such emergency situations will always be to help the poor when larger organisations are not able to meet their individual needs.

4.3 The Vincentian Family

Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help, form a single family. Gratefully remembering the support and encouragement the first Conference received from Blessed Rosalie Rendu, the Society maintains and develops close relationships with other branches of the Vincentian family, while preserving its identity. It cooperates with them in spiritual development and common projects, as well as with the Church's charitable pastoral initiatives at every level, whenever this may be mutually enriching and useful to those who suffer.

Commentary.-True to the wishes of the founders, the Conferences do not forget the inspiration of Vincent de Paul (Rule 2.5; 2.5.1). That inspiration leads us to share our efforts and challenges with the ecclesiastical institutions which share the spirituality of the Saint of Charity. With them, (The Daughters of Charity, Congregation of the Mission, Religious of Saint Vincent, International Association of Charity, Vincentian Marian Youth and MISEVI -Vincentian lay missionaries -, among others), we strive to serve the poor better by a coordination between consecrated and lay persons, which is always so necessary in the life of Holy Church.

Conferences do not forget the one who undoubtedly can be called our first Spiritual Adviser: the Blessed Rosalie Rendu, who knew how to stand by our young founders in the beginning, with her advice and her example, afterwards letting them walk on their own, in response to their lay vocation. She always remained at their disposal for everything they could need from her. She was an example of a mother who dreamed of the formal and responsible independence of those children who sought her help in the first moments of their journey.

5. Relationship with the Church Hierarchy

5.1 A close relationship

Faithful to the clear intentions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the Society has a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Respect of the members for the hierarchy provides the foundation for harmonious reciprocal cooperation.

Commentary.-Being part of a lay Society which takes seriously its responsibilities within the Church, the Conferences strive to maintain an absolute respect and love towards the Holy Church's hierarchy. The Society strives to scrupulously respect the Hierarchy's voice in everything that concerns it, whether from the Parish, the Diocese or the Holy See. The process is reciprocal. Canon law says, "(The laity) have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church" (Canon 212.3). The Society also bears in mind that "associations and movements need to work in full harmony within both the universal Church" (NMI 46) and the dioceses.

5.2 Autonomy

The Society is legally autonomous as to its existence, constitution, organisation, rules, activities and internal government. Members freely choose their own officers and manage the Society's activities and assets with full autonomy, in accordance with their own Statutes and the legislation in effect in each country.

Commentary.-The Society, usually a civil institution, legally constituted in most of the countries, is free in all its actions and does not need the formal authorization of any entity to develop its activities. The Society's autonomy has been recognised on many occasions by the Holy See, in particular in the decision dated 13th November 1920.

5.3 Moral recognition

The Society recognizes the right and duty of the Diocesan Bishop to confirm that none of its activities is contrary to Catholic faith or morals. The Society, whenever possible, informs the diocesan bishops of its activities annually, as a sign of ecclesial communion.

Commentary.-The Conferences, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, whose members wish to be faithful children of the Holy Church, acknowledge that it is each Diocese's Bishop with whom it should cooperate in the Diocesan Pastoral social welfare initiatives that the Bishop considers appropriate and which foster person-to-person contact with the poor. In particular, it recognizes the Bishop's competence to confirm that the Society's activities in his Diocese are in keeping with Catholic faith and morals. "Let us never do anything new without having received the blessing of the Hierarchy at its different levels. Neither will we ever undertake any new and important work within an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, without consulting him who is at the head of it. We will do nothing in opposition to spiritual authority" (Rule 1835, PC)

6. Ecumenical & inter-Faith relationships

6.1 Every member should foster ecumenism

Each Vincentian should seek to deepen a personal commitment to ecumenism and to cooperation in works of charity and justice as a contribution towards the achievement of that full and visible unity of the Church for which Christ prayed, "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21).

Commentary.-The Society, each Conference, even each Vincentian, does not forget the requirements of ecumenism as stated by the Holy Church. It is not possible to make this commitment as a duty, following a 'rule'. "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from newness of attitudes (cf. Eph 4:23), from self-denial and un-stinted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow toward maturity (UR 7). It is prayer to the Holy Spirit which will open us to this change of heart (cf. CCC 1108).

"that the world may believe" - "Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature" (UUS 6). "Those belong to (the ecumenical movement) who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour, doing this not merely as individuals but also as corporate bodies." (UR1)

6.2 The Society is committed to ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation

Following the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul recognizes, accepts and encourages the call to ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation which arise from its charitable activity. It is prepared to

participate in the Church's ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives within each country, in harmony with the diocesan bishop.

Commentary.-Being aware of this ecclesiastical requirement, the Society, everywhere in the world, abides by the guidelines of each Diocese. Each Conference understands that the Catholic response in each area should be characterised by harmony and, therefore, prior to any action in this delicate field, it listens to and acts in keeping with the indications of the local bishop.

If this cooperation with people of other denominations is to be a witness to an unbelieving society, it is important that the public should observe an easy friendship and trust, and a oneness that is a reflection of the oneness of love, knowledge, will and mission at the heart of the Trinity.

6.3 The adoption of practical initiatives

Conferences and Councils should establish a dialogue with their counterparts in other Christian churches or ecclesial communities and other faiths, with regard to cooperation in charitable work, wherever this is appropriate.

Commentary.-There are various circumstances in which the Conferences can be established in so many places around the world. The principle of Subsidiarity (refer to Rule 3.9), allows the different Conferences and Councils to decide locally with whom to cooperate in their service of the poor. Prudence will indicate on each occasion what advice to seek before commencing this cooperation, which must always be in keeping with the spirit of the Society (Rule 6.7).

6.4 Ecumenical and Inter-Faith membership

In some countries, circumstances may make it desirable to accept as members Christians of other confessions or people of other faiths who sincerely respect and accept the Society's identity and its principles insofar as differences of faith allow. The Episcopal Conference should be consulted.

Commentary.-The world is big and many people feel the call to help the poor. The Conferences must be open to admit them. Having said that, the Society cannot forget that, in addition to trying to help people in need, those who suffer, each Conference is part of a worldwide Catholic community. The members who feel called to admit people of other beliefs must ensure they understand that whilst we will always have the utmost respect for the faith and conscience of such members, we will always preserve those prayers and other spiritual practices which are fundamental to the Catholic ethos of the Society. To protect ourselves from any possible danger to our ethos, the Rule underlines the need to consult the local Episcopal Conference. Let us submit to its criteria; that will always be good for the peace of our souls. (See also 3.1)

6.5 Preserving the Catholic credo and ethos

The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must be preserved. The President, Vice-President and Spiritual Adviser should, therefore, be Roman Catholic. They may, in certain situations depending on national circumstances, and after consultation with the local diocesan Bishop, be members of churches and ecclesial communities which share the Catholic belief in, among other issues, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the seven Sacraments and devotion to Mary.

Commentary.-In addition to the Spiritual Adviser, the President has an obligation to promote Vincentian spirituality and the Catholic ethos (see 3.11). This also applies to the Vice-President who, when necessary, fulfils all the duties of the President. Such an obligation should not be imposed on someone who cannot in conscience discharge it. The intention of the Society's 1999 General Assembly was to allow at least Catholic, Orthodox and High Anglican members to hold these offices. The Catholic hierarchy within each country will know whether there are other churches or ecclesial communities which meet these criteria. As other officers do not have a specific obligation to promote Vincentian spirituality, these offices, Secretary, Treasurer etc, are open to any member.

6.6 Affiliated groups can work very closely with us

The Society accepts the principle of affiliated groups. These groups consist mainly of members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities who are attracted by the work of the Society and/or its spirituality. They are welcome to participate in the charitable work, appropriate Council discussions and the fraternal life of the Society, but are not eligible for office in the Society. Groups from non-Christian religions may also be similarly affiliated.

Commentary.-In some places, it can be appropriate to accept with an affiliated status, and with the limitations stated by the article, groups from other creeds or beliefs. The Society can admit them, but in its desire to remain Catholic, rules out their eligibility for representative offices.

6.7 Relationships with state agencies & other charities

When the problems they encounter are beyond their competence or capacity, Vincentians may contact State Agencies and other more specialised charitable organisations, provided that such action helps the Society in its struggle against injustice and respects the spirit of the Society.

Commentary.-A more and more globalised world is also a more complicated world. The Conferences, through the appropriate Councils, can and should seek a ready collaboration with other organisations, agencies or institutions that could assist their work, with benefit to the most deprived.

A prudent, observant attitude, will keep us away from the scandal that could be implied by collaboration with groups or people having approaches opposite to the Holy Church' moral teaching. "...it is necessary to avoid even the appearance of evil and everything that could cause scandal to the weak" (Rule 1835, PC)

7. Relationship with Civil Society – Work for Social Justice

7.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

Commentary.-The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and each of its Conferences, seeks the spiritual and material prosperity of each of the persons it helps. It seeks to prevent the extension of poverty in its various manifestations. It seeks to alleviate suffering. For this purpose, it uses as many means as possible to re-establish justice, always with Charity towards all men. "Peace is also the fruit of love, for love goes beyond what justice can achieve" (GS 78).

7.2 A vision of the civilization of love

Affirming the dignity of each human being as created in God's image, and Jesus' particular identification with those who are excluded by society, Vincentians envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted.

As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and the civilization of love. In this way, the Society shares the Church's mission to evangelise the world through visible witness, in both actions and words.

Commentary.-It is not possible for Vincentians to remain solely interested in the effects of deprivation on individuals. We have to seek to remedy the causes as far as our modest possibilities allow. To evangelize, the inalienable mission of each Conference and each member means to proclaim the Good News and this includes the promotion of a civilisation of love. It is not possible to tell men that God loves them, without them seeing our determination to change the structures of society so they are founded on Love.

"As citizens of one world». Of course, Vincentians are loyal citizens of their country but their concern for the common good embraces the world and we have a loyalty to the poor everywhere.

"culture of life": Vincentians are committed to promote the right to life from conception to the natural end of earthly life.

7.3 Vision of the future

The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

*Commentary.-The Society's Twinning projects foster "**sustainable development.**"*

*"**protection of the environment**". It is essential to respect the environment, as a consequence of our faith in its creation by God for the benefit of human beings, who are the stewards of creation and must care for it and nurture it for future generations. The environmental crisis "is truly trans-national and intergenerational, the first of such kind ever to face humanity as a whole" (To the UN 11/91).*

7.4 The practical Vincentian approach to social justice

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those we visit who suffer from injustice.

Commentary.-There are no two ways about it. Our outlook is that of the poor, of the oppressed, of the persecuted, of the hungry, the exploited... Others may defend other views and other options. Ours is the viewpoint of the poor.

7.5 A voice for the voiceless

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.

Commentary.-Let us help them to tell their truth, to reveal their suffering, to explain their needs. Let them feel responsible for achieving their goals. When this is not really possible, only then, let us become the voice of the voiceless ones. Only then.

7.6 Facing the structures of sin

Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak out clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements.

*Commentary.-"**speak out clearly .. with charity**". We cannot pretend that the structures of sin do not exist. They do exist. We should point them out, even with our modest resources, but with the full conviction and vigour that derives from a life shared with the poor. Charity towards everybody will help us to achieve this with the least possible offence to those responsible. To challenge what is wrong in society was seen by Ozanam as essential; "What evil is done in the world through the inconsistency and timidity of good people!" But, he reminded us: "kindness will be the character of Christian controversy." "Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things*

and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society" (GS 27). "There exist also sinful inequalities that affect millions of people". (CCC 1938)

7.7 Striving to change attitudes

Vincentians oppose discrimination of all kinds and work to change the attitudes of those who view the weak or those who are different with prejudice, fear or scorn, attitudes which gravely wound the dignity of others.

The Society strives, with charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, so that all are able to understand, recognise and defend the right of each person to be responsible for his or her own life. The Society promotes understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.

Commentary.-The poor are our friends: regardless of their colour, of their medical condition, of their poverty, of their weakness, of their defects. Let us introduce them to the world as Children of God: as our brothers, as beloved friends.

"opposes discrimination .. promotes understanding"

To be misunderstood and discriminated against is a severe form of poverty because it humiliates, reduces self-esteem and reduces opportunities for work. Let us encourage sympathy and tolerance.

7.8 Political independence of the Society

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.

Commentary.-From its foundation, the Society has taken extreme care not to identify itself with any political party or political option. It even advised that there should be a total absence of party-political conversations within each Conference. Of course, the Society understands and praises the members who wish to take the Christian message into active politics. But these dear members, in order to avoid misunderstandings of any kind, are begged to relinquish any representative service in the Society while they are in a period of direct political activity. This is a small sacrifice that will undoubtedly be welcome and understood by all of them. "The spirit of charity, together with Christian prudence, shall further induce us to banish party-political discussions for ever from both general meetings and ordinary meetings. (Rule 1835, PC)

7.9 Working with communities

The Society should work not only with individuals in need but also with families and communities. It can help an excluded or deprived local community to develop

a sense of responsibility and solidarity which leads it to improve its economic, social or environmental well-being, always retaining the personal contact of members with those who suffer.

Commentary.-It frequently becomes necessary to go beyond simple personal help, as has been mentioned so often in this Rule and in its commentaries. We referred in 1.10 to the empowerment of individuals to help forge the destiny of their community. In this article, 7.9, it is envisaged that in a deprived community in which Vincentians already visit the poor, members may be able to help gather together people in the community who want to find ways to improve their lives. Vincentians could help them to discern their most pressing problems, to decide on the relative priorities and to develop a plan to raise public awareness and achieve change.

Any action of the Society, to be fully justified from a Vincentian point of view, always has to arise from personal contact with the individuals who suffer. It is far from our intention to become simply pressure groups. The Society and each Conference must first live close to those who suffer, and only then build on this experience by helping them to overcome difficulties.

ABBREVIATIONS

DOCUMENTS QUOTED IN THE COMMENTARY TO THE RULE

- CCC 125** **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, paragraph 125
- NA** *Nostra Aetate*, Second Vatican Council, 1965
- UR** *Unitatis Redintegratio, Decree on Ecumenism*, the Vatican, 1964
- GS** *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), Second Vatican Council, 1965
- CA** *Centesimus Annus - The Hundredth Year*, Pope John Paul II, 1991
- EV** *Evangelium Vitae - The Gospel of Life* - Pope John Paul II, 1995
- EJA** *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*
U.S. Bishops, 1986
- UUS** *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II, 1995
- Canon 212.3: Code of Canon Law**, 1983, Canon 212, paragraph. 3
- Rule, 1835, PC** *Preliminary Considerations to the S.S.V.P. Rule*, 1835
- Introduction to the Manual, 1845:**Introduction to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Manual**, 1845
- to the UN Statement of the Vatican to the United Nations, November 1991

II. PART

STATUTES

OF THE

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION

OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

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1. The Confederation, Head office and Members

1.1 The Confederation

At international level, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is united in its spirituality and management through an International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (hereinafter referred to as the “Confederation”), which is presided over by the President General.

Commentary.- So that the Society can establish more fruitful official links with many other international and national organisations and agencies, including the United Nations, it is necessary that the Society should be established legally as a Confederation, whose ‘legal members’ are defined in 1.6. The Confederation is now established¹, appropriately, within the French legal system. It is a Non-Government Organisation (NGO).

Although it is a Confederation by law, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in its essence remains, as it has always been, one, unique, worldwide community, one family. The phrase “Society of St. Vincent de Paul” should, therefore, normally be used in the Society’s communications unless legal precision requires the use of the term ‘Confederation’.

1.2 The name of the Society

The International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the sole owner of the Society’s name. Only the Council General may, on behalf of the Confederation, authorise or prohibit the use of its name.

1.3 The international head office

The Confederation’s head office is based in Paris, France, the city where the first Conference was founded.

The head office may be transferred to any other location in the world by resolution of the Council General Assembly; this resolution shall be adopted by a majority of two thirds of the votes of the members present and represented.

In order for this resolution to be validly adopted by the Assembly, the point must have been included on the agenda prepared previously and sent to the members of the Council General.

Commentary.-The possibility of moving the Head office was allowed for in the previous Rule, also requiring a two-thirds majority.

It recognises that we are an international Society and that a change of location for the central administration may at some time become desirable or necessary, either to Rome or even to another continent. A proposition to make such a change will, of course, be notified several months before an Assembly, together with details of the costs involved and of the benefits envisaged from such a move.

¹ Registered n°: -1911.

Paris will, however, always be recognised as the main focus of pilgrimage for the Society's members, with its many sacred places which have their place in Vincentian history, including the final resting place of Blessed Frederic, St. Vincent, St. Louise de Marillac and Blessed Rosalie Rendu, among others.

1.3.1 Other international Confederation centres

Other work centres may be established in different cities around the world.

Commentary.-The enormous extension of the Society may necessitate the establishment of other offices, as Council General decides, anywhere in the world. It is also probable that a President General who lives outside Paris will need some auxiliary staff in the place where he or she lives.

1.4 Official language

In recognition of the establishment of the first St. Vincent de Paul Conference in France, the official language of the Confederation is French. All the Confederation's official documents shall be drafted in this language.

Commentary.-This does not imply that the first draft of an official document must be in French, as it is likely to be drafted in the language of one who begins the drafting process, from which it will be translated into French.

1.4.1 Other co-official languages

The co-official languages of the Confederation are English, Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. The Confederation undertakes to publish most of its documentation in all the co-official languages.

Commentary.-Publication in different languages of key documents such as the Rule and Statutes with the commentaries opens up new and exciting possibilities for the Society.

1.5 The Assembly of the Council General

The supreme democratic body of the Confederation is the Council General, which meets in ordinary or extraordinary Assembly and is presided over by the President General.

Commentary.-The General Assembly has fulfilled this function from the earliest days of the Society.

1.6 Legal members

Each Superior or Assimilated Council that duly joins the Confederation, and is instituted accordingly, shall become a legal member of the Confederation's Council General.

They must be constituted within the scope of their national legislations as non-profit or similar organisations, and duly Instituted by the Council General.

Although the tradition of our Society prefers to use the term "Superior Councils", which is used throughout the wording of the Statutes, special provisions in legislation or other circumstances may warrant the use of the term "National Council".

Commentary.-The identification of “legal members”, defined above, was a necessary condition for establishing the Society as a legal entity in French law in such a way that its legal status would be recognised internationally.

The Statutes re-establish the term “Superior” which was an old traditional term. In fact, from the origin of the Society this term was used to define the highest level of representation within a country. ‘Superior’ meant superior in serving each member, Conference and Council. It meant superior in the obligation to fulfil this mission.

Returning to this term was necessary for two reasons :

The first one is the possibility, facilitated by the Statutes, to have this kind of Council coordinating Conferences from more than one country. For instance, two adjacent regions of two different countries, with strong links of mutual cooperation, and which depend on the same Council to serve the poor better (see article 1.8 of these Statutes).

The second reason is that the term ‘national’ is a narrow one and could lead to the concept of nationalism, which is something which the Society should strongly avoid. We are unified in the name of Jesus Christ who leads us to a personal service together towards the poor.

If the term “National Council” is preferred, all the Society’s documents printed in the country may use that term instead of the term ‘Superior Council’.

1.6.1 Representatives on the Council

The Council General is formed by the duly elected Presidents of the Superior or Assimilated Councils, which they represent, and which are instituted in the different countries and clearly-defined regions around the world.

Commentary.-“duly elected” – by secret ballot and conforming to the requirements of B.R. 11 of the Basic Requirements for Drafting the Internal Statutes for Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

“clearly-defined regions” – see commentary on 1.8

1.6.2 Definition of Assimilated Councils

Assimilated Councils are Councils that have been Instituted or Conferences that have been Aggregated, and which are legally constituted within the scope of their national legislations as non-profit organisations representing a country or region in which a Superior Council has not yet been Instituted.

Commentary.-It is not intended that “Assimilated Councils” remain with that status, but that they develop their membership and network of Conferences and Councils steadily but prudently until it is sensible to establish a Superior Council. It is an aim of the Society to be able to provide some practical help to facilitate this development, whenever possible.

“or Conferences” - *It is a lovely tradition of the Society that a country can be represented and have a vote even if it has only a few members gathered in one or more Conferences, if it is legally constituted as defined above. If it is small in numbers, it may still be great in spirit!*

Associated Councils, not legally constituted in this way, may also be represented with a right to speak but not to vote (see 1.10.1, 1.11), except that they have a vote in the election of the President General (see 3.3), and they have a vote on the Permanent Section if it is not meeting as the Board of Directors of the Confederation (see 5.2.1), whenever their President attends.

1.7 Affiliation to the Confederation

Any Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council (as defined in Article 1.10.1 of the International Statutes) of the Society around the world that wishes to join the Confederation must request this in writing and submit such request to the President General of the Confederation.

Commentary.-A standard form to facilitate this request by new members of the Confederation is available from the head office of Council General.

1.7.1 Requirements for the affiliation

The abovementioned written request for affiliation to the Confederation must state that such Council complies, pursuant to national legislation, with the provisions established in Article 1.6 of the International Statutes of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and must also indicate the area for which it is responsible.

Likewise, it shall expressly accept all aspects of the Rule and Statutes of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which consists of three parts:

The Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; The Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; The Basic Requirements for Drafting the Internal Statutes for Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

Commentary.-The adoption and acceptance of the principles of the Rule and Statutes of the Society is very important. It ensures that we are a unified Society of St. Vincent de Paul spread throughout the world with the same values.

1.7.2 Legal liability

Under no circumstances shall the Confederation or any of its governing members, by virtue of the affiliation described above, be liable for events occurring without their full and proven knowledge. The Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils shall, for all legal purposes, be the highest and ultimate bodies responsible, before any type of national or international jurisdiction, for events occurring within their jurisdictional areas.

Commentary.-This article, which has been included by legal necessity, has its counterpart in B.R. 18 of the Basic Requirements for Drafting the Internal Statutes for Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils, to protect Council General against being involved unnecessarily and unjustly in litigation which is properly the responsibility of other Councils.

1.8 Institution of Superior Councils

In order to achieve a better service for members and the poor in the same country, two or more Superior Councils may be Instituted in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 1.9 of the International Statutes.

Commentary.-“better service for members and the poor” – both these conditions, which relate to our vocation, are essential, together with the other conditions stated in 1.8 and 1.9. Organisational theories and structures must serve our vocation and never constrain it, and sustained prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance would be essential.

The options are now totally flexible. It is possible to have:

- a) a single Superior Council in a country

- b) *a single Superior Council in a state which embraces more than one country*
- c) *a single Superior Council which crosses state boundaries (see 1.9.2)*
- d) *More than one Superior Council in the same country with a very large Vincentian membership. This option could only be invoked if it is requested by the existing single Superior Council. The unity of our Society and the harmony between its Councils is essential, so Council General would have to be confident that possible dangers of discord have been thoroughly investigated and eliminated. Potential difficulties of two sets of policies and representation before a single State or Church hierarchy will also need to be addressed, before two Superior Councils can be approved. This possibility completes our flexibility options.*

1.8.1 The conditions

The following conditions must be met in order to justify this need:

- a) **Excessive territorial scope.**
- b) **Difficulties in communication**
- c) **Large number of Conferences and Councils**
- d) **Large number of members and Special Works**

1.9 Procedures for instituting new Superior Councils

The following conditions must be met in order for a new Superior Council to be instituted in a country where there is already a Superior Council:

1.9.1 Establishment on the request of a Superior Council

- a) **Existence of more than 3,000 Conferences working in the country of the applicant Superior/Assimilated Council.**
- b) **The new Council which is the object of the institution request has more than 1,000 Conferences.**
- c) **The request is presented by the existing Superior Council, authorising the institution of the new Superior Council.**
- d) **The legislation in the country in question permits the institution of two Superior Councils in that country, with different jurisdictions.**
- e) **Favourable report by the Territorial Vice-President.**
- f) **Express authorisation from the Council General through its Permanent Section**

1.9.2. Institution following an official request

The Council General, through its Permanent Section, may officially institute Superior or Assimilated Councils for specific regions around the world, regardless of the frontiers of the countries in question, whenever socio-political, geographic reasons or the service make this necessary.

When the Institution of these Councils affects already Instituted Superior Councils duly aggregated to the Confederation in accordance with the provisions established in Article 1.6 of these International Statutes, the aforementioned Council must be consulted beforehand. This consultation obligation shall be binding on the Permanent Section of the Council General.

Commentary.-The International Statutes try to be open to all possibilities which could result in a better service to the poor and to the members themselves. But they also do not forget to

include the necessary guarantees which avoid harmful decisions and which ensure that decisions have been taken carefully.

1.10 Other members of the Council General

Different circumstances may mean that there are other members of the Council General, in accordance with the following classification:

1.10.1 Associated Councils

These are Councils that cannot achieve full legal member status due to limitations in their national legislations or to the fact that they have availed themselves of legal instruments governing legal members other than those established in Article 1.6 of these International Statutes.

*Commentary.-There are some countries where the Society has to pursue its mission of charity in silence. There are places where belonging to a Conference may represent a risk. For such circumstances, the category of “**Associated Councils**” has been established. Also, on some occasions, the Conferences are only recognised by the Church, but do not have a civil recognition. In summary, faced with the variety of situations, the Internal Statutes establish different options.*

1.10.2 Temporary Members

These are members appointed by the President General in countries or regions where the Society is not present and until the corresponding Superior or Assimilated Council can be instituted.

The same shall apply to the provisional Presidents of the Superior Councils instituted by the Council General, in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 6.5 of these International Statutes.

Commentary.-This article reflects the encouragement given to members from countries where the Society is trying hard to establish itself and grow (see the commentary on 1.6.2). It is a tool at the disposal of the President General which may be useful to help in the spreading of the Conferences.

1.10.3 Missionary Members

These shall be members appointed by the President General to perform specific tasks and services. They shall always include members that have served as International Presidents General.

*Commentary.-“**Missionary**” – because they carry out specific missions. “**International Presidents General**” – they will have gained immense experience during the time when they had the privilege of serving the Society as President General. It is in keeping with Vincentian custom and our spirit, to invite them to attend the General Assembly with a right to speak, so that this experience enables better decisions to be made by the voting members.*

There are great advantages in democracy and in restricted terms of office, so that there is the energy and openness to new possibilities which will enable the Society to adapt to changing needs. There is, however, a danger that vital experience could be cast aside, with the danger of ‘re-inventing the wheel’ or failing to see the best way forward. This article ensures this will

not happen at the Assembly level. It is, therefore, recommended that at other Council levels, the possibility be allowed in the Internal Statutes, for a President to invite and appoint one or more of his predecessors, and/or one or two members who are well respected and have exceptional qualities, to be available for consultation, either during key meetings or by conversation or correspondence.

For this to bring definite benefits to the Society, such consultation would need to be prompt, so decisions were not delayed, and the President would select only such Consultors as he could work with in a spirit of friendship. Consultors would require certain qualities in addition to experience – the wisdom that comes from a life of prayer, humility (in being content to contribute and to encourage the elected President to make his/her own distinctive contribution), willingness to be open to new ideas and methods and loyalty. Loyalty implies that they would be prepared to explain to others the positive reasons for decisions made, even when these were not the decisions they themselves would have made.

By the appointment of a few Consultors, a wise and fruitful balance can be achieved between dynamic leadership (often younger members) and experience (often older members). This reflects the ideal in the Rule (article 3.11) that a President who is a servant leader identifies the “natural talents and spiritual charisms” of members, which can then be “put to the service of the poor and the Society”

1.11 Right to speak but not to vote

All the other members of the Council General, that is: Associated, Temporary or Missionary members shall be entitled to speak but not to vote at Council General Assemblies.

Commentary.-See the exceptions stated in the Commentary to article 1.6.2.

1.12 Related Special Works

Special Works related to the Society that may use the Society’s logo in the places and situations that are considered appropriate, shall be deemed to be those Special Works in which the Society of St. Vincent de Paul participates at any level of the organization; the aforementioned participation shall enable the Special Work to be controlled by Vincentian members on an effective, majority and real basis.

Commentary.-“controlled” - this means that the majority of voting members of the management committee or Conference which runs the Special Work are active Vincentians. There are other works where, reflecting our desire to cooperate with other organisations in projects, Vincentians participate on the management committee but do not have voting control. Such works are not Special Works, but could be referred to as Special Activities and whilst they would not carry the logo of the Society, they could be helped financially, always in accordance with what is stipulated in the Rule 3.14.

1.12.1 Use of the Society’s logos

Every Superior or Assimilated Council shall authorise the use of the Society’s logos within its jurisdiction in accordance with the provisions established in the previous paragraph.

Commentary.-The Superior or Associated Council must be particularly careful in granting this authorisation.

1.12.2 Employees

The employees of these Special Works and in general those employed by the Confederation may not hold Offices on the Councils of the Society, with the exception of the technical and executive position corresponding to them at the Special Work or Council where they render their services.

Commentary.-This is a wise provision to maintain the voluntary character of the Society and to avoid conflicts of interest.

“with the exception” – employees may, when invited, attend meetings of the Council to which they report, and participate in discussions relevant to their function, without, of course, having a right to vote (see also B.R. 12 of the Basic Requirements).

2. The Council General Assembly

2.1 The General Assembly of the Confederation

The senior body of the Confederation is the Council General, which meets in a General Assembly as provided in Article 1.5 of these International Statutes.

Each Superior Council and Assimilated Council which is a legal member is represented by one vote. The President General shall likewise have one vote which, if the case may be, shall be considered the casting vote.

Commentary.-“if the case may be” refers to a situation of equal votes for and against, in which case the President General’s vote shall determine the outcome.

2.1.1 Quorum and voting

The valid adoption of resolutions by the General Assembly shall require the attendance or representation of at least 30% of its full members. Should a second call be necessary, this shall be issued at least 24 hours later, and shall be considered as validly constituted regardless of the percentage of members present or represented. Resolutions shall be validly adopted by a simple majority.

Commentary.-“Full members” are the “legal members” referred to in 1.6.

“at least 30%” - the fraternal and democratic spirit of the Society impels us to make every effort to encourage and make it financially possible for many more than 30% of the full members to attend, and also the Presidents of Associated Councils (non-voting). There will inevitably be an appeal to Councils from richer countries to be generous in providing the necessary funds.

“second call” – this exceptional provision eliminates the possibility of an expensive gathering being unable to make decisions.

“Resolutions” – the only resolutions requiring more than a simple majority are those relating to changes to the Rule and Statutes (see article 7.3) and those relating to a change of Head office (see article 1.3). Article 1.11 stipulates those with a right to speak but not to vote.

2.2 Frequency of Assembly meetings

The Council General Assembly normally meets once every six years.

2.2.1 Extraordinary General Assemblies

The President General may convene Extraordinary General Assemblies whenever circumstances make this advisable.

An Extraordinary General Assembly must be convened when so requested by more than 50% of the legal members of the Council General.

Commentary.-Any democratic organisation should provide for the possibility of a majority of legal members being able to call an Extraordinary meeting. Such a provision should be considered for inclusion, if appropriate, in the Internal Statutes for Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

2.3 Participants

These Assemblies may be attended by the representatives of the Councils indicated in Article 1.6 herein as well as those indicated in Articles 1.10.1 and 1.10.2 and 1.10.3 of these International Statutes, each by virtue of the powers granted to them in the aforementioned Articles.

Commentary.-Attendees are from Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils, plus Temporary and Missionary members.

2.4 Agenda

The agenda of the Assembly meeting and the notice convening the meeting are determined by the General Secretary in agreement with the President and taking into account any suggestions by members of the Council to whom this notice is delivered.

Commentary.-Because the Conferences have spread throughout the world and because of the diversity of issues with which we are faced, we must ensure that the most important points are discussed in the General Assembly, in order to express a true Vincentian concern. That is why it is necessary for the Secretary General of the Society to listen to the suggestions of all Councils and to include the key points in an accurate agenda.

2.5 Prayers and meditation

In accordance with the Society's tradition, the meeting begins and ends with a prayer consisting of a spiritual reading or a meditation, which may lead to a brief exchange of opinions. This reading is given by the International Spiritual Adviser. The corresponding secret collection is always taken among the participants.

Commentary.-This plenary meeting of the Council General, in its philosophy and in its functioning, is not very different from any other Conference of the Society. The members of the Council General are gathered as a group of beloved friends who come from different parts of the world, but who form a fraternal group which dedicates this most important part of the

meeting to pray and meditate together. The members are part of one very large Conference in which prayer is fundamental, and the collection is a sign of sharing and participation, similar to any other Conference.

3. The President General, the Board of the Council General and the International service structure

3.1 The President General

The President of the Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and its Council General

represents the Society before the Holy See and all international religious or civil organisations, and in general, before any public or private organisation.

Since the founding of the first Conference, this figure has represented the nexus of union and moral authority of the Society in periods when the Council General Assembly has not met.

The President General personifies the unity of the Society worldwide.

*Commentary.-“**represents the Society**” – normally this is on matters that affect the Society at international level, but occasionally there may be a need to represent the Society at another level. More usually, it will be the President of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council who represents the Society within the Council’s territory.*

*“**before the Holy See**” – it is customary for the President General to provide an annual report to the Pope on the Society’s work, conveying also the affection and prayers of the members.*

*“**organisations**” – In practice, the President General delegates some of these representational roles to other Vincentians with sufficient knowledge and long experience within the Society.*

*“**moral authority**” A President General is elected after prayer to the Holy Spirit to make his or her own distinctive contribution to the Society, out of love for the poor. Vincentians try to make this possible. They recognise that the President General leads the Society in a spirit of humble service and carries a heavy burden of responsibility. They respond with affection and loyalty when he/she expresses views and makes, after appropriate consultation, those decisions which are within his/her authority, in the light of the spirit and traditions of the Society.*

*“**personifies**” - especially when he/she visits other countries, the President General is more than a symbol, but truly personifies the unity of the Society as its elected head, and strives to maintain that unity which is so vital if the Society is to be a sign of the love of Christ in the world. For this, a conciliatory spirit is indispensable.*

3.2 The functions of the President General

The President of the Council General, supported by a team within the International Structure, supervises, fosters and coordinates the Society’s activities worldwide and, for this purpose, makes any decisions deemed appropriate, implementing the resolutions of

the Council General Assemblies in compliance with the provisions established in the Rule, the International Statutes and pursuant to the Society's tradition.

Commentary.-The Society gives the President General authority for a range of decisions, to be made after prayer and consultation, especially for appointing officers to the international structure, for intervening when necessary to protect the Society, and for implementing resolutions as above.

3.2.1 Report on the progress of the Society

In January every year, and for general information of all the members and Councils, the President General drafts a moral report for all the members of the Council General, reflecting the progress of the Society during the previous year and the prospects for the future.

Commentary.-This progress report on the state of the Society, to the members of Council General is an expression of the President General's accountability. It should be distributed as widely as possible. The IEC, which meets in the first half of the year, will express its opinion on the content of this report and other matters.

It has been our tradition from the earliest days for the Presidents General to encourage everyone by circular letters and to draw attention to new possibilities or to aspects of the Vincentian spirit or practice which require renewed emphasis. Such letters form part of a rich Vincentian heritage and many of the older letters are still relevant and a continuing inspiration. All members should be encouraged to become familiar with the key letters.

3.3 Election of the President General

The President of the Council General is elected by all the members of the Society, represented by the Presidents of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils, who exercise this right on their own behalf and on behalf of the members they represent.

Commentary.-“on behalf of the members” An effort should be made to carry out an appropriate consultation of the members of the Society, so that they are involved as closely as possible. Although they will not usually know the individual candidates, they may, for instance, indicate the qualities they wish the President General to possess. Bearing these views in mind, and after a period of prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance, the Presidents will vote for the person they consider will best promote the Society's mission to the poor, the spiritual development of the members, the profound unity and the organisational effectiveness of the Society and who will advocate more fruitful relationships with the Vincentian family, the Church, ecumenism etc. and civil Society with its need for social justice (these aspects reflect the structure of the Rule).

Presidents of Associated Councils, who normally have the right to speak but not to vote, do have the right to vote in the election of the President General.

We insist on the necessity to ensure that the members have sufficient knowledge of the election process to enable them to feel intimately involved in it.

3.4 Duration of the term of office

The term of office of the President General is six years; this term of office may be renewed once only.

Commentary.-Terms of office in other Councils and Conferences are more limited (see BR 11). The reason for the exception in the case of the President General is that the scale of the role is vast and the timescales for projects is often longer than those on a national level. It may, then, sometimes be desirable to allow a President General sufficient time to finish some key projects, for the benefit of the Society.

Presidents General, like other Presidents, regard their role as one of service to the Society, not a position of honour.

They do not cling to office and 'prefer others to themselves' (Phil 2:3, Rom 12:10). They are aware of the need to appoint members who have appropriate natural talents and spiritual charisms to positions in the international structure, so that possible successors are as well prepared as possible. Re-election is, therefore, to be regarded as unusual and the norm is six years.

3.5 Age limit

The President General may not be more than 65 years of age when elected.

Commentary.-This requirement is intended to make clear the Assembly's view that senior Presidents require both experience - in this case at least 15 years (see article 3.7), and much energy. It reminds us of the role young people played in the Society in its earlier years and is a gentle hint that it is very often desirable to ensure the 'spirit of youth' throughout the Society by considering younger members for office.

Experience should, however, be deeply valued and can be kept available to younger Presidents by appointing older more experienced members to other offices, whenever appropriate, or as Consultors (see commentary on 1.10.3).

An age limitation is acceptable under French law, but Council General appreciates that an age limitation may not be acceptable under certain other legal systems.

3.6 Election procedure and deadlines

When a President General must be elected because the term of the existing President has reached its end, the Vice-President General must announce this at least ten months prior to the time of the election to the members of the Council General, who are then responsible for notifying the members accordingly.

Commentary.-In accordance with the stipulation in the commentary to 3.3 of these Statutes, it is essential to give the broadest publicity to this announcement, among members and Conferences.

3.6.1 Electoral Board

The electoral board is presided over by the Vice-President General and is formed by the latter, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General, provided that none of them is a candidate. If any of the aforementioned three persons is a candidate, he/she shall be replaced by a legal member of the Council General.

Commentary.-Although this article does not say so, if required, any replacement will be appointed by the President General.

3.7 Presentation of candidates, forms and limitations

During the two months following the notification of the elections, the members of the Council General, either individually or in groups, may present the candidates that they deem suitable and worthy, chosen from among those members who have belonged to the Society for more than fifteen years and who do not hold remunerated service posts in the Confederation at any level or in any of the participated or related Special Works.

Commentary.-A minimum level of experience is stated, and the volunteer nature of the Society is upheld.

It is possible to interpret the presentation of candidates, instigated by the Council General, as a 'first polling' concerning the renewal of the mandate of an outgoing President General. So, in fact, if the exceptional circumstance occurs, which is provided for in 3.4 of these Statutes, we shall clearly see this in the number of Councils which support the nomination of the outgoing President General.

3.8 Announcement of candidates

At least three months prior to the Council General Assembly meeting, the Vice-President General shall announce the candidates who fulfil the required conditions and whose proven acceptance has previously been obtained by the Vice-President General.

This announcement shall be accompanied by a short Vincentian "curriculum vitae", together with the candidate's action programme if elected, presented on a maximum of two sheets.

3.9 Time and form of election

The new President General shall be elected at the General, Ordinary or Extraordinary Assembly called for this and other purposes.

3.9.1 Quorum for election

In order for the General Assembly to be validly constituted to elect a new President General, a quorum of 30% of the members with voting rights pursuant to Article 3.3 of these International Statutes shall be required.

3.9.2 Voting procedure

The voting system used shall consist in two rounds and shall be effected by secret ballot. The first round shall include the postal votes of those electors who are unable to attend in person. In the second round, which shall only be required if no candidate obtains one half plus one of the votes presented, the candidates shall be the two members who have obtained most votes in the first round. Due to time restrictions, this second voting round shall be performed directly and by secret ballot; no postal votes shall be accepted.

Voting shall take place on the afternoon of the first day of the Council General Assembly meeting in which the voting is included on the agenda and shall have priority over any other matters.

Commentary.-The purpose of reducing the vote to two candidates in a second round is to ensure that the elected President General has gained a clear majority. A similar arrangement is recommended for the Internal Statutes of Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

3.9.2.1 Limitation

If an existing President General is presented for a second term of office having passed the first round without any candidate reaching half plus one of the votes, in order for his/her election to be valid, he/she must obtain at least one half plus one of the votes presented in the second round. Otherwise, the voting process shall recommence twenty-four hours later with the proposed candidates, excluding the existing President.

Commentary.-This article relates to the stipulation of article 3.4 of these Statutes. It adds to the conditions required to re-elect the out-going President General. The intention is to define more accurately what this exception means. In a standard election, blank votes are not counted in determining the majority. If the President General is one of the candidates, he or she must obtain 50% plus one of all the votes cast, including the blank votes.

3.9.3 Taking of office

The President General shall take up the Presidency on the next Feast of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, namely on 9 September, in the city of Paris.

Commentary.-The Society was born in Paris and the President General will always take up his office in Paris. If in the past, the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul was the date for taking up this office, nowadays, with one of our co-founders being Beatified, it seems more appropriate to use the date of his liturgical ceremony, to celebrate the taking up of the Presidency.

3.10 Termination of functions

The President General may cease to perform his/her service functions for the following reasons:

- a) End of the term of office for which he/she was elected.
- b) Not selected for a second term of office.
- c) Expiry of the maximum of two terms of office.
- d) Resignation during the period of service.

- e) **Incapacity.**
- f) **Death.**
- g) **Loss of civil rights.**

Commentary.-The provision relating to loss of civil rights has never been available in the past and hopefully it will never be needed. However, such an extensive organisation as ours must provide for all contingencies which may arise, even if they are as improbable as this.

3.11 Resignation from service

In the event a President General should resign, in order for such resignation to take effect it must be formally presented before the International Executive Committee, pursuant to Articles 4.1 and subsequent of these International Statutes, and accepted by the aforementioned Committee.

Commentary.-It is a mark of humility for a President General to request release from the position from a body representing those who elected him/her. It may be possible for the IEC to assure the President General of a greater level of support and persuade him or her to continue. But in other cases it will be appropriate to accept the resignation.

3.12 Incapacity

Should any incapacity impede the President General's performance of service, the Board Members, i.e. the Vice-President General, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General shall jointly call an extraordinary meeting reserved solely for the International Executive Committee in order to deal exclusively with this matter. This meeting shall be held within a maximum of 30 days.

In order for the meeting to be validly constituted, the attendance of 30% of the members established in Article 4.3 of these International Statutes shall be required.

Commentary.-It is appropriate that the IEC, whose voting members are democratically elected Presidents, should make this decision.

Incapacity may be due to various causes such as a medical condition, lack of available time due to personal circumstances, lack of the conciliatory spirit which a servant leader needs to maintain harmony, or even insufficient ability for the role.

We strongly recommend to the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils to consider the need to include similar articles in their internal statutes.

3.12.1 Consideration of incapacity

The Committee, meeting on an extraordinary and emergency basis to deal exclusively with this matter on the agenda, shall examine on a charitable and reserved basis, the alleged incapacity of the President General based on founded and documented arguments

presented by the members of the Board of the Council General. During the period elapsing between the convening of the Committee and its decision, no international Vincentian office undertaking may be suspended, replaced or cancelled.

Commentary.-If such a situation arises, the decision must be taken as soon as possible and with all the evidence needed to establish the severity of the condition. The members of the Board shall present to the IEC the request for the declaration of incapacity, with the appropriate documentary evidence.

“charitable” – the same empathy and sensitivity we show towards those we visit is due to other members, especially in a situation as delicate as this.

“no office suspended” – the Society must continue, and the President General also remains in office, until the IEC decides otherwise. This is a clear guarantee of democracy.

3.13 Guaranteeing the decision about incapacity

In order for the incapacity decision to be legally executed and validated, it must be supported by at least two thirds of the votes present and represented at the meeting of the International Executive Committee. The Secretary General of the Society shall immediately take detailed minutes of all the events at the Committee meeting, which, on this specific occasion, must be signed by all the attendees.

Commentary.-“two-thirds” – reflects the crucial nature of this decision. Such a majority is only required for changes to the Rule and Statutes or a move of the head office (both of those are General Assembly decisions).

3.14 Replacement of the General President

In any of the events envisaged with respect to the termination of services and functions on the part of a President General, the Society’s Vice-President General shall be responsible for the international management of the Society.

In all cases he/she shall notify the other members of the Council General and particularly the President General when specifically declaring the latter’s incapacity.

Commentary.-We can easily imagine the pain which would be felt in the Society and by the members who are requesting such a decision. We can also comprehend the great charity with which the Vice-President General must deal with this situation, if exceptionally, one day, the Society is faced with it.

3.15 Deadlines for the election of a new President General in the event of resignation or incapacity.

In the event of resignation or incapacity, and within the maximum and non-extendible period of 90 days, the International Vice-President General shall call elections in accordance with the provisions established in Articles 3.3 to 3.10 of these International Statutes.

Commentary.-The same procedure would apply in the other situations referred to in 3:10.

3.16 The Board Members of the Council General

The President General, after making the appropriate enquiries, shall appoint a Vice-President General, a Secretary General and a Treasurer General for a limited renewable period; these persons, together with the President General, shall form the Board of the Confederation's Council General, and shall provide the President General with counsel and shall also have the functions described in Article 7.4 of these International Statutes.

The President General shall preside over the Board. All the members indicated pursuant to Articles 3.16 through 3.18 of these International Statutes shall be entitled to vote at the Board meetings, with the exception of the Spiritual Advisor. Meetings of this Board shall not require a quorum and resolutions shall be adopted by simple majority vote.

Commentary.-'for a limited renewable period' – the advantage of this type of appointment is that changes in the officers can be made more harmoniously and quickly if it becomes necessary.

3.16.1 The Board's Mission

The Board shall collaborate with the President General in order to develop the strategy required to implement the agreements reached by the Council General Assemblies and the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

It shall also collaborate with the President General in designing the strategy to be proposed to the Council General Assemblies and to the International Executive Committee.

It is the closest Vincentian body to the President General, whom it advises and counsels on any matter.

The President must consult the full Board at least three times a year, in between International Executive Committee meetings

Commentary.-Whilst the Board operates at strategic level, the Permanent Section operates mainly at the level of tactics and day-to-day management of the Society.

The consultation, approximately quarterly, of either the Board or the IEC will ensure that the President General receives guidance from very experienced Vincentians in the difficult task of leading the Society. The consultation may be by 'telephone conferencing', as not all Board members may be able to travel to the meetings.

3.16.2 The International Spiritual Adviser

The International Spiritual Adviser always belongs to the Board of the Council General, as a member, with a right to speak but not to vote; this person shall also be appointed by the President General with the authorization of his direct superior.

Commentary.-As we are a lay Society, not regulated in this matter by Canon law, the custom is retained of the President General choosing the Spiritual Advisor, although it is, of course, necessary for the chosen priest to obtain agreement from his ecclesiastical superior.

By including the International Spiritual Adviser within the Board, with the right to speak but not to vote, the International Statutes highlight the importance of this role. The Society, from its foundation, chose to have a legal status in civil law, which made our work for the poor easier in some specific situations. This is, however, no reason to forget the need for deep and continual Christian renewal for every member in his personal life and in his Vincentian apostolate.

The close relationship of a Catholic priest with the Board of Council General and with the President General himself, will help to facilitate this process and enable us always to preserve our ethos and Christian morality.

3.16.3 The International Youth Delegate

The member entrusted with the International Youth Delegation shall also always form part of the Board of the Council General.

Commentary.-This appointment is a sign of the special affection the Society's members feel towards their younger members and of our intention to provide opportunities to young people of talent to contribute at the highest level, both to speak and to vote. In this way we remember how effective our founders were, despite their youth. Young members who have had this experience will have much to offer the Society in the future. It is recommended that Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils should consider such a provision in their Internal Statutes, for the various Council levels.

3.16.4 Other Board Members

Depending on the Board's needs, other members may be appointed as deputies to the Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer.

3.17 The Vice-President General

The International Vice-President General shall replace the President General if the latter is prevented from attending, absent or disqualified and all the latter's functions shall be delegated to the former.

Commentary.-This is the Society's tradition at all levels. In the President's absence, the Vice-President fulfils the role with all its authority, so that, especially in the event of a long absence, the Councils and Conferences are not leaderless, but can continue to be fruitful and effective. This applies also to the Council General.

3.17.1 The special mission

The Vice-President General is responsible for ensuring and organising the election of a new President General, whenever the post becomes vacant, and in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 3.6 et seq. of these International Statutes, and announces the election results and submits these to the Society.

Commentary.-In addition to the functions of his office and any tasks delegated by the President General, the Vice-President General will, by virtue of his office, be in charge of the complete election process of a new President General.

3.18 Deputy Vice-Presidents General

Whenever necessary, and for specific general Areas of considerable responsibility within the Vincentian Society, the President General shall appoint Deputy Vice-Presidents General to whom certain functions shall be delegated; these Deputies shall automatically form part of the Board of the Council General.

Commentary.-This article provides the possibility of a certain collegiality in the functioning of the Presidency. If articles 3.1 and 3.2 of these Statutes describe the functions and authorities of the President General, this article permits a certain delegation of the functions and authorities, if this is necessary. The magnitude of the duties entrusted to the member elected to serve as President General, make it necessary to rely on some close collaborators, to whom he may delegate some of the duties. At every moment, every President General will consider how he can make use of this possibility, in the light of all the circumstances.

3.19 The Secretary General: functions

Under the authority of the President General, the Secretary General ensures the smooth running of the different administrative services and bodies worldwide that report directly to the Council General. The Secretary General prepares the schedule of Council General Assemblies, organising its agendas and drafting the Minutes. The Secretary General performs the same mission for the International Executive Committee, the Permanent Section and the Board.

The Secretary General handles habitual and regular relations between the Permanent Section and the different Councils and Conferences of the Society.

The Secretary General is responsible for the Council General's Archives and may be assisted by Deputy Secretaries.

Commentary.-“organising its agendas” – this includes prior consultation with the participants (see 2.4 and 4.5.1)

3.19.1 Annual Report

In July every year, the Secretary General shall draft an Annual Report on the Society's worldwide activities, based on the information obtained from the Superior Councils. This Report shall also be publicised internally and externally.

Commentary.-“publicised externally” – there is a temptation to misinterpret the concept of the humility of the Society and publicise little or nothing externally. The result is that many of the public feel we are almost a 'secret society'. Our mission to let the world know that Christ is our inspiration, requires us to let our light “so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:15-16).

We can and should publicise the Society's work and sometimes the media will mention the names of members, although we never seek such personal publicity. We are, however, careful not to exaggerate the impact we make. The truth is eloquent enough.

The main facts from this international report, together with events, activities, statistics and inspirational anecdotes from all levels of the Society should, therefore, be publicised both internally and externally. In addition to its main purpose of 'spreading the Gospel', such publicity generates goodwill which may attract new members and extra income.

To sum up, we should not publicise ourselves, but we should publicise the works of the Society, which will attract people to join us who already know something of our activities.

3.20 The Treasurer General: functions

Under the authority of the President General, the Treasurer General is responsible for the financial management of the Council General. The Treasurer General keeps the accounts, which must be checked at least once a year by a financial Commission appointed by the Council General and by a professionally qualified independent body.

The Treasurer General may be assisted by Deputy Treasurers.

Commentary.-If in all institutions, transparency in accounting is indispensable, this is particularly important within the Society. From the Council General to the most humble of the Conferences, the accurate production of the accounts should be regarded as a very serious responsibility. If necessitated by the magnitude of the amounts, the accounts should be examined by external Auditors, as stipulated in this article for the Council General itself. (see BR 21 and commentary)

3.21 The Budget of the Council General

The Treasurer General establishes the budget for the Administration of the Council General: the income and expenses accounts are approved by the Permanent Section, in its capacity as the Governing Board, before being presented at the Council General Assembly. In years in which no ordinary Assembly is convened, the International Executive Committee shall be responsible for approving these budgets.

Commentary.-In between such meetings, the President of the Finance Commission, together with the Treasurer General, will also report to the Board.

3.21.1 Income

The ordinary budget of the Council General in terms of income is generated by:

- **Contributions from the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils.**
- **Collections taken during Council meetings.**
- **Donations with or without special applications.**
- **Subsidies from any type of public or private institution.**
- **The personal contribution of each member of the Society, through secret collection in the last quarter of each year, as a sign of solidarity with the Council General.**
- **Others.**

Commentary.-To support the international structure, which is so helpful to the Conferences and Councils, should be an obligation undertaken with joy and motivated by the great charity of the members. Council General depends heavily on the generous contributions from less than 20% of the Superior Councils to meet its costs, and it is very difficult for it to meet its commitments, including the most basic, the personnel in our head office or training or the extension itself within the countries where we are weakly established.

The personal contributions from members are also a significant help and are a constant reminder to the members that they all share the responsibility for Council General, through which they can truly feel they are helping to contribute resources to Councils and Conferences everywhere and that they are members of one unique Conference spread throughout the world. (see Expenses below).

It is possible for a country to adopt a more specific rule on the personal contribution, such as requiring a minimum amount from each member, as is the custom in some countries. In any case, the richer countries should be especially generous, recognising that the contribution from members in poorer countries may be understandably low.

3.21.2 Expenses

The main expenses are as follows:

- **Expenses incurred to finance actions in any country in order to develop, extend and support the Society.**
- **Expenses incurred by the Secretariat and with respect to Council General publications.**
- **Expenses incurred in the organization of Vincentian meetings that serve the international structure.**
- **Expenses incurred in connection with strictly essential trips.**

Commentary.-As indicated in the commentary to 3.21.1, all members are called to accept a responsibility for the expenses stated in this article. If we feel blessed to be a member of a Conference, we should have the aspiration that other people may also enjoy the same blessing, to be better able to serve the poor. Council General has always tried to spend the minimum amount and to provide a good service despite this austerity. But lack of reserves undoubtedly constrains our ability to extend the Society to new countries and to create new Conferences in countries where the Society is established. This will be a matter of great concern for all members whose hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor everywhere.

3.21.3 Extraordinary Budgets, Global or Special Funds and others

Besides the ordinary budget, a provision may be allotted for creating Global or Special Funds, which are managed in the same way and intended for use in emergencies or as aid in specific circumstances for the benefit of one or various Councils, Conferences, countries, geographical regions of the world, in the event of catastrophes, or for any other purpose that is deemed appropriate.

Commentary.-Because we have so many Conferences throughout the world, the Council General has always opened accounts to meet various kinds of need. For instance, to respond to natural disasters, wars or any other kind of suffering, the members and Conferences send funds to Council General, either to help resolve a specific problem or one of a more general

character. The Council General, with adequate publicity within the Society, will send the money received, to the Conferences or Special Works which need it.

3.22 The remaining international service structure

The President General appoints Territorial Vice Presidents and Area Coordinators from among the Society's worldwide members.

3.22.1 Enquiries

Prior to making the appointments to the International Service Structure, the President General shall, on a non-binding basis, always consult with the countries affected by the appointments.

The countries affected by an appointment to service in the Structure of a Coordinator or International Vice President with which they do not agree by majority vote, shall inform the President General of such a decision.

The President General shall be obliged to revoke his appointment and to appoint a different Coordinator or Territorial Vice President within the shortest possible time.

Commentary.-It is necessary for the President General to be able to work harmoniously with very senior officers, and that is why he or she retains the right to appoint members to this team who will be close friends in the spirit of Blessed Frederic and St. Vincent. The President General does not require unanimous assent to an appointment after consultation, but will always take the comments into consideration. These articles ensure, however, that if an unworkable situation develops, it will be resolved quickly and harmoniously.

3.23 Territorial Vice-Presidents

In close cooperation with the President General and in his/her name, the Territorial Vice-Presidents shall support, advise, protect, help and coordinate the Society in large geographical areas around the world.

3.23.1 Regional meetings

In the parts of the world where they supervise and are responsible for rendering their services, they may organise regional Meetings with the authorisation of the President General.

Commentary.-In this article, following a good and venerable tradition, the Statutes remind us of the benefit of meeting one another, of cooperating with one another, of exchanging experiences of all kinds, with the members with whom we work most closely. This applies also at international level.

3.24 The Coordinators

The Territorial Vice-Presidents are assisted in their supervisory and promotional tasks by members who report to them and to whom they delegate specific service tasks for specific groups of countries.

They shall also respect at all times the freedom of action of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils which they serve as a nexus of union and means of communication.

Commentary.-Territorial Vice-Presidents and Coordinators serve in such a way that they recognise the authority of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils to make their own decisions. It is, however, our custom to enable the Territorial Vice-Presidents and Coordinators to make a real contribution, so their advice is considered along with other factors, when decisions are made on the matters they have been consulted upon.

The friendships generated during the Regional meetings and other informal contacts are a source of inspiration, sharing good practice, suggesting new works and opportunities and possible solutions to any problems that have arisen.

These appointments enable the President General to stay well-informed on all major issues and developments, and to serve the Councils more effectively.

3.25 International Commissions

For specific purposes, the President General may delegate different members the task of presiding over work or representing Commissions established to achieve specific targets.

3.25.1 The members of the International Commissions

Whenever proposed by the different Commission Presidents, the President General shall appoint the members of these Commissions.

Commentary.-With this article, the Statutes try to help the President General in his task. The Commission President will suggest possible Commission members, but the President will make the final decision.

3.26 Individual responsibilities

Likewise, and for specific missions that do not require a larger number of collaborators, the President General may delegate specific missions to individual members.

Commentary.-With this article also, the Statutes try to help the President General in his task. The President General will make the final decision on any proposals.

3.27 Members with international missions

All members summoned to render important international services to their fellow members and to the poor shall do their utmost not to abandon their obligation to perform

these tasks simultaneously with their commitments to the Conference to which they belong.

Commentary.-It is very important that all officers, including the President General, belong to a Conference and still attend it and visit the poor as often as possible. It is a beautiful custom, which ensures that everyone operates at the 'grass-roots' level and 'keeps their feet on the ground'. It is also an expression of humility as even the President General will gladly accept the authority of the Conference President to allocate the work to be done. This stipulation is also to be included in the Internal Statutes of Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils (see B.R.11).

3.28 The end of terms of office

In order to ensure the smooth hand-over of functions, all terms, posts and services delegated by the President General shall automatically cease six months after a new President General takes up his/her appointment.

The new President General may shorten this period if it is deemed appropriate.

Commentary.-This article ensures that there will be some continuity in the key positions, so that the Society can carry on functioning effectively. It also gives the President General the opportunity to evaluate the situation more accurately and provides time to assemble the new team. If the President General wishes instead to follow the more usual custom of the Society that all appointments cease when the President ceases to hold office, that is also possible under this clause as the extension period can be nil.

4. The International Executive Committee

4.1 The mission of the Committee

The International Executive Committee of the Confederation (hereinafter referred to as the "Committee"), shall be responsible for co-ordinating the Society's international strategy in the interim periods between Council General Assemblies, giving special attention to the need to ensure that this complies with the requests and matters approved during in the aforementioned General Assemblies.

It shall also assist and advise the President General in the task of supervising all the Conferences and Councils, examining the general progress of the Society and making decisions on the strategy for the following year, as well as aspects that the President General considers must be corrected from previous administrations.

Commentary.-The IEC is a democratic body which meets annually. It is second only to a General Assembly in its ability to make strategic decisions. The voting members of the IEC are democratically elected Presidents who between them represent a large majority of the

worldwide Vincentian membership (see 4.3). All Superior or Assimilated Councils can suggest items for inclusion in the Agenda (see agenda in 4.5.1).

The custom is for Guest participants (see 4.4) to give priority to the voting members in all discussions on future strategy etc. (This custom is recommended for Councils at all levels of the Society out of respect for democracy). During the discussion on and evaluation of, the service of Council General, the President General is free either to chair the IEC or to delegate the role to the Vice-President General or to another member of the IEC. Obviously, all official decision-making meetings will be presided over by the President General or the Vice-President.

4.1.1 The mission of the Committee as an Ordinary Assembly of the Confederation

In the years in which the ordinary Assembly of the Council General is not convened, the Committee shall be responsible for performing the Assembly functions of the Confederation as provided in French legislation governing non-profit associations.

Commentary.-The convocation of the General Assembly, normally every six years (see article 2.2 of these Statutes) makes it necessary to entrust to the IEC, every year, the supervision of all the work accomplished by the International Structure.

4.2 Report to the General Assembly

At the beginning of each Council General Assembly meeting, the Committee shall report to the Assembly through the Secretary General on the results of its management and administration during the years in which the Assembly was not convened and shall request the ratification of its performance.

Commentary.-As the General Assembly is the highest level of the Confederation, it is clearly necessary that it must convey its acceptance or reservations on the service provided by the IEC during the years between General Assemblies. The IEC will take note of what is expected of it by the General Assembly for the time ahead.

4.3 Permanent and legal members

Permanent Committee members are, apart from the President General, who is responsible for the effective presidency of the Committee, other members namely the Vice-President General, the Secretary General and the Treasurer General. Likewise, they shall include, where appropriate, the Deputy Vice-Presidents General envisaged in Article 3.18 of these International Statutes.

Legal members of the Committee are the Presidents of the Superior or Assimilated Councils with more than 1,000 active and aggregated Conferences within their jurisdiction.

Moreover, the President General shall appoint, on the proposal of the other permanent and legal members of the Committee, five members from the Superior or Assimilated Councils with a lower degree of Vincentian representation around the world; these members are appointed on a biannual basis.

Each Superior or Assimilated Council which is a legal member is represented by one vote. The President General shall likewise have one vote which, if the case may be, shall be considered the casting vote.

Commentary.-It is highly desirable that the membership of the IEC will include at least one member from each continent.

In the last paragraph, "if the case may be" refers to a situation of equal votes for and against, in which case the President General's vote shall determine the outcome.

4.3.1 Quorum and voting

The valid adoption of resolutions by the International Executive Committee shall require the attendance or representation of at least 30% of its full members. Should a second call be necessary, this shall be issued at least 24 hours later, and shall be considered as validly constituted regardless of the percentage of members present or represented. Resolutions shall be validly adopted by a simple majority.

Commentary.-Clearly, a simple majority will be necessary for the approval of all matters except those for which the Statutes establish a higher percentage (see article 3.13)

4.4 Guest participants

The Territorial Vice-Presidents, the Presidents of the existing International Commissions and members especially delegated by the President General with individual tasks of an international nature, shall always be invited to attend Committee meetings with a right to speak but not to vote.

The International Spiritual Adviser shall also be invited especially because of his/her spiritual work.

4.4.1 Special invitations

Any person holding a post of responsibility within the Society's international structure may be called to explain his/her management and administration performance to the Committee, and this shall be subject to approval by the latter; the corresponding observations shall also be made by the Committee itself.

Commentary.-Within the Society it is usual to listen to one another. Taking into account the various opinions and aspirations in reaching specific decisions, it will be easier to obtain fraternal and effective management of the Society. At the same time, the difficulties experienced by the members of the IEC will be known more widely.

4.5 Special reports

The Deputy Vice-Presidents General, the Secretary General, the Treasurer General, the Territorial Vice-Presidents, and the members delegated by the President General with Commissions or special missions shall be specifically obliged to report on the work performed.

4.5.1 The Secretary General's Report

The Secretary General, who shall also act as the Secretary of the Committee, shall report on the management of the Permanent Section and on the administrative situation and service of the Offices of the Council General of the Society.

Except for the extraordinary meetings envisaged in paragraph two of Article 4.7 of these International Statutes, the Secretary General shall obtain confirmation from all the Superior or Assimilated Councils, at least two months in advance of the meeting of the International Executive Committee, regarding the inclusion or exclusion of any point on the agenda of the meeting.

The Secretary General shall be the spokesperson for Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils that do not form part of the Committee and do not attend its meetings, with respect to any reports or opinions that have been sent in writing.

Commentary.-The Councils that do not attend the IEC are, nevertheless consulted about the agenda and invited to send their views and suggestions on any issue in addition to the usual annual reports. This ensures that a proper respect is shown for the reports and opinions of every country. It reflects both the fraternal spirit of the Society and its desire to be as democratic as possible, given the impossibility of convening a full General Assembly every year.

4.5.2 The Treasurer General's report

Specifically with respect to the Treasurer General, he/she shall report on his/her management and administration performance to the Committee, which shall take the place of the Financial Commission envisaged in Article 3.20 of these International Statutes, when one has not been established.

Likewise, the Treasurer General shall present the budget and obtain its approval in those cases envisaged in Article 3.21 of these International Statutes.

4.6 Correspondents and Coordinators

In addition to the members with the responsibilities mentioned in the previous Articles, the Committee may specifically summon any Correspondent or Coordinator, etc., and include within the performance of their services, to ask questions with respect to any aspect of their service.

Commentary.-The future strategy of Coordinators and of any other senior officers of the Society is decided by the IEC after consultation with them. Individual Coordinators may or may not be invited to attend the IEC, but they will at least attend in the following days every two years as part of the international service structure (see 4.7.1).

4.7 Committee and International Structure Meetings

The Committee shall meet at least once a year, during the first six months of the year, except in years in which the Council General Assembly is convened.

Extraordinary meetings may be convened when the President General considers that these are necessary and also whenever requested by one half plus one of its voting members.

Commentary.-Just as Extraordinary General Assemblies can be called by a majority of legal members, so can meetings of the IEC, as a democratic requirement. (see 2.2.1).

4.7.1 Service structure meetings

The entire International service Structure shall meet in a Plenary Session each two years, except in years in which the ordinary Assembly of the Council General is convened, on the days after those on which the Committee is convened.

Commentary.-See Commentary on article 4.1.1 of these Statutes.

4.7.1.1 Participants

All the Vincentian members that are delegated international services and are the so-called components of the International Structure shall be invited to participate in these meetings.

Commentary.-“international services” – appointed with specific tasks or missions at international level (see 1.10.3, 3.6).

4.7.1.2 Objectives

The aim of these meetings shall be to provide information and to exchange experiences among the different members serving the International Structure of the Confederation. In this way, the members of the International Executive Committee shall learn about the difficulties of the International Structure and the latter shall gain knowledge of the international strategy to be designed by the former – the Committee – during inter-Assembly periods.

These shall be mainly training and informative meetings for the entire structure.

Commentary.-“the difficulties of the International Structure” – this phrase makes it unnecessary to consult in advance about the agenda, as any relevant issue may be discussed.

4.8 Prayer and meditation

In accordance with the Society’s tradition, the Committee meeting shall begin and end with a prayer. A spiritual reading or a meditation, which may lead to a brief sharing, shall be presented by one of the attending members, normally by the International Spiritual Adviser. A collection shall then be taken among the participants.

Commentary.-At every meeting, we are explicitly reminded of the spirituality of the Society in this way, and all business is conducted prayerfully, in a spirit of love, humility and joy. Any meeting of the Society must always reflect these characteristics of a Conference meeting.

5. The Permanent Section/Governing Board

5.1 Head office and convening of meetings

A Permanent Section shall be established at the head office of the Council General of the Confederation; it shall be presided over by the President General. It may be convened anywhere around the world, whenever the President General considers that the situation makes this advisable.

5.1.1 The mission of the Permanent Section

Its mission is to closely supervise and monitor the activity of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul around the world, helping the President General to achieve a better international service for members and the poor. It makes any appropriate decisions within the scope of the Rule and Statutes and the Society's Tradition, and also complies specifically with the resolutions adopted by the Assemblies of the Council General and the recommendations of the International Executive Committee.

The Permanent Section shall specifically monitor resolutions adopted at the last Assembly meeting of the Council General or the International Executive Committee, as well as their degree of implementation in the different Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils and by the Council General itself whenever appropriate.

5.1.2 The mission of the Permanent Section as the Governing Board of the Confederation

Whenever appropriate, and at least once a year, the Permanent Section shall be responsible for performing the role established by French Law for the Governing Boards of non-profit Associations.

In such circumstances, the Permanent Section shall be convened with a special agenda that shall make special mention of the fact that it acts as the Governing Board of the Confederation.

Commentary.-The Permanent Section and the Council General itself are the two oldest organs within our International Structure. Its authority is to take day-to-day decisions within the Society.

5.2 Permanent Section members

By virtue of the service that they render, the Board Members of the Council General, the Territorial Vice-Presidents and the Correspondents are members of this Permanent Section.

5.2.1 Voting

Save on the occasions when the Permanent Section meets as the Board of Directors of the Confederation, pursuant to Article 5.1.2 of these International Statutes, all Presidents of Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils who attend a session of the Permanent Section shall be entitled to a voice and vote, as if a full member of this body.

Commentary.-In the circumstances envisaged, where the decisions do not require restriction to those who can legally bind the Society in the Assembly or the IEC or the Governing 'Board of Directors', Presidents of Associated Councils (those not legally constituted in their country as defined in 1.6.2) also have a right to vote in the Permanent Section.

5.3 Territorial Technical Liaison Officers

Members of the Section are those professionals who are recruited whenever possible, and on a preferential basis, from among the members from different geographical origins. Their mission is delegated by the President General for a specific renewable period. They are appointed with the right to speak but not to vote.

5.3.1. The mission of the Territorial Technical Liaison Officers

Each Liaison Officer is appointed at the designated Council General Work Centre determined pursuant to Article 1.3.1 of these International Statutes, as an assistant to the Territorial Vice-Presidents and Coordinators of the geographical area to which they are assigned.

From time to time, other Technical Liaison Officers, with or without territorial responsibilities, may be entrusted with special missions reporting directly to the Secretary General or the President General.

Commentary.-Territorial Technical Liaison Officers are usually employees whose role reflects the Society's international nature. They will be located in the most appropriate work centre anywhere in the world.

5.3.2 Exclusion

These Members of the Permanent Section shall not belong to this Section when this is meeting as the Governing Board of the Confederation, as provided in Article 5.1.2 of these International Statutes.

Commentary.-This is a new provision to ensure that the senior officers serving the Society are always volunteers, and also to ensure that the Society and Conferences never lose this spirit.

5.4 Correspondent members and others

The members traditionally referred to as Territorial Correspondents who are appointed by the President General for a specific renewable period, as well as other members with specific missions, also form part of this Section.

Commentary.-In the head office of Council General, from our foundation until now, dozens of members ensured that the Conferences established throughout the world were given adequate attention and support. Although these members were all Parisians, at the beginning, today they are joined by members from different regions of Europe and the world.

"specific renewable period" – see commentary on 3.16

5.4.1 The mission of the Territorial Correspondents

The mission entrusted to the Territorial Correspondents is that of maintaining a constant relationship and effective cooperation with the different Territorial Technical Liaison Officers to whom they report. They shall be close and fraternal representatives before the international structure, of the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils, to whose service they have been assigned.

Commentary.-Their service ensures that all the resources of the Council General are available to all Conferences and Councils.

5.5 Permanent guests

The Presidents of the Superior or Assimilated Councils, when present at head office shall always be invited to attend the meetings of the Permanent Section.

Commentary.-This article is similar to article 5.2.1 of these Statutes. It is undoubtedly an invitation to the members by right and Associated members of Council General to join in this responsibility.

5.6 The Secretary of the Permanent Section

As envisaged in Article 3.19 of these International Statutes, the Society's Secretary General is also the Secretary General of the Permanent Section.

6. Institution, Aggregation and Dissolution

6.1 Aggregation and Institution powers

Only the Council General is empowered to institute new Councils and aggregate new Conferences to the Society, after consulting the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils accordingly.

Commentary.-By tradition, the full legitimate status of belonging to the Society is obtained through the official aggregation of Conferences and institution of Councils granted by the Council General of the Society. Only through these two processes of aggregation and institution is it possible to belong to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the fullest sense.

6.2 Aggregation and Institution Proposals. Speaker.

The Aggregation of Conferences and Institution of Councils are requested by a Speaker appointed by the President General, in a session of the Permanent Section. The Speaker receives the proposals and recommendations of the competent Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils on behalf of the President General and obtains opinions from the

members of the Permanent Section specifically responsible for handling relations with the Council which has requested the Agregation or Institution.

The Speaker presents the request to the Permanent Section, which either approves or rejects the Agregation or Institution request.

Commentary.-From the foundation of the Society, a member appointed by the President General, called 'the Speaker', proposes the aggregation or institution requested for a Conference or Council.

6.2.1 Deadline for presenting and requesting the Aggregation of Conferences

The Conference, object of an Aggregation request presented by the Speaker, must have been created and must have provided services to the poor for at least twelve months.

Commentary.-Active work for twelve months indicates a degree of stability and perseverance sufficient to justify Aggregation.

6.2.2 Preservation of aggregated or instituted status

The Conferences and Councils, once Aggregated or Instituted, shall retain that status as long as circumstances do not require the President General to proceed to their temporary suspension (see Article 6.8 and subsequent of these International Statutes), or to the firm exclusion by the Society of any Conference or Council.

Commentary.-This article does not prevent the President General, on the advice of the Permanent Section, agreeing to Internal Statutes of Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils which stipulate an automatic loss of status as Aggregated or Instituted for Conferences or Councils which fail to submit reports for a specified number of years, which fail to meet other specified requirements or which have fallen into abeyance.

In those approved circumstances, the Permanent Section should be notified of the loss of the Conference or Council by the Superior Council concerned. Aggregation or Institution will be cancelled and an accurate picture of the Society's true dimensions can constantly be maintained.

6.3 Extraordinary circumstances

The Permanent Section, through the Aggregations and Institutions Speaker, may sometimes request supplementary reports from the International Territorial Vice-Presidents.

Commentary.-These reports will help to complete, if necessary, the full official information to the Permanent Section.

6.4 Communication

The Aggregations or Institutions declared by the Permanent Section are notified by the President General to the President of the interested Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, as well as to the beneficiaries.

6.4.1 Aggregation and Institution Letters

The Aggregation or Institution Letters shall be signed by the President General and the Secretary General; a space shall be left for the signature of the President of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council. The Speaker shall provide notification of any Aggregation or Institution requests that have been rejected for different reasons.

Commentary.-Reasons for rejection will be notified to the President of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council.

6.5 The Institution of a Superior Council. Appointment of a provisional Board.

When the Council General, through the Permanent Section, institutes a Superior Council, the President General appoints a provisional Board, whose term of office is limited to one year and which may be renewed only twice. The President of this provisional Board is a Temporary member of the Council General, as established in the provisions contained in Article 1.10.2 of these International Statutes.

Commentary.-This article tries to facilitate the actions which lead to the development of the Society. Frequently, in the same region, there are some Conferences which do not know of one another, and which act independently without any coordination, because of the lack of an adequate Superior Council. This article tries to facilitate the contact between them, giving the President General this opportune, extraordinary mechanism which will never exceed three years.

6.6 Missions of the Provisional Board

During this year, the provisional Board shall prepare and ensure the adoption of the Internal Statutes of the new Society for the members in their geographical area and shall establish the legal procedures required for it to subsequently join the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as a fully legal member, in accordance with the provisions contained in Article 1.6 of these International Statutes.

The Council General, through its Permanent Section, shall finally, and whenever necessary, approve the text of the proposed Internal Statutes, including those of any Assimilated or Associated Council. Then, and within the scope of the new Statutes, the members shall elect a new President of the Superior Council and notify the Council General accordingly.

Commentary.-When the provisional Board is nominated, the International Statutes entrust it with certain duties, to enable it to move beyond this provisional arrangement towards belonging to the Confederation in the fullest sense.

6.7 The dissolution or suspension of the Aggregation or Institution of a Conference or Council

For reasons prompted by the seriousness of a particular event, the President General may suspend temporarily or permanently exclude a Conference or Council, after notifying the Permanent Section accordingly. In case of a permanent exclusion, this shall always entail the cancellation of the Aggregation or Institution. (see Article 6.9 and subsequent)

Commentary.-This extraordinary decision is reserved for extraordinary situations. An institution with our characteristics, with such a number of active Conferences and Councils, must have the power to take urgent and immediate decisions which prevent a specific problem having an adverse effect on other Conferences and Councils and the services they give to the poor (see 6.9.1, 6.9.2 for the conditions).

If the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council itself is suspended, it would be helpful if the President General also consulted the Board of Council General (defined in 3.16) and would report to the next IEC or General Assembly, as appropriate.

6.8 Extraordinary Delegation

Each President of a Superior or Assimilated Council is, on a precautionary basis by virtue of his/her election received and accepted accordingly at the head office of the Council General, delegated the powers to temporarily suspend a Conference, Council or member which are the prerogative of the President General. In other words, in cases of extreme seriousness and urgency, a President of a Superior or Assimilated Council may suspend a Conference, Council or member, exclusively as a precautionary measure, within his/her territorial jurisdiction.

Commentary.-This delegation is considered essential to provide an immediate response to an emergency, to protect the Society and the work. Whilst the suspension is in effect, the situation can be investigated and resolved, if possible. Assistance from a small Conciliation Committee may be appropriate, in order to listen to the member, Conference or Council suspended as a precaution, to ensure that we act in a just way. (see BR 15)

6.8.1 Communication

In such circumstances and regardless of the direct communications to those involved, the President General shall be notified of such decision, and the justified reasons for the same, within a maximum of 15 working days (as provided in Article 6.9.1.1 of these International Statutes); the member, Conference or Council in question may appeal to the aforementioned President in order to be heard. The President General shall approve or reject the appeals that are presented.

Commentary.-The intention is to preserve the rights of the members, Conferences and Councils, which could be harmed by a decision of this nature, realising that in some exceptional circumstances, when it becomes necessary, the President General is entrusted, as an additional service, to take the final decision in this matter.

6.9 Commencement of dissolution or suspension procedures.

Two procedures may be used to suspend, cancel or, where appropriate, withdraw an Aggregation or Institution procedure.

6.9.1 On the request from the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council

On request from the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council within whose jurisdiction the relevant member, Conference or Council are operating.

6.9.1.1 Necessary documentation

When a Superior Council requests the intervention of the Council General in the event of any problem, it must send, together with the request, full documentation for the information of the President General, particularly the documentation resulting from the intervention of the Conciliation Committee of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, where appropriate.

6.9.2 Ex officio

The President General ex officio, i.e. on the initiative and request of one of the International Territorial Vice Presidents, shall start the procedure of suspension or exclusion in the event of any serious circumstances. The President General shall report this serious situation to the Permanent Section.

Commentary.-Simple instructions about the possible procedures are given here.

6.10 Execution of the decision

The Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council that has supervised the Conference or Council is responsible for taking the necessary steps, in agreement with the Council General, in order to execute the sanction and to ensure the transfer of property and files of the dissolved organisation. In the event of suspension or dissolution of a Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, the President General shall appoint a Provisional Board pursuant to the provisions contained in Article 6.5 of these International Statutes.

6.11 Extraordinary procedures

In agreement with, and normally on the request of, the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council concerned, the Council General may intervene in disputes arising at Conference and Council level. Its proposed decision shall take into account the spirit of the Society and any specific aspects of the Society's Statutes at the location in question, provided that they are approved in conformity with the provisions contained in the Rule and these International Statutes and ratified accordingly by the Permanent Section.

6.11.1 Civil and other Tribunals

Any member, Conference or Council that takes legal action through civil or other Tribunals, without express authorisation from the Council General, in order to resolve disputes between members, Conferences or Councils, shall be automatically separated

from the Vincentian friendship by virtue of this action and shall be excluded, for all intents and purposes, from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Commentary.-It is not legally possible to prevent members taking Society matters before the courts, but this paragraph makes it quite clear that it is completely against the spirit of the Society to do so, and states the inevitable consequences, unless express authorisation from the Council General is obtained. The Society is perfectly capable of resolving nearly all issues 'within the family', using the Society's own structures and, if necessary, a Conciliation Committee set up by the Superior Council (see B.R. 17). The Society's ability to do the Lord's work will be damaged by any such public manifestation of disunity. It will succeed in its mission if its members are seen to be disciples of Our Lord; "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

This article does not, however, relate to criminal misconduct. In the event of fraud or other criminal misconduct, the Society will always cooperate fully with the civil authorities. It is important that the Superior Council President should be made aware of any such instance at the earliest possible moment, so that the best advice can be obtained and that possible damage to the Society's reputation is kept to a minimum. If such a matter refers to the Society at national level, the President General should be immediately informed.

7. Amendments to and Interpretation of the Rule and the Statutes

7.1 Rule and Statutes reform procedures

This Rule and the Statutes, in their three Parts, may be modified by means of two procedures.

7.1.1 General reform

Firstly, on a general basis, by replacing it with another newly-worded version.

7.1.2 Partial reforms, Amendments

Secondly, by so-called "Amendments". By means of this procedure, the different amendments approved shall be attached to the end of the text of the Rule and Statutes and shall have the same effect as those that they rectify, complement or replace.

Commentary.-Improvements to the Rule may be suggested by any member, Conference or Council. A sensible process to follow would be to raise the issue through the structures of the Society. A decision by the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council in favour of a suggested change would greatly strengthen the case, as many experienced members would have considered the issue.

7.2 Rule and Statutes reform periods and methods

In both cases, proposed changes to the Rule and Statutes or Amendments to any of its Articles must be presented one year before the date scheduled for the Council General Assembly meeting at which these changes or amendments are to be discussed.

Commentary.-The Rule and Statutes must not be submitted to changes made with haste, and without sufficient study and reflection. That is why, in order to establish general or partial reforms, the Statutes define the timescale involved.

7.3 Quorum

In order for the change or amendment by means of one of the two procedures mentioned above (reform of the entire Rule and Statutes or partial Amendment) to enter into effect, it must be approved by 2/3 of the legal members of the Council General present or represented, including those members who have voted by post.

Commentary.-In the same spirit as the commentary on 7.2, the Statutes establish precautions here, to ensure that the reform is shared and accepted by a higher majority of voting members.

7.4 Interpretation of the Rule

Any matter that is not specifically governed by any Parts of the Rule and Statutes shall be governed by Tradition and, in the final instance, by the decision issued by the Board of the Council General.

Commentary.-This article gives the Society an agile and rapid method to resolve questions requiring interpretation that arise from time to time. Members of the Board will have the necessary experience to provide an interpretation in keeping with the spirit and traditions of the Society.

The General Assembly (see 1.5) or IEC (see 4.1) have the authority subsequently to modify the Board's interpretation.

7.5 General rules governing interpretation

Despite the fact that the entire Rule and Statutes in their three Parts must be treated as a single legal document, the first of these parts entitled “Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul” prevails with respect to the other two Parts in terms of its contents.

Likewise, the “Statutes of the International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul”, are subordinate to the Rule but prevail over the Internal Statutes.

There are also the corresponding Internal Statutes for the Superior Councils. For their drafting, we have the Basic Requirements for the Drafting of the Internal Statutes of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

The Internal Statutes, which must be prepared by each Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council, shall comply fully with, and be subordinated to the Rule and to these International Statutes and shall be treated as a single legal document, as provided in

Article 1.7 of these Statutes. They must always be approved by the Permanent Section of the Council General in order to be valid.

PART 3

Basic Requirements

FOR DRAFTING THE INTERNAL STATUTES

**FOR SUPERIOR, ASSIMILATED AND ASSOCIATED
COUNCILS**

OF THE

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION

OF THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL

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In compliance with Article 7.5 of the *International Statutes*, these together with the *Rule* shall prevail over the *Basic Requirements* to which they give shape.

The *Rule* itself and the *International Statutes* shall serve as models for drafting the *Internal Statutes* of the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils.

However, the *Basic Requirements (B.R.)* are much more detailed and the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils must include them all, in order for their **Internal Statutes** to be approved in accordance with the philosophy of the Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Of course, such Councils are free to include other Statutes which reflect their own customs or circumstances, but these must be in accordance with the spirit of the Rule. Once the Statutes are drawn up and before their submission to the civil authorities of each country, the text must receive prior approval from the Permanent Section of the Council General.

THE STRUCTURE

Conferences meet frequently

B.R. 1: Members of the Society, called Vincentians, traditionally gather in communities called "Conferences", which meet regularly and frequently. (See Article 3.3.1 of the Rule).

Commentary

The Rule (3.3.1) specifies meetings "usually weekly but at least every fortnight". There are three essential dimensions of membership of our Society.

- *The horizontal dimension – towards the poor whom we seek and visit (Rule 1.2 to 1.12),*
- *The vertical dimension – towards God - the spiritual development of members (Rule 2.1 to 2.6).*
- *The support dimension and fraternal community – towards one another - unity and friendship between the members and mutual support in discerning the best way to help (Rule 3.1 to 3.15)*

This description only expresses an emphasis, as all three dimensions are always present in all truly Vincentian activities. A weekly meeting enables all three dimensions to be constantly developed. To halve the opportunities for spiritual development etc. by meeting only every two weeks, is sad indeed. If one meeting is then missed, it will be four weeks since the last meeting attended, which also adversely affects our service to the poor and that unity and friendship which we treasure. It will often be found that where the weekly meeting is not respected, there is a misunderstanding that visiting the poor is all membership involves, with a very inadequate understanding of the importance of the spiritual dimension and support dimension – the essential community spirit, which in reality make a marvellous difference to the effectiveness of our love for the poor.

Only those who love one another, who understand one another, those who are deeply concerned about other members of the fraternal community - the Conference, sharing both

their sorrows and their joys, attain the fullest expression of a communal commitment to the poor and are a 'sign of contradiction' for the world (Lk 2:34).

Councils – the minimum number of levels

B.R. 2: Conferences are organised under different levels of Councils in the simplest manner possible.

The denomination preferred for these Councils is: Superior Council: coordinates and represents the general activity of all the Conferences in a particular country or geographical area. **Area Council:** represents groups of Conferences in a particular geographical area under the supervision of the Superior Council to which it belongs. **Both Councils shall include the area they serve in their name in order to differentiate between them.**

The Superior Councils determine the boundaries of the Area Councils and create new Councils when the number of Conferences they assist so requires, informing the Council General of the same and requesting their Institution.

Other Regional, Central, etc. Councils may be instituted when deemed appropriate.

Commentary

The intention is to eliminate any level of Councils which is not now essential because of changed circumstances and modern technology. Some countries have, with benefit, dispensed with the Central or Regional levels of Councils. The functions of the Councils (see Appendices 3 and 5) and their current boundaries and operation should be reviewed and changed if necessary and their effectiveness should be evaluated. If this review establishes that those in need and the members benefit from having one or more levels of Council between Area Council and Superior Council, then they should be preserved.

In other words, we should preserve as light a structure as possible, according to the circumstances in which we are working. Too many levels of Councils could reduce the effectiveness of our service to the poor and the members.

Councils are at the service of all Conferences under their jurisdiction. They help Conferences develop their spiritual life, intensify the service of each Conference, and diversify their activities so that they will be constantly attentive to the needs of those who suffer. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.6 of the Rule).

In particular and without creating a parallel organisation, Councils at appropriate levels should particularly promote the Youth Committees, helping them to be fully integrated into the life of the Society.

The 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.

Commentary

To speak about young members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is always to speak about adapting ourselves to their need for training and support in their journey through life. Any of our norms, any of our decisions, should always give the first priority to what the young members expect, request and need from the older members. To amplify what is said below about young members, see the circular letter from the President General dated 30th June 2002.

"Youth" can be defined, for the Society's purposes, as beginning at any age when a person can make a sustained contribution to Vincentian work and ending at age 30.

"fully integrated" - the members of Youth Committees will be young members who may be members of senior Conferences or of Youth Conferences. Contact details should be maintained for members of Youth Conferences which can be passed on to the President of a senior Conference when they leave the Youth Conference or move to another area. The appropriate President can then invite them to join the senior Conference,

Young people should, of course, always be invited to Festival meetings and other Society events. They find it encouraging to be invited to give a brief report on their activities.

"Youth Committees" – Superior Councils should decide at what levels of Council such Committees should ideally be established. Membership of an active Youth Committee is an excellent way to develop the talents and charisms of young members and strengthens their commitment to the Society.

"the same relationship as other Committees" – as, for instance, the Finance, Twinning Committees etc. It is normal that each Committee seeks the agreement of the Council to any strategy it proposes (always indicating the cost), to a level of expenditure below which it can make its own decisions, and the content and frequency of reporting. A Committee, and therefore a Youth Committee, should then be trusted to decide on its tactics and operate with some autonomy, but always within the agreed strategy and budget. Youth Committees at different Council levels, which are each related to their Council in this manner would never become a parallel organisation, because they agree their strategy not with a higher Youth Council but with the Society's duly instituted Council to which they report.

Aggregation and Institution

B.R. 3: All Conferences and Councils are full members of the Society when they are respectively Aggregated or Instituted by the Council General. (For the complete criteria, see Articles 3.8 of the Rule and 6.1 *et seq.* of the International Statutes).

Commentary

Aggregation may be requested after a Conference has been active for at least 12 months. This is such a significant development for the Conference and Council that it is customary to present the Aggregation Certificate to the Conference President at an Area Council meeting or, better still, during a Festival meeting.

CONFERENCES & THEIR WORK

Membership

B.R. 4: The Society may have different categories of members. Full members are those who voluntarily live the Conference's life of prayer and action by attending the meetings and through personal contact with those who suffer. The Internal Statutes of the Superior Councils may establish, as necessary, other categories of members who collaborate with its service to the poor. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.1 and 6.4 of the Rule).

Commentary

"other categories of members" - for example, whilst they do not attend the meetings, Benefactors help the Society's works by their donations, and Auxiliary members, help the Society through their personal cooperation in any work for the service of those in need.

All categories of members are spiritually linked to the Society and should be invited to all Festival meetings and Conference Masses or social occasions.

The process of accepting members will vary with local custom and legislation, but should be specified in detail in the Statutes.

Conference Presidents are responsible for ensuring that the new members acquire knowledge and formation in the traditions and practices of the Society, and the necessary skills. All the other Conference members will assist the President, who should also encourage the member to attend any training course provided with the support of the Superior Council.

Conference Meeting essentials

B.R. 5: A Conference meeting always includes the following:

- a) **Opening and closing prayers, formal and spontaneous. (A prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and a prayer for those whose suffering they wish to share are obligatory).**

Commentary

To amplify all the following commentaries, see the circular letter from the President General dated 30th June 2001.

The opening and closing prayers should enshrine nearly all aspects of Vincentian spirituality. The prayers will only nourish our spiritual lives weekly if they are said slowly and reflectively. Gabbling prayers is simply an empty ritual. Members will be helped if, from time to time, they reflect on the meaning of each phrase of the prayers, during the spiritual reading. To say a few prayers devoutly has always been the preference of the Society, so Council General has never considered it right to impose even so worthy a prayer as the Rosary as compulsory. To include spontaneous prayer is encouraged, for any needs the members feel are important to them at the moment.

- b) **A spiritual reading or meditation, on which members are always invited to comment as a means of sharing their faith and deepening their mutual understanding.**

Commentary

***"sharing"** – there is a considerable difference between 'discussion', which can imply possible disagreements, and 'sharing'. It is customary to avoid absolutely, matters of party politics or divisive criticism arising from the differences between Christian denominations or other faiths. On the other hand, issues of social justice, viewed in the light of Catholic social principles are entirely appropriate, as are any aspects of Catholic spirituality, doctrine or practice. Whilst discussion is certainly appropriate during other phases of the meeting, sharing is much more fruitful during the reflection on the spiritual reading. It implies that members say how the reading spoke to them individually, what they found inspiring or illuminating, how it could lead them to more Christ-like attitudes or actions. They may well build on the comments of others but it is not the time to challenge and disagree with others, nor the time for an academic analysis of the meaning of a passage.*

The Gospels are the prime source. Meditation on the Rule will bear much fruit. Lives of the saints are recommended, especially those of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. 'The Imitation of Christ' by Thomas Kempis has stood the test of time. Catholic (or other) papers, magazines and books can sometimes be excellent sources. It is both courteous and beneficial if a President ensures that at every meeting the Spiritual Adviser is invited to give his views, especially near

the end of the sharing, which he could sum up. Too early a comment by someone very fluent and knowledgeable can sometimes stifle comment from others.

- c) Reading and approval of the Minutes of the previous meeting, according to the notes taken by the Secretary on the matters discussed and agreed at each meeting.**

Commentary

The Minutes can be thorough or short, but should at least record who was present, the action points agreed and the expenses and collection.

- d) Reading and approval of the financial report presented by the Treasurer, including the amounts of available funds and expenses.**
- e) Reports on the visits made by the members since the previous meeting to families and friends in need. Discussion of ways to improve the Conference's service.**

Commentary

In addition to relating facts and problems, it is very helpful for the spirituality of the Conference, if members report on anything they found to be inspiring during their visit.

It is very important that every member knows, in depth, the needs of all the friends the Conference is helping.

- f) Allocation of the visits and other tasks entrusted to each member for the following week by the President, after consultation with the Conference. Visits are preferably made in pairs.**

Commentary

"allocation" – *the President tries to match the nature of the visit to the skills of the members. Some of those we visit prefer to get to know nearly all the members, over a period, but visiting in a rota must still allow exceptions, to respect those who prefer visits from the same members.*

"visits in pairs" – *in some countries this will be made obligatory, perhaps for all visits or for visits to families but also important is the care required with especially vulnerable adults. The safety of members visiting in certain localities is another factor.*

Among the other advantages of visiting in pairs are:

- * Two members are likely to see different aspects of a problem and other possibilities*
- * It helps to foster the friendship between members which is so important to us*

** Our Lord sent out his disciples in pairs, for mutual support and inspiration.*

g) A secret collection.

Commentary

This tradition has existed from the time of the very first Conference in 1833. It provides the opportunity for members, if they wish, to donate, secretly, the cost of certain gifts to those they visit, without making any other member feel inadequate when they are going through difficult times financially.

This is a very important tradition within the Society. Every Conference makes a secret collection and no-one knows the amount given by each member, which is known only to God. What the Conference gives is taken from the Common Fund, so the people helped do not know whether the members helping them are wealthy or poor. It is the community – the Conference as a whole, that is helping.

h) Review of any correspondence.

i) Whenever possible, the inclusion of training periods for members and communication of information about all levels of the Society.

Commentary

Every Conference, anywhere, is in a sense, representing the entire world-wide Society. This additional agenda item has been customary in a few countries which have found it beneficial. It provides the opportunity for members to get to know what is happening elsewhere in the Society, so that they really feel part of one international family.

It is envisaged that only a few minutes will be added to the meeting, so if a Superior Council decides to provide some training resources for this slot, it should bear this in mind.

Visits to the poor are made in a Vincentian spirit

B.R. 6: Visits to those in need should be made in their environment, whenever possible. The 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.

(For the complete criteria, see Articles 1.2. through 1.12 of the Rule).

Commentary

"in their environment" – it has always been our custom, whenever possible, to 'go to the poor, to visit them in their homes, hostels, camps, or where they are sleeping rough in the street. In this way, the contrast is obvious between the Society's open-handed offer to help, in a spirit of love and friendship, and a State activity which demands that the poor come for help to a certain location.

"whenever possible" – there are exceptions - for instance, Vincentian shops or drop-in centres, where the poor come to us for help. Such work sometimes attracts volunteers who do not wish to belong to a Conference. In those cases, some formation sessions should always be provided to ensure that they relate to the poor with the Vincentian spirit described in this article and more fully in the Rule (especially 1.7 -1.12), and that they are able to link the poor with a Conference, if this is what they wish.

Conference & Council Annual Review

B.R. 7: At least once a year, each Conference and Council must evaluate their service to the members and to the poor they visit, and find ways to provide better service. (For the complete criteria, see Article 1.6. and also Chapter 3 of the Rule).

They should also consider the new types of needs they seek to alleviate and how to find those in need.

Commentary

A meeting to review all aspects of Conference work has been found to be an excellent way to resolve difficulties and to decide the best way for the Conference to move forward.

Sometimes members will become frustrated with certain aspects, but say nothing because they do not wish to 'rock the boat'. Loss of members and impairment of the work can result. The review meeting enables all aspects to be thoroughly discussed, so that all frustrations can be aired and suggestions discussed.

An annual Review meeting is, therefore, to become part of Conference life, and the same idea is extended to Councils.

At least once a year they submit a report on their activities to the Superior Council and the immediate Council to which they belong.

Commentary

Such reports are not only useful in providing the statistics needed for external publicity to create goodwill and attract new members and funding, but they are essential to enable the Councils to serve the Conferences, by indicating Conferences:

- *likely to go into abeyance due to shortage of members – they could be offered help with recruitment*
- *meeting very infrequently*
- *undertaking few visits – they could be offered help to find more people in need*
- *having a heavy expenditure – they may need funding*
- *having excessive funds which are being 'hoarded'*
- *having very little contact with the Society and the area meetings and events it promotes*

Commissioning Ceremony

B.R. 8: All members shall annually renew their promise of service to the Members and to the poor, thereby deepening the spiritual dimension of their vocation. (For the complete criteria, see Chapter 2 of the Rule).

Commentary

"annually" - *each Conference shall celebrate the renewal of the members' promise of service, preferably during a Conference Mass, but it could be conducted during a Festival Meeting.*

"promise" - *a sincerely made promise, but not a legal, civil or canonical vow.*

"deepening the spiritual dimension" - *it is recommended that a member be in the Society for at least six months before taking part in the Commissioning ceremony, as this demonstrates perseverance and it is more likely that the member has had sufficient Vincentian formation to be able to make this a meaningful commitment, in which the spiritual dimension is prominent.*

Before being Commissioned, a new member could exchange views on continued membership with the Conference President or the Spiritual Adviser. In this way, the period before the Commissioning would be, in effect, an informal probation period. Those who remain as members could be invited to share their observations and constructive suggestions with the Conference.

OFFICERS & DECISION-MAKING

Subsidiarity and Democracy

B.R. 9: The Society accepts the principles of subsidiarity and democratic consensus as the basic rules of its functioning. (For the complete criteria, see Articles 3.9 and 3.10 of the Rule).

Commentary

"democratic" - in the International Statutes of the Society, care has been taken to state whether a quorum is required and, if so, what is the quorum, who can vote and what majority is required. The Internal Statutes should also make these matters clear.

Our custom is to allow Presidents to make their own distinctive contribution, but they are expected to listen to the members of their Conference or Council. If, after prayer and serious open-minded discussion, the consensus or majority vote is clearly against the President's view, he will fully accept the democratic decision.

At Council level, if both the majority of the Board and the voting members are against a proposal, this should always be decisive. If, however, the Board are unanimously in favour but a majority of voting members are against a proposal, the proposal is defeated, but there is another possibility in that unusual situation. Would the Council agree to allow the scheme to go ahead for a limited period or on a limited basis? It could then be evaluated and either withdrawn, or, in the light of a positive experience, sustained. This will ensure that a President can lead more effectively, whilst still being bound, finally, by democratic decisions.

Servant leadership

B.R. 10: Offices in the Society, at any level, are always to be accepted as service to Christ, the members and the poor. (For the complete criteria, see Article 2.6 of the Rule).

Commentary

"service" – the President and other officers carefully avoid the temptation to dominate. "You know that those who .. rule over the Gentiles lord it over them .. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mk 10:42b-44).

By tradition, within the Society, we say that the service given by every Conference and Council is better or worse depending on the example given by the President. In fact, the quality of the service, of the commitment, of the sacrifice, is affected by the

members' response to the President's example, which strongly influences the life of the Conference or Council.

Board members and other officers

B.R. 11: For a specific period of time the Society chooses members for the various Council and Conference offices, who will carry out their tasks with the same dedication with which they work within their own Conference.

Commentary

"for a period of time" – *the advantage of an appointment 'for a limited renewable period' is that changes in the officers can be made more harmoniously if it becomes necessary (perhaps because the office now requires different skills). It also gives the President the opportunity to give valuable experience to someone who could be a possible successor, who may not have been known to the President when the first appointments were made.*

"within their own Conference" – *It is very important that all officers, including the Superior Council President, belong to a Conference and still attend it and visit the poor as often as possible. It is a beautiful custom, which ensures that everyone operates at the 'grass-roots' level and 'keeps their feet on the ground'. It is also an expression of humility as even the Superior Council President will gladly accept the authority of the Conference President to allocate the work to be done.*

Similar to the Board of the Council General, each Conference or Council should have at least a Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer appointed by the President after consultation with the members. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.16 of the International Statutes).

Commentary

The Vice President exercises all the functions of the President when the latter is absent. This ensures that the Society can continue to operate effectively, especially in times of a lengthy absence. In particular, the Vice President usually attends the meeting of the next higher Council, whenever the President is unable to attend.

"consultation" *could, if preferred, be by inviting members to suggest privately who they think would be the most suitable persons for these roles.*

"at least" – *implies that other officers may be appointed, as the President wishes. To ensure democracy, however, in a Society in which decisions are often made by consensus, some Superior Councils have stipulated that there will always be more elected Presidents than appointed officers, in any Council. Appointed officers should ensure that the elected Presidents are given more opportunity than themselves, to express their views.*

To safeguard the good reputation of the Conference or Council and therefore, that of the Society itself, appointees should not be relatives of the person empowered to make the appointments.

Commentary

This article is intended to ensure that the offices are spread widely among the members and not kept within one family. It is also a prudent safeguard for auditing reasons.

The President is elected by secret ballot by the full members of the Conference or Council, in accordance with the legal procedures of the country where the Society is established. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.11 of the Rule).

Commentary

The date of the election should be made known in advance to all full members, and those who cannot attend should have the opportunity to hand in their vote in a sealed envelope.

There should be two members who count the votes, neither of them being candidates. The total electoral procedure for Councils and Conferences should include the appropriate elements covered in the election of the President General (see 3.6 to 3.9 of the International Statutes).

If there are more than two candidates, a second round is recommended between the two candidates who have the most votes. (see International Statutes 3.9.2).

The maximum term of office for Presidents of Superior Councils or those of any other level should not exceed six years.

Commentary

A shorter period may be stipulated. The periods for different levels of Councils or Conferences could be different if so desired.

Under exceptional circumstances, a Superior Council may request the Council General's permission to extend the term of office of its President. The Council General, through the Permanent Section, will authorise or refuse such a possibility and, in case of its authorisation, will set the maximum period of time for that extension.

Councils, at any level, have the same power as Council General to authorise a second term of office for the Presidents of the Councils and Conferences they co-ordinate on written request of the same. By virtue of the above, Council and Conferences Presidents cannot be re-elected without requesting and obtaining the agreement of the next higher Council.

Commentary

"exceptional" - *It is envisaged that this extension would be very rare. One of the President's main tasks is to identify possible successors and to provide them with opportunities which will prepare them for a future role. It will help if all members are aware that it is part of our spirituality to be willing to take office at some time, assuming the member has the appropriate skills and that family and work commitments permit. This is implied in the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30), and Spiritual Advisors can help to generate this willingness.*

On the other hand, to cling to office is against our spirit, against humility. At the end of their term of office, Presidents should rather, 'prefer others to themselves' (Phil 2:3, Rom 12:10), enabling others to exercise their gifts and make their own distinctive contribution.

"will set the maximum period for that extension" – *this should be as short as possible, reflecting the circumstances – all levels of Council must set a maximum term of extension.*

It is recommended that members should not hold the office of President after the age of 70.

Commentary

In some countries it is not possible to state an age limit.

Where it is legally possible, the recommendation is that an age limit should be stated, which should not exceed 70.

On balance, the Society's view is that for the role of President there are more advantages than disadvantages in having an age limit. It ensures that we remember the part played by young people in the foundation of the Society. It will encourage younger members to join, as they will become aware that the Society is still dynamic and that they can play a significant leadership role in the Society. It will help to keep the Society young.

It is also sometimes the case that a person who was once full of energy and good health, may be in a much poorer state of health over the age of 70. In such cases, it is much more sensitive to suggest that they should step down from office because of the rules rather than because they are no longer able to be an effective President.

If all members of a Conference are over 70, it should not be closed down, but the Area Council should help it organise a recruitment campaign, with a view to handing

over the Presidency to a younger member as quickly as possible. This could be within a few months in some cases.

There is no reason why experienced members over the age of 70 should not be considered for other offices in the Society, because a President who is a servant leader identifies the natural gifts and spiritual charisms of members and provides opportunities, whenever possible, for these gifts to be used for the good of the poor and the Society.

The Society must remain voluntary

B.R. 12: Employees of the Society, of its Special Works or of organisations controlled by the Society, may not be elected or appointed to any office within the Society. They may, however, be members and hold offices in a Conference, provided it is not the Conference responsible for the work in which they are employed. (For the complete criteria, see Article 1.12.2 of the International Statutes).

Commentary

This is a wise provision to maintain the voluntary character of the Society and to avoid conflicts of interest.

Article 1.12.2 of the international Statutes indicates that employees may, when invited, attend meetings of the Special Work or Council to which they report, and participate in discussions relevant to their function, without, of course, having a right to vote.

"may be members... of a Conference" – *some employees wish to participate fully in the work of a Conference (not responsible for their work). It can only be of benefit to the poor and the employee if they fully absorb and put into practice the spirit of the Society in this way. It will certainly bring an additional dimension to their work for the Society.*

The Spiritual Adviser in a lay Society

B.R. 13: As traditional since the beginning of the Conferences, a Spiritual Adviser should be appointed to foster spiritual life within the Conferences and Councils. Priests, permanent deacons and other members of religious orders are not eligible to be appointed to any office outside of their spiritual work. (For complete criteria, see Article 3.16.2 of the International Statutes).

Commentary

"to foster spiritual life" – *The Society, and the motivation of the members, is not merely humanism. Our work is not just another form of social work. From the beginning, the members have sought to follow Jesus Christ by serving him in the poor*

(Rule 1.2, 2.1 to 2.6). A Spiritual Adviser must, of course, foster the spiritual life in the way he or she feels guided towards by the Holy Spirit, but in all cases, the spirit of the Rule should be promoted in its entirety and be the basis for any programme of spiritual development.

At Council level, although chosen by the President, the Spiritual Adviser must obtain agreement from his or her ecclesiastical superior.

Should a priest, permanent deacon or other member of a religious order not be available for the spiritual advisory function, the President of the Council or Conference, after consultation with the President of the Council to which it belongs, may appoint a member who has had the appropriate training as Spiritual Advisor.

Commentary

"appoint a member" – *this recognises that in some countries, the reducing number of priests makes it difficult for them to take on this role as a regular commitment.*

"after consultation" – *it will usually be prudent for a Conference President to discuss this appointment also with the parish priest.*

"appropriate training" – *the Superior Council should ensure that such training is available. Spiritual readings or other resources suitable for use in Conferences and Councils should be identified or provided.*

PROMOTING UNITY WITHIN AND BETWEEN CONFERENCES

'Festival Meetings' & Conference Masses should be maintained

B.R. 14: Conferences and Councils celebrate liturgical ceremonies, particularly Vincentian ceremonies, together throughout the year, endeavouring to maintain a spirit of profound moral and material friendship among the members. (For the complete criteria, see Chapters 2 and 3 of the Rule).

Commentary

There are two situations envisaged.

1). **'Festival Meetings'** of the members within one or more Councils areas. A minimum number per year should be specified, in accordance with local custom, but it is difficult to see how the purposes can be achieved if there are not at least two annually.

These 'festival meetings' have been regarded, from the Society's earliest days, as a means of promoting friendship between the members, which has always been treasured. It leads to a sharing of experience and good practice and to mutual support when Conferences are going through difficult times. Sometimes an external speaker will provide information that is useful for members in their work. Such meetings are one way to extend the horizons of the members, so that they never focus entirely on their own Conference but feel part of a much larger family, the Vincentian family throughout the world.

"liturgical ceremonies" – *it is customary to have Mass, Benediction or some other ceremony during Festival meetings.*

"Vincentian ceremonies" *refers to the liturgical ceremonies regarded as especially meaningful to Vincentians. These are:*

- *the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the liturgical year*
- *the Immaculate Conception on 8th December, because Mary is our Patroness*
- *the first Sunday of Lent (because in Lent the need to undertake more charitable works is emphasised along with the need for more prayer and penance)*
- *the Birthday of Blessed Frederic Ozanam (23rd April)*
- *the liturgical Feast Day of Blessed Frederic Ozanam (9th September)*
- *the Feast Day of St. Vincent (27th September)*
- *the liturgical Feast Day of Blessed Rosalie Rendu (9th November)*

2) Conference Masses. In many countries, these are customary. Ideally there should be at least one a year, for the members, both full and auxiliary, including spouses and children, during which the Commissioning Ceremony could be held. Former members of the Conference who have died could be especially remembered on this occasion, perhaps mentioning, simply and without exaggeration, an aspect of their Vincentian work that was an inspiration to other members. This would be an expression of our continuing love for them. We could remember also those we visited who have died, who will, according to St. Vincent, be there to welcome us when we go to our eternal reward.

Many Conferences identify a parish Mass every quarter which all the members try to attend. They offer the Mass for the poor and for the Society and pray that their own work may be ever more fruitful.

Since 1870, it has been customary for Conferences to join a "vast crusade of supplication and prayers" by having the 'Mass of the four intentions' offered for the intentions of the Church, the Pope, our Society and our own country (President General M. Calon reminded the Society of this custom in 1911).

AUTHORITIES OF PRESIDENTS OF SUPERIOR COUNCILS

To suspend members, Conference & Councils

B.R. 15: In accordance with Article 6.8 of the International Statutes, the Presidents of s Superior Councils have the delegated authority to suspend members, Conferences or Councils of the Society within their area as a precautionary measure.

When the Superior Council President has made such a decision, the member, Conference or Council suspended as a precautionary measure will cease to exercise any office and may not act on behalf of the Society under any circumstances. However, such member, Conference or Council is entitled to appeal to the President General. (For the complete criteria, see Article 6.8.1 of the International Statutes).

The suspended member may appeal to the relevant Superior Council so that the case may be reviewed at a plenary meeting of the latter, which will listen to the member and make its decision by vote. Should the member choose this process, the appeal to the President General will remain pending.

Commentary

"delegated authority" – the authority to suspend or exclude belongs exclusively to the President General (see Article 6.7 of the International Statutes). This delegated authority is considered essential to provide an immediate response to an emergency, to protect the Society and those we visit. Whilst the suspension is in effect, the situation can be investigated, quickly and thoroughly, and resolved, if possible. Extreme care is taken to ensure that the investigation is not only fair but seen to be fair. The members concerned will always be treated with sensitivity and love, as we are all aware of our own frailty. Assistance from a small Conciliation Committee may be appropriate (see B.R.17). The appeal procedure provides the necessary guarantee of consistency and fairness.

"suspended member" – whereas the appeal of Conferences and Councils is to the President General, in the case of a member, the appeal route would normally be first to the Superior Council and only after that, to the President General.

To annul the election of a President

B.R. 16: Presidents of Superior Councils 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 Superior Council Assembly.

Commentary

This is another authority to protect the Society. It could be invoked if the President was unwell or was behaving in a way that was causing grave difficulties which seriously impaired the ability of the Conference or Council to carry out its work for the poor. The difficulty may be due to various causes such as a medical condition, physical or mental, complete lack of available time due to personal circumstances, lack of the conciliatory spirit which a servant leader needs to maintain harmony, or even insufficient ability for the role. Normally, a President with these difficulties could be persuaded to step down, by the Conference or Council members, proceeding with sensitivity and charity. If he or she refuses to resign and the situation becomes unworkable, and the next higher Council also cannot resolve the situation, the authority in this article may be invoked.

During discussions with a higher Council and during an appeal, which may be referred to a Conciliation Commission (see B.R. 17), the appellant should have the right to be accompanied by another member of the Society who could, if necessary, speak on his or her behalf.

May establish a Conciliation Committee

B.R. 17: The Superior Councils may establish a Conciliation Committee, to which Councils, Conferences and members may appeal.

Commentary

"A Conciliation Committee" – *this has been found to be of great value by several countries. It may only have three or four members, of great experience in Vincentian matters, with relevant skills and a conciliatory spirit. It should have the capacity to quickly establish the facts, be able calmly to explain the views of the two parties to each other, and to propose solutions which are consistent with the spirit of the Rule and the Statutes. Sustained prayer, good will and a desire to reconcile, will usually resolve the issue satisfactorily.*

Councils, Conferences and members trust the integrity of the Society and its life of prayer and communion, so that they need not appeal to civil or legal authorities to resolve internal differences.

Any member, Conference or Council which uses means other than those provided by the Society to resolve internal disputes renounces Vincentian

communion and leaves the Society. (For the complete criteria, see Article 6.11.1 of the International Statutes).

Commentary

It is not legally possible to prevent members taking Society matters before the courts, but this paragraph makes it quite clear that it is completely against the spirit of the Society to do so, and states the inevitable consequences, unless express authorisation from the Council General is obtained (see article 6.11.1 of the International Statutes). The Society is perfectly capable of resolving nearly all issues 'within the family', using the Society's own structures and, if necessary, the Conciliation Committee set up under this article. The Society's ability to do the Lord's work will be damaged by any such public manifestation of disunity. It will succeed in its mission if its members are seen to be disciples of Our Lord; "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

This article does not, however, relate to criminal misconduct. In the event of fraud or other criminal misconduct, the Society will always cooperate fully with the civil authorities. It is important that the Superior Council President should be made aware of any such instance at the earliest possible moment, so that the best advice can be obtained and that possible damage to the Society's reputation is kept to a minimum. If such a matter refers to the Society at Superior Council level, the President General should be immediately informed.

TRANSPARENCY IN USING MONEY AND OTHER ASSETS

Annual finance & activity reports are normally publicised by Superior Councils, other Councils & Conferences

B.R. 18: The Society shall preserve its good reputation for honesty and responsible stewardship. It will produce finance and activity reports at least annually.

Commentary

Such reports are a legal requirement in some countries under laws which govern Charitable Organisations, but even where this is not the case, such reports are essential if the Superior Council and Council General are to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of the Society and the scope of its work, with a view to offering assistance and serving more effectively. The facts will often be an inspiration to other Conferences and Councils.

Whenever circumstances permit, these reports should be publicised externally and internally and be made available to all members and the public in general.

These reports should be sent to the diocesan Bishops and the Civil Authorities for their information whenever possible. (For the complete criteria, see Article 3.19.1 of the International Statutes).

Commentary

"publicised externally" – *there is a temptation to misinterpret the concept of the humility of the Society and publicise little or nothing externally. The result is that many of the public feel we are almost a 'secret society'. Our mission to let the world know that Christ is our inspiration, requires us not to hide our light "under a bushel", but to let our light "so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:15-16). We can and should publicise the Society's work and sometimes the media will mention the names of members, although we never seek such personal publicity. We are, however, careful not to exaggerate the impact we make. The truth is eloquent enough.*

These reports, together with events, activities, and inspirational anecdotes from all levels of the Society should, therefore, be publicised both internally and externally. In addition to its main purpose of 'spreading the gospel', such publicity generates goodwill towards the Society.

Councils and Conferences should prepare similar reports.

Commentary

It is highly desirable that a Conference should produce an annual report for the Parish, thanking the parishioners for their contributions, normally without mentioning individual benefactors. Explaining the activities of the Conference and how the money has been spent, in general terms, within the parish, elsewhere in the country or within the national and international Twinings, will bring home to parishioners the international scope of the Society, and create good will which should bear fruit when potential new members are contacted and it may encourage more generous donations. The reports should avoid mentioning individual members, if possible, except for contact purposes.

The Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils will be, to all legal effects, the sole responsible parties before any national or international jurisdiction for the events occurring within their respective areas. (For the complete criteria, see Article 1.7.2 of the International Statutes).

Commentary

This article protects Council General against being involved unnecessarily and unjustly in litigation which is properly attributed to other Councils over events occurring without the full and proven knowledge and agreement of Council General.

Property and the distribution of unused funds

B.R. 19: Conferences and Councils zealously manage and maintain the Society's assets.

Commentary

"zealously manage and maintain" – this refers to money, investments, equipment and buildings. Buildings and essential equipment should be maintained in a safe condition.

A policy of "ethical investment" should be followed, to ensure that the Society is not investing in Companies which operate in a way that seriously disadvantages the poor or which is contrary to the values of the Society.

The authority to dispose of, purchase, mortgage, lease or rent the Society's real estate assets shall remain exclusively with Superior or Assimilated Councils, which may delegate this authority in specific cases.

Commentary

This article should effectively ensure the following:

- * All properties owned are listed.*
- * The location of all deeds or leases is known – ideally the Society will keep a copy in a central location.*
- * The terms of the deeds and leases are within the parameters laid down by the Society. (There have been instances of clauses which involved the Society in severe and unreasonable liabilities).*
- * All properties comply with the legal health and safety requirements or with standards set by the Superior Council.*
- * The insurances are renewed annually, whenever appropriate, and covered for the risks which the Superior Council has decided to insure.*

Faithful to the spirit of non-accumulation of wealth, the Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils will determine annually the percentage of the unused funds of each of the Councils or Conferences within their area

which will be made available to them. The Superior, Assimilated and Associated Councils will determine the direct allocation of such funds, 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. (For the complete criteria, see Articles 3.14 and 3.15 of the Rule).

Commentary

This is an effective way to resolve an issue which several countries have identified.

"unused funds" – this may need to be defined – e.g. funds more than x% over the average expenditure of the Conference or Council for the last two years, so that the meaning is, effectively, 'funds which are likely to be unused'.

"made available to them" – not used for administration, but re-distributed to the poor, a concept central to the Society which springs straight from the Gospel. The intention is to identify substantial funds and achieve more good with them. It is not the intention to impose excessive bureaucracy (against the Rule – see 3.9), by moving small amounts of surplus from all Conferences and all Councils. It would, therefore, be in the spirit of this Requirement to specify a level of Conference or Council funds over which this Requirement would take effect.

The Society and each Conference must avoid hoarding money. One of the enormous advantages of our organisation, is that we have no binding financial obligation to create significant reserve funds. On the contrary, except in extraordinary, occasional instances, the Conferences should distribute the money they collect, among the friends in need whom they help, and if, finally, some resources remain, they should put this amount at the disposal of other Conferences which lack resources, or into funds for disasters, Twinings or special works. This is true Vincentian fraternity and it must represent, for each member, Conference and Council, an ideal to be attained.

Collections for the poor and to maintain the structures

B.R. 20: Each Conference shall assume its responsibility in assisting other Conferences and Councils with greater needs. Likewise, Conferences should feel responsible for the maintenance of the all levels of the structure of the Society. In order to achieve this, they must take up special collections in the spirit of friendship, solidarity and sharing. These are recommended at least quarterly and may be allocated as follows: in the first quarter, an Internal Solidarity collection for the poorer Conferences within the same Superior, Assimilated or Associated Councils; in the second quarter, a collection for External Solidarity for the poorer Conferences in other areas of the world; in the third quarter, a collection in solidarity with the Structural expenses of the Councils to which the Conference belongs, to be distributed by the Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council and, in the fourth quarter, a collection allocated for the Structural expenses of the Council General.

Other means of financing such objectives may be contemplated in certain countries.

Commentary

"may be allocated" – *not necessarily in the way suggested, but this is a serious suggestion which is felt to have strong advantages. This does not exclude collections being held for other purposes, or special funds being set up to which contributions can be sent. The International Statutes do, however, assume a 'personal contribution of each member of the Society, through secret collection in the last quarter of each year, as a sign of solidarity with the Council General' (see 3.21.1).*

"other means" – *This could apply if, for instance, a country has developed a 'tithing' system which works well, whereby a certain percentage of specified income is required from each Conference, to be distributed throughout the structure for the benefit both of the poor and the maintenance of essential Society structures.*

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Council Presidents' right to audit and to see correspondence

B.R. 21: When deemed appropriate, Council Presidents should authorise audits of the Conferences, Councils and Special Work under the auspices of their Council.

Commentary

"audits" – *each Superior Council will stipulate the levels at which various degrees of annual audit are required. For small amounts, audit by another member of the Conference or Council may be sufficient. For larger amounts, audit by an independent qualified Accountant may be justified. For very large amounts, the intervention of the Society's main Auditors may be necessary. Even if the law does not require annual audits, the Society certainly should do so.*

This Requirement enables Council Presidents to authorise audits at any time, in addition to the annual audit, whenever they feel there is the need.

The President of the Council to which any of the Society's Special Works belongs, shall be entitled, after due consultation with the Superior Council and evaluation of the legal consequences, to replace the members of the Board of that Special Work and any of its employees regardless of their functions. (For complete criteria, see Article 1.12 of these International Statutes).

Commentary

"Special Works" - *It is essential that a Special Work remains loyal to the policies and strategies agreed by the Council to which it reports. It is normal that the Council will, after consultation with the Special Work, determine the policies, strategy and budget of the Special Work, together with the frequency and content of reporting, whilst delegating authority to it for the day-to-day operation. There is a possibility of the Special Work refusing to recognise this role of the Council. This can occur, for instance, if its Management Committee contains a majority of non-Vincentians, or if it becomes a separate legal entity with trustees who reject the decisions of the Council about how it should function or develop, or about matters to do with the buildings, vehicles, Health and Safety issues, etc.*

This paragraph provides a necessary safeguard to ensure that such harmonious and fruitful cooperation remains possible. If the Special Work has its own Constitution, it will be necessary for some clauses to be added, if this is legally possible, to recognise the right of the Council to change the officers and members of the Special Work's management Committee or Conference (if it is run by a Conference).

Council Presidents are also entitled to have access to all correspondence sent by any Conference on behalf of the Society. This same authorisation is applicable to any Council with regard to the other Councils under its auspices.

Commentary

It is considered essential for a Council President to have this right, especially where correspondence has been sent to external bodies, civil authorities etc. The intention is not to stifle good initiatives, which are usually to be applauded, but to provide assistance in conciliation where views have been expressed that are quite contrary to the Society's policy or where methods have been used which are not in keeping with our spirit.

Refund of expenses

B.R. 22: Vincentians entrusted to undertake previously and duly authorised offices, missions or tasks for the Society are entitled to the refund of the expenses incurred.

Commentary

Not only are they entitled to the refund of expenses, but it has been the Society's constant tradition that members should reclaim all expenses. This ensures that no members, however poor, need feel inferior to the members who are better off, or feel inclined to leave the Society because they cannot afford to belong to it. The value of members to the Society in the work for the poor is not based on wealth but on the empathy, love, understanding, and spiritual qualities which they bring to their work for poor and to their relationships with other members.

If a member wishes to make an anonymous donation of part or all of the expenses he/she has claimed, there is always the possibility of using the secret collection for this purpose. This is a beautiful illustration of the Gospel in practice - "Truly, I say to you, when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Mt 6:3-4).

POINTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STATUTES WHICH COULD HELP IN DRAFTING INTERNAL STATUTES

This list is ‘unofficial’ and it is not essential to take it into account – but it is worth considering by countries whose Internal Statutes are being revised.

The International Statutes contain wise customs which have proved their worth over many years, and new structures and procedures which meet modern needs. The following points could, by analogy, influence the provisions of Internal Statutes. Whilst they are not, of course, mandatory, it will be beneficial, whilst re-drafting the Internal Statutes to incorporate the Basic Requirements, to consider whether some of these points could be included. The paragraph numbers below refer to the International Statutes.

2.1.1 - For all levels of Councils, it is strongly recommended that the Statutes include, for all decisions of the Councils (where consensus has not been reached or a vote is preferred) - *who can vote, the quorum and the majority required.*

2.2.1 and 4.7 (second paragraph) - The power of more than 50% of the voting members to call an extraordinary meeting of the National Council.

3.7 - A stipulation of a minimum number of years experience in the Society by members before they are eligible for the office of National Council President.

Election of a President

3.6 to 3.9 - Procedures for the secret election of a President should specify at least:

- a) the time before the end of the President’s term of office when the Vice-President must ask for nominations (unless the Vice-President is a candidate, when another Officer will organise the election)
- b) the date by which nominations must be received
- c) quorum required and majority required
- d) the possibility, or not, of postal votes
- e) the need for two ‘independent’ vote counters

Also consider requesting prayer to the Holy Spirit (e.g. the Veni Creator) by Councils and Conferences from the beginning of the nomination process, for all elections at every level, in the hope this will inspire some members to make themselves available, by adjusting their priorities.

3.9.2 – For Council Presidents, a second round ballot between the two candidates with the most votes, so that the President has a clear majority mandate

Note: the “Model Internal Statutes” – mainly for countries with a small membership and basic structure, which have not yet submitted their Statutes for CGI approval – will shortly be reissued, including an Election procedure which should be helpful.

Termination of office of the National Council President

This can be:

3.10 (g) – By loss of civil rights

3.10 (e), 3.12 to 3.13 - By incapacity

(B.R. 16 provides for annulment of the election of a President at other levels)

3.16 - Appointment of officers for a limited renewable period (see B.R. 11 first paragraph and commentary)

3.16.3 - Option to include a Youth delegate on Council Boards, with a right both to speak and to vote

3.21 - Stipulating the need for a balanced budget for the National Council, completed by a specified date, against which expenditure is checked.

3.28 - Previous Council officers ceasing to hold office several months after the new President takes office, to facilitate a smooth handover to any new officers appointed by the President after consultation with Council members, with the option of the period being shortened, if necessary, to nil.

4.5.1 (second paragraph) - Provision of a period before National Council meetings during which Agenda items should be submitted.

7.2 - Provision of a minimum period for receiving information and being able to reflect on it, (relating to significant decisions), before a National Council meeting at which they are to be discussed.

6.5 - Appointment of a provisional Board for a specified short period for a new Conference or Council.

The continuing participation of former Presidents or other very experienced Officers

1.10.3 - The Commentary (below) draws out possible implications for National Councils. What is the best way to use the wisdom and experience of just a few past Officers, in the best interests of the Society, whilst asserting firmly the primacy of the democratic process which ensures that currently elected Officers make the decisions?

“There are great advantages in democracy and in restricted terms of office, so that there is the energy and openness to new possibilities which will enable the Society to adapt to changing needs. There is, however, a danger that vital experience could be cast aside, with the danger of ‘re-inventing the wheel’ or failing to see the best way forward. This article ensures this will not happen at the Assembly level. It is, therefore, recommended that at other Council levels, the possibility be allowed in the Internal Statutes, for a President to invite and appoint one or more of his predecessors, and/or one or two members who are well respected and have exceptional qualities, to be available for consultation, either during key meetings or by conversation or correspondence.

For this to bring definite benefits to the Society, such consultation would need to be prompt, so decisions were not delayed, and the President would select only such Consultors as he could work with in a spirit of friendship. Consultors would require certain qualities in addition to experience – the wisdom that comes from a life of prayer, humility (in being content to contribute and to encourage the elected President to make his/her own distinctive contribution), willingness to be open to new ideas and methods and loyalty. Loyalty implies that they would be prepared to explain to others the positive reasons for decisions made, even when these were not the decisions they themselves would have made.

By the appointment of a few Consultors, a wise and fruitful balance can be achieved between dynamic leadership (often younger members) and experience (often older members). This reflects the ideal in the Rule (article 3.11) that a President who is a servant leader identifies the “natural talents and spiritual charisms” of members, which can then be “put to the service of the poor and the Society”.”