

Living into a Structure: Relationships in the Vincentian Family

Preamble

Based on our common charism, the love of Christ urges us, and our common mission to serve those living in poverty, we, members of the Vincentian Family (VF), commit to collaborate. This collaboration is more than joint efforts in ministry; it invites us to an appreciation of who we are as followers of Saint Vincent de Paul so that it becomes our way of life. We understand that collaboration means never to do alone what can best be done together. It involves thinking, planning and prioritizing together. Collaboration needs to be fluid, based on the issue and also the circumstances of each individual branch of the Family.

In order to continue and to improve collaborative relationships in the Vincentian Family, we are seeking to clarify the roles of two existing structures: I) for decision-making (Vincentian Family Executive Committee) and II) for operational support to carry out the actions proposed by the decision-making body (Vincentian Family Office).

I. The Vincentian Family Executive Committee (VFEC)

Role: the VFEC creates enthusiasm and motivation among the branches of the Vincentian Family (VF) for the living of the Vincentian charism. This is not a juridical body, but does make decisions or offer recommendations for, or give approval to, activities of the VF such as:

- The annual themes for VF reflection;
- The theme for international gatherings of international VF leaders;
- The establishment of the mandates of VF Commissions;
- The appointment of the coordinators and members of VF Commissions;
- The appointment of the coordinator and team of the international Vincentian Family Office (VFO);
- Discerns the needs of the VF and its response to those needs, especially regarding the creation of new VF Commissions; and
- The study of the annual VF operational budgets.

Structure: The VFEC is composed of four (4) founding branches and four (4) rotating branches of the VF.

The VFEC is composed of a **Founding Team** consisting of four (4) branches: the International Association of Charity (AIC), the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

The current (2019) rotating branches are: the Sisters of Charity Federation of Strasbourg; the Brothers of the Congregation of Our Lady, Mother of Mercy; the Sisters of Charity Federation of North America, and the Vincentian Congregation.

Each VFEC member branch may be represented by up to two people. The international leader of a Branch may not delegate another person to take his or her place, with the exception of the “Federations” within the VF.

This founding – rotating structure allows for:

1. Continuity on the VFEC, if not of a specific person (who may go out of office), then of the branches which serve on the VFEC, and at the same time
2. The gift of the inclusion of additional branches which brings with it a greater ownership by the larger VF of the work of the VFEC as well as new insights into the charism.

The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, as the spiritual successor of St. Vincent de Paul, serves as the President of the VFEC. The function of the **Founding Team** is:

1. to help the VF and the VFEC remain faithful to the Vincentian Charism, and
2. in consultation with the entire VFEC, to invite four additional branches to serve as rotating members of the VFEC.

A. The relationship of the VFEC with the Branches of the VF

The VFEC serves as the coordinating body of the VF. In this role of service, the VFEC will:

1. Champion the unity of the VF in their evangelization and service of those living in poverty;
2. Create opportunities to strengthen our common efforts to serve the poor;
3. Raise the consciousness of the VF to the existence of the VFEC, the VF Commissions, and the VFO, which have been created to assist them in their ministries.

B. The relationship of the branches of the VF with the VFEC

The VF is composed of approximately 150 branches whose mission and charism flow from the vision of St. Vincent de Paul. As such, they share:

- A common heritage,
- A sense of commitment and dedication with and for those living in poverty
- A way of living the charism of Charity.

Thus, membership in the VF, supported by the work of the VFEC:

1. Acknowledges the value of belonging to an entity greater than oneself called the VF;
2. Assists each branch in the extension of their sense of mission globally and the effectiveness of their particular manifestation of the Charism;
3. Provides opportunity for greater collaboration in the mission and thus may provide a cooperative base out of which the Charism may be incarnated;
4. Helps members and branches decrease their carbon footprint and better respond to the call of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*, 49: "Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both *the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*"

C. The relationship of the VF Commissions with the VFEC

The VFEC, working with the Commissions:

- Provides their mandates;
- Appoints their coordinators and members, upon hearing their needs and recommendations;
- Studies their annual reports and makes recommendations regarding their work;
- Monitors their finances through the VFO;
- In dialogue with a Commission, may decide that its mandate has been fulfilled and thus move to disband that Commission;
- Creates new Commissions to meet the ever changing needs of those living in poverty.

II. Vincentian Family Commissions

A. Relationships of the Commissions with each another

All Commissions share, to some extent, a common purpose: to assist the VF in its service of those living in poverty. Thus, it is important for the Commissions to seek ways in which each can benefit the other:

1. The Commissions share with each other their annual reports. As part of this, each Commission will add the following components:
 - a) Explain how it has related to the other Commissions during the course of the past year, and
 - b) Discern if there exists in the VF the need for the creation of a new commission to better meet the needs of those in poverty today.
2. The Commissions will seek to dialogue with each other to better model collaboration for the VF. Some specific areas for possible dialogue include:
 - a) The use of social media;
 - b) The inter-connectivity of Commission web pages; and
 - c) The sharing of best practices and lessons learned for everyone's mutual benefit.

B. The relationship of the Commissions with VF National Councils (NC)

The Commissions share in the responsibility for the growth of the VF with the National Councils.

1. Where NC are in place, the work of a Commission ought to begin in collaboration with them.
2. A Commission should make every attempt not to establish an alternate structure in a country so that its specific work may continue to be developed.
3. Commissions need to always be aware of the cultural and linguistic realities of a country in the preparation of their programs.

III. The International Vincentian Family Office (VFO)

The Vincentian Family Office, as a function of the Vincentian Family Executive Committee, coordinates activities, provides information, and delivers formation experiences on the heritage and charism of St. Vincent de Paul to the Branches of the Vincentian Family throughout the world. This includes promoting communication and collaboration among the various branches of the Vincentian Family, as well as opportunities for leadership to meet and develop ways to work together. The office's focus assures

timely follow through for the VFEC's mandates in addition to support for Commissions and National Councils.

A. The relationship of the VFO with the VFEC

The VFO is the vehicle through which the aspirations of the VFEC are carried out globally. The Office ensures the continuity of the work of the VFEC from one year to the next. More specifically, the VFEC:

1. Provides the VFO's mandates;
2. Appoints its coordinator and Team;
3. Receives from the VFO the annual budget of all activities of the VF, including the work of the Commissions. The annual budget of the VFO itself needs the approval of the VFEC.
4. The VFO, in its communications strategies, raises the international visibility of the VF and the VFEC.

The work of the VFO is supervised through the relationship of the VFEC's President and the International Coordinator of the Office.

B. The relationship of the VFO with the VFO Advisory Committee (VFOAC)

VFOAC was established to assist the VFO with its mandate in regard to the support and development of the NC. Its members, who are involved in the work of NC internationally, and who also come from a wide range of experience with them, help keep the office grounded in the local realities of the VF.

Therefore:

1. The VFOAC works with the VFO in its efforts to support and develop NC;
2. The Advisors form a channel of communication:
 - a) From the Office: to help motivate and encourage the work of the NC, and
 - b) From the NC to the Office: to share information and recommendations from the grass roots to the Office.
3. The members of the VFOAC are appointed by the VFO with the approval of the President of the VFEC.
4. Terms of office, meeting schedules, etc. will be established.

C. The relationship of the Commissions with the VFO

The VFO supports the work of the Commissions through:

1. Creating a common calendar;
2. Facilitating the sharing of information (e.g. annual reports) among the Commissions;
3. Collating the operational budget for the work of the VF;
4. Creating a data base for VF activities;

5. Seeking opportunities to foster dialogue and collaboration with one another; and
5. Assisting with advancement efforts, if needed.

D. The relationship of the VFO with the National Councils

The VF is incarnated in the regions encompassed by the National Councils. The strength of a NC greatly determines the vitality of the VF's outreach to the poor.

1. The NC grounds the work of the VFO.
2. The VFO can help to connect NC with each other. This will enable them to feel mutually supported in their ministries.
3. This also increases NC ability to see themselves as part of an international VF.

On a more practical level, the VFO enables the NC to:

1. Share best practices;
2. Identify formation resources;
3. Create opportunities for effective works with and for those in poverty;
4. Facilitate connections between NC and the branches of the VF;
5. Encourage NC to come to know the larger VF, including the Commissions and the VFEC.

The VFO is available to assist the NC as needed.

E. The relationship of the VFO and regional branches of the VF

The VFO is available to assist the branches of the VF as requested.

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