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### Introduction

This small book is offered as a guide to the many home visitors who volunteer on behalf of the Indianapolis Archdiocesan Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Just as St. Vincent himself did in the early 1600's in Paris, the home visit is still today an integral part of what the Society does. Our founders, including Frederic Ozanam, understood this central principle and incorporated it into the charter of the Society which they founded almost 200 years ago in 1833. The practice is maintained by Councils around the globe, and Vincentians in the Indianapolis Council gladly comply with the tradition. Indeed, what better way to truly understand the plight of those in poverty than to visit them in their homes and obtain deeper insight into their situations!

### The Vincentian Heart

It is often repeated that Vincentians making home visits strive to portray the face of Christ to those they serve, and to see the face of Christ in our neighbors. These mirrored perceptions need to withstand the occasional challenge, so it's important to recall some details when preparing to make home visits.

Some of those who call the helpline asking for assistance are the victims of *generational poverty*. That is, they are the third or more successive generation in their family who struggle to survive, lacking the resources needed to lead their lives without distress. Frequently they have an incomplete understanding of the reasons for their situation and are ill-equipped to free themselves from the cycle of poverty. Desperation, frustration, resignation, and hopelessness are often the result.

Others who come to the Society for help are the victims of *situational poverty*. These people's lives have been upended by temporary circumstances caused by joblessness, divorce, illness or death of the bread-winner or other circumstances beyond their control. Panic and fear are often the results.

Whatever type of poverty our neighbors are struggling with, they seldom *have a good day*. Patience, humility, and tact are qualities we encourage among empathetic Vincentians, and an awareness of the social, economic, and political systems which have let our neighbors down.

## Overview of the Help Line / Home Visit Process

Here's how the home visit process works:

- A person or family in need calls the help line number for the SVdP Conference / Council.
- Volunteer responders answer the calls, obtaining basic information: name, address, phone number and a summary statement of what is needed. The volunteer responder will relay the information to the SVdP Conference serving that neighborhood. Volunteer responders may also mention other resources available in the local community. In some cases, the information is relayed through a parish business office, then sent to the local SVdP Conference. (Note: The Conference is the local group of Vincentian volunteers who implement the activities of the Indianapolis Council and conduct local assistance efforts.)
  - Calls for help sometimes come from neighbors who do not speak English.
  - Calls for help may also take the form of a web-based inquiry (depending on the Conference). This information will be taken by a responder and sent to the local Conference as described above.
- A two-person team from the local Conference is assembled and a team member contacts the caller and arranges a mutually convenient time for a home visit. Try to establish contact with the caller within three working days of being notified.
- The home visit team---always two persons, just as Jesus sent his disciples to do their work---makes the home visit promptly and punctually. (More than two persons allowed if needed) A short prayer offered by the team prior to the visit helps to set a calming state of mind in anticipation of the visit and to be aware that Christ is present.
- On site, after introductions and assurances that the home visitors are there to offer help to the extent that they are able, the neighbor identifies the need(s). The needs may span a wide spectrum from beds and linens to furniture and clothing. One of the home visitors should write notes during the visit to refer to after the visit; many Conferences use forms to record the need(s).

- It is critical that the home visitors emphasize that all household items are subject to availability. In the case of some items that are temporarily out of stock, a wait list may be maintained by the Conference / Council.
  - Home visitors should also share a list (or website location) for local resources. (e.g. SVdP Resource Card)
- Should the neighbor-in-need request help meeting rent or utility payment, please recall that the Council does not have assistance programs for either. The local Conference or parish office may have such a provision, but it's recommended to understand this provision and applicable Conference guidelines before you make your home visits.
- It is important never to over-promise the scope, extent or timing of the help we can offer. Sometimes what we can offer is empathetic listening and prayer. Assure them that the Society will offer help to the extent that it is able to do so.
- Prayer with the neighbor and his/her family is encouraged especially toward the conclusion of the visit. This is not something to force on the neighbor, but a strong indicator of faith in God and an entreaty to him for special intercession. It need not be lengthy and might take the form of the Lord's Prayer and some expressed invocation that the neighbor's burden be lessened. If the neighbor declines to pray, comply graciously (you can offer a moment of silence).
- Depart with sincere thanks. When out of earshot of the neighbor, conduct a short debrief, asking *What went well in that visit?* Then, *What could we have done better?* And, finally, *What would we do differently on our next home visit?* Conclude your visit with a prayer offered up by members of your two-person team.

## Details of the Home Visit Process including Forms used by the Conference

>> Note: This section is intended to be updated to reflect the forms used in the local area.

- The needs identified with the neighbor in need should be recorded by one of the home visitors during the visit. This information is written on the Neighbor Referral Form (see **Exhibit A**). Please be complete, providing all the information requested including neighbors birthdate with your names and expiration date---typically 30 days out, with a week added if a national holiday intervenes. Remember to cross out the items that the neighbor does not need. This is done to avoid fraudulently entering items after the home visit is made. It is suggested to ask for the neighbor's ID to ensure you have the correct spelling for their name.
- It's critical that the home visitors emphasize that all items are subject to availability at the time of the pickup at the Distribution Center. In the case of mattresses temporarily out of stock, a wait list will be maintained.

- The Neighbor Referral Form is returned to the Conference for record-keeping (e.g. ServWare) and end-of-year reporting. The Conference sends a copy of the completed Neighbor Referral Form to the Distribution Center for scheduling.

### What programs are offered by SVdP in Indianapolis?

Since the early 1960s, the Indianapolis Council of the Society has been actively engaged in assisting the needy. We operate a personal choice food pantry located at 3001 E. 30<sup>th</sup> St., across from Washington Park. There is a second food pantry at Boulevard Place, 4202 Boulevard Place for nearby zip codes. In a grocery-store format, packaged and freshly grown products are made available to people of low income at no charge to them. Currently, the 30<sup>th</sup> Street food pantry is open for 17 hours of shopping every week. Shoppers may shop for their food once a week and have a “limit” on each food item, rather than a dollars-and-cents limit. First-time shoppers should be prepared with their name, address, and household size. They will be required to verify their income eligibility for receiving food from the pantry.

A non-food Distribution Center operates from 1201 E. Maryland St. This warehouse collects donated clothing, furniture, appliances, linens, housewares and other basic household essentials for re-distribution to needy people at no cost to them. The donation line number is 317-687-1006 to arrange a collection pick-up date. Clothing and small items are picked up only if accompanied by other bigger and bulkier donations such as furniture and appliances.

Mission 27 Resale refers to either of two resale stores. One is located in the east portion of the Distribution Center building located at 1201 E. Maryland St. Mission 27 Resale’s address is 132 Leota St., around the corner from the Distribution Center entrance. The second store is located at 1618 Shelby Street near Fountain Square. Clothing, furniture, appliances, mattresses, linens and other basic household items are priced for sale to customers. Neighbors who have had home visits may come to Mission 27 Resale on Leota Street to pick up clothing and other small items. Neighbors will be called to make a convenient appointment to come to the Distribution Center and pick up their larger items at an assigned time. It is important to note and emphasize to neighbors that all items are offered on an as-available basis. Holiday shutdowns occur as scheduled.

There are three initiatives serving the unsheltered. The Beggars for the Poor is a Saturday morning ministry which operates out of 1347 N. Pennsylvania St. Every Saturday morning, volunteers meet there to pull together a hot meal and weather-appropriate clothing to take to the unsheltered at the Roberts Park Methodist Church parking lot at the 6-way intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Vermont and Alabama Streets.

An unsheltered ministry operates out of the Olive Street entrance to the Distribution Center on Tuesdays through Saturday from 11 AM to 1 PM. The unsheltered are given clothing, and provision is made to initiate the process of obtaining identification documents as well as social service paperwork, help with job resumes, and referrals for interim housing, addiction treatment, etc. We also serve a hot meal and supply our brothers and sisters with a snack bag for their journey on that day.

The third initiative is Bicycles for the Unsheltered. This is at the Distribution Center, 1201 E Maryland at the rear of the building. This is available on Wednesday and Saturday at 8:30 AM to 10 AM. A repaired-bicycle program provides donated bikes to the unsheltered, with helmets locks and safety vests.

In a proactive effort to equip neighbors-in-need to interrupt the cycle of poverty that prevents them from leading full lives, the Society offers a program called “Changing Lives Forever.” (CLF) This is an 18-session program which meets once or twice a week for three hours to motivate and energize the “investigators” (as participants are termed) to lead self-sufficient lives without the need for public assistance. While not guaranteeing graduates jobs, the program offers much of the information needed to obtain a job paying a living wage and the skills to earn, manage and save funds. CLF graduates are offered a trained volunteer mentor, as well as access to graduate support sessions to provide long-term help in exiting poverty and achieving their future story.

The Love Your Neighbor Center (LYNC) provides supportive housing, programming, and services for unsheltered individuals to assist with self-sufficiency, stability, and sustainability. The LYNC facility is located at 2500 Churchman Avenue and offers participation in Changing Lives Forever programming to residents. See the SVdP Indy website for eligibility requirements.

### Neighbors Affected by a Fire

In the event of a fire that has partially or completely destroyed the neighbor’s home and its belongings, home visitors should be aware of near term (clothing) and long term (furniture) needs. Please itemize the needed items as in the case of a regular home visit. Do not just write “Needs Everything.” We also refer neighbors to the local Red Cross for additional resources.

## One Last Thing

The likelihood of confrontation during a home visit is very small, but occasionally neighbors express disappointment that we cannot give them everything they may need. If emotions begin to rise, stay calm and listen. When you feel you have a clear understanding of their point of view, acknowledge the reality of the situation and explain that it is the philosophy of the Society to provide most (but not all) of the basic items needed to operate a household for a lot of people, rather than provide all the items for a few people. Learn to listen, not just with the ears, but also with the heart and truly hear the underlying point of the complaint.

Please be sure and fill out the Referral Form in its entirety, with legible penmanship. Circumstances sometimes arise where we must trace the home visit and speak with the home visitors and obtain clarification or perhaps offer suggestions for improvement. This is difficult to do when we cannot interpret what is meant on the Referral Form.

Prayer is a powerful component of all the Society's activities, including the home visit process. Pray before the visit, during it, and afterwards whenever possible.

From your fellow volunteers, the SVdP employees, and on behalf of the many people we all strive to serve, **thanks for being a Vincentian home visitor.**

## Safeguarding Policy

Helping the vulnerable is at the heart of our mission—including the protection of those we serve and those who serve alongside us. Along with all other SVdP Councils worldwide, SVdP Indy has established a safeguarding policy to actively prevent harm, abuse (sexual, emotional and physical), and distress of children and adults. The Safeguarding Policy includes Home Visits and includes three main facets for Home Visitors: Training and Awareness, Background Checks, and Photo IDs. All those with IDs (including Home Visitors) will be expected to wear them as they work at our facilities or any of our activities or events.

## VINCENTIAN WORDS TO LIVE BY

*You will find that charity is a heavy burden to carry, heavier than the soup pot or the basket of bread. It is not everything to give soup or bread. That the rich can do. You must always keep your gentleness and your smile. They are your masters, terribly sensitive and exacting as you will see. It is only because of your love, only your love, that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them.*

St. Vincent de Paul

*Knowledge of the poor and needy is not gained by poring over books or in discussion with politicians, but by visiting the slums where they live, sitting by the bedside of the dying, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes.*

Blessed Frederic Ozanam