

## Framework for the National Council Society of St. Vincent de Paul Voice of the Poor Committee (VOP)

The Voice of the Poor is a nonpartisan committee of the National Council. Duties<sup>1</sup> include:

- 1) Serve the National President, who is the official spokesperson for the Society, in speaking on issues related to the basic needs for the poor.
- 2) Develop and implement a process to reach out to parishes and collaborate with other groups to advocate with the poor including: position papers, action alerts, follow-up, and communication of results.
- 3) Inform members of approved SVDP positions related to the needs of the poor.
- 4) Encourage the growth and development of VOP Committees by Councils across the country by motivating members to speak with and on behalf of the poor as part of their Vincentian mission. (Regional chairs and regional representatives on the national VOP Committee are encouraged to monitor and promote progress in VOP organization formation in their region.) VOP will assist in setting goals for incorporation in the National Strategic Plan.

Therefore:

1. Believing in the dignity of every person, Voice of the Poor **supports Catholic Social Teaching looking at issues that cause or contribute to poverty, suffering and exclusion**. VOP will work with the National President (who is the only official spokesperson of the Society) and the National Council to advocate for justice on behalf of those in need.
2. **Issues should fall under identified areas per approved position papers<sup>2</sup> and/or in the approved national legislative agenda.<sup>3</sup>**
  1. VOP will limit the number of new issues brought to the National Council to five or less each year. An exception to this limit may be subject to recommendation by the National President.
  2. VOP will investigate whether issues are supported by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, the Vincentian Family, and/or other Catholic organizations doing research and with whom we may join in education and advocacy.
  3. VOP will notify VOP membership through emails, the VOP website, in SVDP meetings, and through Society publications.
  4. VOP will state whether issues are supported by the Council of the United States, or simply presented for information (individual voluntary action).
  5. VOP will keep the National President posted on progress.
3. Voice of the Poor is **prohibited from participating in partisan political campaigns** including endorsing or opposing political parties or candidates.

---

<sup>1</sup> National and local VOP committee job descriptions may be downloaded: <http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/info/jobdescription-3-03.pdf> In addition the *Voice of the Poor Guide Speaking in One Voice for Christ's Poor* is found at <http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/info/VOPGUIDEEDITS9-03.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Approved by the Trustees (i.e., approved position papers): Housing, Health Care, Just Wage/Minimum Wage, Immigration. Possible future topics for position papers: Restorative Justice, Restorative Justice for Women, Dignified Christian Burial, Child Care, Laws and the Homeless, Food Security. Approved position papers are found at [http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/position\\_papers.htm](http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/position_papers.htm)

<sup>3</sup> The approved legislative agenda is found at [http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/legislative\\_updates.htm](http://www.voiceofthepoor.org/legislative_updates.htm)

## APPROVAL/COMMUNICATION PROCESS

- VOP assists in drafting letters/statements, as requested, provides the draft(s) to the National President for review/approval and to the National Executive Director.
- The National office sends out the approved letters/statements on Society letterhead and with official signature(s) to legislators, media, collaborators, etc., as approved by the National President.
- A letter on the approved position will also be sent by the National Office (via email) from the National President to Council Presidents asking Councils to take action. A copy of this correspondence will be provided to the National VOP Committee for follow up with local VOPs.
- Once the National President has taken a position and that position is known, Diocesan/District Council Presidents will be expected to reiterate the position and urge members, as individuals, to contact elected representatives expressing the local need (relevant to the position) via their stories, statistics, and service.

## POLICY REGARDING WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Regarding letters/statements/websites (i.e., “sign ons”) from outside organizations, the National President, as the official spokesperson for the Society, is the only authorized signator for the Society. **No Diocesan/District Council or Conference of the Society may use the Society’s name in “sign-on” campaigns.**
- Use of funds for local advocacy membership in organizations may be permitted only if the organization’s positions are consistent with Catholic social values, if the Society is actively involved in working together (i.e., there is Vincentian hands-on activity on issues related to the poor), and if use of such funds is approved by the local District Council. Payment of membership dues without active Vincentian involvement is not allowed. This means that only when active members of SVDP acting as Vincentians in partnership with other groups may Vincentian funds be used.
- The Society works with other groups only on an issue by issue basis and does not allow the name of the Society to be used generally by other groups.

## LOCAL VOP ACTION

(Arch)diocesan/District Councils are encouraged to investigate and speak out on local economic and social issues impacting the poor in their communities and whenever possible, to involve in advocacy those persons who are poor and affected by the issue. Councils are **prohibited from participating in partisan political campaigns** including endorsing or opposing political parties or candidates.

- The message of Councils and Conferences must be consistent with the Society’s mission and values. Before the relevant Council President speaks he/she must get approval from the (Arch)diocesan/District Council. Together, as Vincentians, we speak in one unified voice.
- Each (Arch)diocesan/District Council will form a VOP Committee to keep track of local needs, work with the local Council President, interface with regional VOP representative(s), keep on top of the Society’s National position, and educate members.
- Society identification is important and (Arch)diocesan/District Councils must identify themselves appropriately. When a (Arch)diocesan/District Council, under the direction of the Council President, acts he/she must plainly show by name the (Arch)diocesan/District Council (i.e., Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council of \_\_\_\_\_). This is particularly important in written information.
- (Arch)diocesan/District VOP Councils are asked to provide a VOP contact person (name, address, phone, fax, email) to the National VOP. Two-way communications is important. By creating an area/regional/national network of VOP we can become more effective and efficient in being a voice of the poor.
- (Arch)diocesan/District Council VOP Committees are encouraged to share activities so that VOP groups can develop best practices.
- Email/mailling lists developed for VOP shall not be shared with outside organizations and will be used only for SVDP-VOP activities.