
Vincentian Coordinator

Role Description

Introduction

The St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) in England and Wales runs apostolic programmes for young people in primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities, as well as parishes. These apostolates are intended to be led by the young people and for the young people. However, all groups under 18 years of age need at least one adult supervisor – especially during the set-up process. This person is the main point of contact between the young people in the group, our Central Council Presidents via our Young Vincentians Development Officers, and the National Office throughout the year. This is the purpose and role of the Vincentian Coordinator (**VC**). Without a VC, groups fall apart for lack of support. Looking at it in a different way, young people flourish in their Vincentian groups by benefitting from the living faith and charitable example of the VC. They are an essential and highly valued part of the SVP family, who encourage and inspire the nurturing of faith among the young people, and magnify the possibilities of the young people implementing charitable works in a Vincentian spirit. With the exception of parish-based 1833 groups (see below), there can be more than one VC per group, although there must still be one main contact.

The four apostolates of Young Vincentians

Mini Vinnies: 7-11 years old.

In primary schools. Meeting once a week or every two weeks, usually during lunchtimes or after school.

Youth SVP: 11-14 years old.

In secondary schools and parishes. Meetings take place as frequently as once a week or as infrequently as every four weeks, depending on the availability and prioritisation of the young people concerning their academic routines. In schools, groups meet usually during lunchtimes or after school, and in parishes, groups often meet as part of a common youth group incentive. Groups can choose to alternate between their meetings with spiritual input and their voluntary activities, or could decide to have combined sessions which contain both.

SVP B-Attitude: 14-18 years old.

Works exactly the same as Youth SVP with the same level and kind of commitment.

SVP 1833: 18-33 years old.

In university chaplaincies and parishes. Meetings and voluntary activity often happens weekly and during times which don't conflict with studies or exam periods, such as early mornings or evenings. In parishes, 1833 groups do not need an adult supervisor, because the elected President would be 18+ years old, and would embrace the tasks of the VC as part of his/her presidency role.

VC Responsibilities

In all our groups, it should be the young people who identify the needs in their local community and come up with ideas of how to help and make decisions about service activities and fundraising. The role of the Coordinator, then, is to guide these discussions and assist the young people to put their passion and ideas into action by:

- Setting up the group with the support of the Young Vincentians Development Officer.
- Archiving meeting minutes in conjunction with the group Secretary.
- Helping the President with preparations for the spiritual reflections and other spiritual input / events.
- Keeping discussions within the realm of possibilities.
- Supporting the group by looking into the feasibility of projects in accordance with Health and Safety policies and duty of care requirements held by the institution.
- Helping the President to organise an election so that leadership roles in the group are filled and maintained year-on-year.
- Ensuring the leadership of the group are fulfilling their roles of: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and Communications Officer, and motivating members without office.
- Updating the Young Vincentians Development Officer at the end of the academic year with statistics and a short summary report (to include testimonies of some of the members) of the group's activities within the year.

In all our Young Vincentians groups, young people can really have a say and make decisions about how they can help people in their community. The VC should help make this happen, and should support the children in their individual and collective growth and formation in the process. Someone from the St Vincent de Paul Society local Conference can assist and support the VC in their role.

Our VCs positively encourage projects that the group plans, where possible; all that is needed is for the Coordinator to spend some time looking into the safety and safeguarding requirements, and ensuring that the requisite processes are followed so that the activities are safe. This may involve organising permission slips, getting the Head teacher's approval or recruiting parents or teachers to assist with supervision.

The number of hours a week vary on many different factors such as the groups' ages, to how often the group meets, to the intensity and frequency of the activities they engage in, to the level of support any given group may need. On average, VCs spend between 1 and 2.5 hours per week.

Person Specification

In Schools: Any staff member within a school can take on the role of coordinating the Young Vincentians group - it does not necessarily have to be the Religious Education Coordinator/Head. What is important is that the person is willing to commit some of their time to attending meetings, charitable activities, and other events and fundraisers that the group organises.

In Parishes: It is not recommended that the Parish Priest to take on the role of Vincentian Coordinator simply because of the tremendous responsibilities that already fall on the shoulders of our Priests. It is therefore recommended that a Vincentian Coordinator be somebody familiar and approachable in the parish, like the Youth Worker, Catechist, Pastoral Carer, Parent, Chaplain, or any capable willing volunteer.

All Vincentian Coordinators are subject to a current enhanced DBS, with a check against the children's barred list. This is normally issued by your school, parish or chaplaincy.

How the meetings/activities work

Meetings are not meant to be long; the President opens the meeting with a prayer which the group says together. A spiritual reflection then takes place – using the relevant resources. If there is no activity planned, the spiritual activity could fill the session but we encourage that overall there needs to be a balance struck between the spiritual aspect and the activity. The Secretary then reads the minutes of the last meeting and group members discuss activities they have done since the last meeting. Any future plans are discussed and decisions recorded by the Secretary. The Treasurer reports the group's financial situation, a record of any funds raised and money spent on behalf of the group. The Communications Officer arranges whatever publicity is required by the group. The president concludes the meeting with a prayer. The VC should take a back seat role at the meetings, gently steering the members back on track if they become side-tracked. S/he should not dominate. In the early stages, the group might need more guidance, but our standard principle is that the groups are young people led.

In some institutions, groups meet, as well as undertake their voluntary activity all in one go. In others, meetings happen separately from activity, alternating between the two from week to week.

When the group is established, they are encouraged to invite the president of the local adult SVP Conference (if there is one) at least once a quarter. The group may decide to invite guest speakers to address the group from time to time; to talk about a particular issue such as social justice, which could influence the group's activities for the following quarter and inspire other young people to continue in their efforts to shape a more just society.

Ongoing Support

Training is very rarely, if ever, necessary if the Vincentian Coordinator is a member of staff in an educational institute. However, necessary training needs to be undertaken by Vincentian Coordinators outside of school parish staff – particularly in the area of child safeguarding. Ongoing support is provided for all VCs via staff at the National Office as well the Young Vincentians Development Officers.

If it was so demanded, a day of prayer and collective sharing could be organised for Vincentian Coordinators regionally.