

Q: How is the Voice of the Poor organized?

A: The national committee has two representatives from each region allowing for regional communications. Councils are encouraged to each form a voice of the poor so that we can begin to develop a network. Members of the voice of the poor are also encouraged to have e-mail so that we can have virtually instant communications. We have a mail list so that information may be shared in a timely manner. An organizational chart showing how local voice of the poor committees fit into the regional and national structure may be found in the "information" section of this website.

Q: How does the Voice of the Poor fit in with the mission of the Society?

A: No work of charity is foreign to the Society. Vincentian help can include any person-to-person assistance that promotes human dignity and integrity. The Society is concerned not only with relieving need but also with redressing the situations that cause it. (Part I of the Rule, Charter I)

Vincentians seek through prayer, meditation on the scriptures, the teaching of the Church, through their daily lives and in their relationship with those in need, to bear witness to the love of Christ. (Part II of the Rule, Charter II)

Section 7 of the International Rule titled, "Relationship with Civil Society – Work for Social Justice," calls members to "a vision of the civilization of love, " to be "a voice for the voiceless" and to strive to change attitudes.

Find the VOP Guidebook, presentations, job description and more on line at:

www.voiceofthepoor.org



Voice of the Poor

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The science of charity reform is not transmitted through books and at assemblies' tribunes as much as by climbing stairs in the home of the poor, kneeling at his bed, suffering from the same cold as he does, and discovering the secret of a grief-stricken heart in the course of a friendly conversation. When we have accomplished this ministry, not for months, but over long years; when we have thus studied the poor at home, at school, at the hospital, not only in one city but in several, and also in the country, in whatever condition God placed him, then we can start to know the formidable problem of misery, then we are entitled to propose serious measures.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam, 1848

Q: What is Voice of the Poor?

A: The Voice of the Poor job description says: "In the spirit of Christian love and justice, the Voice of the Poor Committee upholds Catholic values by researching, validating, documenting, advocating, and promulgating issues related to the condition of the poor and disenfranchised for the purpose of helping Vincentians to live their faith by acting knowledgeably and credibly as a unified body speaking with one voice for the purpose of building up the Kingdom of God."

Q: Why must Vincentians get involved?

A: As Catholics and members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we see the face of Jesus in those we visit. We have a responsibility to be a voice of the poor and to speak out for those who have no voice. We are called to move from being affected by what we see in our homevisits and special works activities to being effective in our service to the poor. As the Voice of the Poor we want to inform our elected representatives and our community how decisions affect the people we care for, our friends the poor. We want to hold our elected representatives accountable for the decisions that they make that affect the poor.

Q: With political differences how do we remain unified?

A: When Frederic and friends formed the first conference of charity, they agreed not to discuss partisan politics. That still should be our focus in any discussion or conversation. Our focus always will be the poor. We cannot afford to become politically divided. We are not speaking as democrats, republicans, or greens. If we truly believe in our Catholic values then we must all come to a unified stand about what is the right thing to do. We need to keep our focus on Jesus. We need to "turn the coin over" and show that by serving the poor, enabling individuals and families to become healthy and self-sufficient, makes our country and our world a stronger and better place to be. We need to show that we are looking for more than a handout for the poor but a hand up out of difficult circumstances and towards an improved quality of life for all.

Q: What do Council Voice of the Poor Committees do?

A: We seek to speak especially for those who have no voice. It is up to the members of the Society to bring the stories that we know of the poor to life. We need to focus on the issues agreed upon by Councils and based on Catholic social teaching. We need to be informed. We research issues so that we can speak knowledgeably. It is important for us to build relationships with the Church leadership and the political leadership of the country so we can bring both together for the good of the Society and our friends the poor. A job description is found in the information" section of the voice of the poor website (www.voiceofthepoor.org).

NOTE: The National President is the only official spokesperson for the Society on national issues. (The elected Council President is the official spokesperson for the Society on local issues.)

Q: What is needed?

A: Councils need to create awareness and interest among Vincentians and encourage members to speak in one unified voice as an extension of our service to the individuals and families that the Society serves. We have stories to tell, statistics of the numbers of people in need that we assist, and service that we can measure and describe to key decision makers.

We need to build grassroots support. This is necessary on the council level if we are to be effective. As we hear stories on the local level and learn of similar needs then we have tangible evidence of what we need to focus our efforts on.

We can be an effective voice of the poor by working to bring the poor to life. There are so many groups asking for money and other resources. Who is speaking for the poor? Who is asking that the community acknowledge that there is a problem as well as a responsibility to serve those who cannot help themselves or who do not have the tools to help themselves? Through our stories, statistics and service we have the opportunity to put a real face on advocacy efforts. We have the ability to show decision makers what they will not likely find in written reports about poverty and the needy.