

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Commitment to Social Justice

A Vincentian Mandate

Sections from the Rule of the Society

7. RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY – WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (pp. 18-19)

7.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions

The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. It is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

7.2 A vision of the civilization of love

Affirming the dignity of each human being as created in God's image, and Jesus' particular identification with those who are excluded by society, Vincentians envision a more just society in which the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted.

As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and the civilization of love. In this way, the Society shares the Church's mission to evangelise the world through visible witness, in both actions and words.

7.3 Vision of the future

The Society's vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

7.4 The practical Vincentian approach to social justice

The distinctive approach of Vincentians to issues of social justice is to see them from the perspective of those we visit who suffer from injustice.

7.5 A voice for the voiceless

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.

7.6 Facing the structures of sin

Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation, the Society should speak out clearly against the situation, always with charity, with the aim of contributing to and demanding improvements.

7.7 Striving to change attitudes

Vincentians oppose discrimination of all kinds and work to change the attitudes of those who view the weak or those who are different with prejudice, fear or scorn, attitudes which gravely wound the dignity of others.

The Society strives, with charity, to foster new attitudes of respect and empathy for the weak, so that all are able to understand, recognise and defend the right of each person to be responsible for his or her own life. The Society promotes understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.

7.8 Political independence of the Society

The Society does not identify with any political party and always adopts a non-violent approach.

It is good that some members follow and fully participate in their political vocation in such a way that they bring Christian values to political matters. Those members who hold political offices will be asked, always with charity, not to hold any mission of representation in the Society during their term of political office.

7.9 Working with communities

The Society should work not only with individuals in need but also with families and communities. It can help an excluded or deprived local community to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity which leads it to improve its economic, social or environmental well-being, always retaining the personal contact of members with those who suffer.

Sections from the Manual of the Society

E. Services to Promote Social Justice (p. 26)

- Every Vincentian needs to understand the Society's priorities and motivation in advocating for the poor. **Voice of the Poor**, the National Committee of the Society, upholds Catholic Social teaching by researching, validating, documenting, advocating, and promulgating issues related to the condition of the poor and disenfranchised.
- At the **parish level**, social justice can be promoted by publicizing the problems of the poor, providing a forum to discuss poverty issues and society's proper response to them, and seeking to inform and influence public opinion.
- At the **local, state, and federal levels**, promotion of social justice requires advocacy, and the establishment and operation of programs, benefits, and services that address the root causes of want and encourage respect for human life and dignity.

Vision

The vision of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the society, was: "To establish a network of charity and social justice to encircle the world."