

This document provides a shared set of definitions and commonly used terms for Conference work, so members can communicate consistently and confidently. It brings together key Vincentian language, Conference roles, compliance and membership requirements, meeting and service practices, governance references, and frequently used acronyms. Use it as a quick reference during formation, onboarding, meetings, and day-to-day ministry.

Common terms used for Conference work

The Rule

The Rule offers a common governance framework for Vincentians across the world. It gives shape to the Society's spirituality, its mission and the governing structures that support the Society, so that its service is effective and faithful to the vision of its founders. The Rule has three parts: Part I summarises Vincentian spirituality; Part II contains the statutes of the International Confederation and Part III sets out the internal statutes of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Australia. An Eighth Edition of the Rule of the Society in Australia was published in July 2026, and an e-version can be found here [The Rule](#)

Vincentian

A Vincentian is a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society who seeks to live out the Society's mission through faith, friendship, and service. Vincentians support companions with compassion, dignity, and respect, and are guided by the values and spirituality of the Society.

Companion

Companions are people in our community who are experiencing hardship and come to us for help.

Vincentian Service

Any activity undertaken by Conference Members to support companions, alleviate hardship, and promote dignity and wellbeing. This may include visitations, emergency relief, advocacy, referrals, food assistance, or practical support.

Vincentian Virtues

There are five essential virtues for Vincentians to live by:

1. Simplicity
2. Humility
3. Gentleness
4. Selflessness
5. Zeal

Visitation

A respectful conversation with a companion at a place of their preference such as their home, in the community, on Society premises, or by phone, to listen, understand their situation, and agree on appropriate support. Visitation must be carried out in pairs, in line with safeguarding and safety guidance. Visits and Conference interviews must not be conducted by a single Member on their own.

Conference

A local community of Vincentians who meet regularly for prayer, reflection, service, and support. Conferences are the foundational “unit” of the Society, focused on serving people in need with compassion, dignity, and respect.

Conferences have traditionally been centred around a parish, where members gather as a faith-based local community to pray, reflect, meet regularly, and respond to the needs of people in their area. While this remains an important and valued model, Conferences can now also take other forms to reflect local needs and circumstances. This may include Conferences connected to schools, workplaces, cultural or language communities, specific ministries, or other community settings where members come together in the Vincentian spirit of friendship, service, and practical support for companions.

Conference Member

A person who embraces and is committed to the Catholic ethos of the Society and seeks to live this commitment through service to people in need in their local community. Conference Members attend Conference meetings, vote for the Conference President, participate in formation and training, take part in the special works of the Society. Importantly, members are also servant leaders of the Society and govern it by being elected to Councils. Members, often called Vincentians, accept *The Rule*, and are registered through the relevant State or Territory Council process. **Associate Member**

A person who is committed to the Catholic ethos, mission, vision and values of the Society and assists in the works of the Society but is not required to attend Conference meetings. Associate Members are welcome to attend meetings and formation programs, may participate in decision-making about matters concerning the Conference or Special Work they are involved in, but are not eligible to vote for the Conference President or hold office-holding positions.

Retired Member

Retired Members are people who continue their association with the Society but are no longer able to

offer the Conference's works to people in need in their community. They may join a Bailly Conference and can still participate in works if they meet the membership requirements set by their State or Territory Council. They can be active as volunteers in Special Works such as the Society's retail outlets and other community-based activities that promote and support the Society's works.

Overseas Partnership Program

The Overseas Partnership Program is a way Vincentians show solidarity with communities beyond their local area, including overseas communities experiencing significant hardship. It brings together three key activities: **Twinning**, **Assist a Student**, and **Projects**.

Twinning creates a direct link between Conferences or Councils in Australia and those overseas. It is based on prayer, friendship, communication, solidarity, and practical support. Through twinning, Vincentians build relationships, share encouragement and resources, and support others in a spirit of compassion and mutual respect.

Assist a Student provides education support for students in partner countries, helping young people access learning opportunities that may otherwise be out of reach.

Projects support practical needs identified by overseas partner Conferences or Councils, such as local initiatives that respond to poverty, improve wellbeing, or strengthen communities.

Confidentiality

Protecting a companion's personal information and sharing it only when necessary for service delivery, safety, or legal requirements, and only with authorised people. Conference discussions should focus on facts needed for help, not unnecessary personal detail. **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding means creating and maintaining safe, respectful, and supportive environments for everyone involved in the Society's work, especially children, young people, and adults who may be vulnerable. It includes recognising and managing risks, following required checks and training, speaking up about concerns, and ensuring all people are treated with dignity and care.

Conference Structure & Roles

Conference President

- Leads the Conference spiritually and ensures meetings reflect prayer, reflection, and Vincentian values.
- Chairs meetings and supports good decision-making and shared responsibility.
- Ensures Conference governance, safeguarding, and compliance requirements are met.
- Represents the Conference to Regional/Territory Councils and works with Conference Support as needed.
- May liaise with external parties, such as parishes, schools, community organisations, service providers and local support networks, where relevant to Conference work. This may include building respectful relationships, coordinating appropriate referrals or practical support, sharing

information about the Society's work, and ensuring any engagement is consistent with privacy, safeguarding, and Society requirements.

Vice President

- Supports the President and helps keep Conference operations running smoothly.
- Acts on behalf of the President when requested or when the President is unavailable.
- Assists with member formation, welcoming new members, and strengthening participation.

Secretary

- Prepares and circulates agendas, minutes, and key communications.
- Maintains accurate records of decisions and actions, including visit rosters where used.
- Supports privacy by ensuring information is stored and shared appropriately (e.g., via approved systems).

Treasurer

- Maintains accurate financial records for Conference income and expenditure.
- Ensures transparent stewardship, appropriate approvals, and timely reporting.
- Supports good practice for receipts, acquittals, and petty cash (where applicable).

Spiritual Advisor

- A Spiritual Advisor fosters the spiritual and pastoral life of a Conference or Council. The Spiritual Advisor must be of the Catholic faith, should be a practicing Catholic with sound knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Vincentian spirituality. As a lay Catholic Society, the role of Spiritual Advisor may be appointed from the Members or a Member of the local parish. The local priests, deacons or religious may be invited to be the Spiritual Advisor or to propose an appropriate person.
- Leads prayer, reflection, spiritual reading or meditation, and supports understanding of Catholic Social Teaching.
- Ensures that the spirituality and identity of the Society, as expressed in *The Rule* and the Society's Vision and Mission Statements, are understood and fully reflected in the meetings and work of the Conference.
- Provides guidance on matters of faith, morals and Catholic Social Teaching in conjunction with the Conference President.
- Promotes harmony between Members and provides a pastoral presence when conflict arises.

Twinning Officer

- Maintains the Conference's relationship with its twinned partners and ensures regular, respectful communication.
 - Coordinates twinning funds (where applicable) and ensures appropriate records and reporting.
 - Shares twinning updates with the Conference to strengthen global solidarity.
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Compliance & Membership Requirements

Working With Vulnerable People (WWVP) / Working with Children Check (WWCC)

Mandatory for all members undertaking service or having contact with companions. No visits or direct service may occur until verification is complete.

National Police Check

Mandatory for all members undertaking service or having contact with companions. No visits or direct service may occur until verification is complete.

Training Requirements

Mandatory modules, such as safeguarding, are completed through Member Training Portal LITMOS or group training.

Code of Conduct / Safeguarding Policy

All members sign and must adhere to the Society's Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Policy, ensuring safe, ethical, and respectful engagement with companions.

Keeping compliance current

Members are responsible for keeping their compliance requirements current. WWCC and WWVP holders are generally notified of expiry through the relevant state or territory check system. Conference Support will notify members when National Police Checks are due for renewal. Members should complete renewals by the due date and ensure evidence of completion is recorded through the approved Conference Support process.

Conference Meetings & Operations

Conference Meeting

Regularly scheduled gatherings for prayer, reflection, sharing of service experiences, decision-making, and planning. Meetings aim to be welcoming, productive, spiritually grounded, and collaborative.

Minutes

A written record of discussions and decisions, prepared and circulated by the Secretary (or another designated Conference Member) prior to the next meeting.

Agenda

A structured list of items for discussion. Recommendation to be circulated before each meeting.

Companion Notes

Brief, factual notes related to assistance provided. Once entered in CDS, paper copies must be securely destroyed.

Recordkeeping & privacy

Only record what is necessary to provide support and meet reporting requirements. Store companion information in approved systems (e.g., CDS) and limit access to those who need it for service. Avoid using personal email or unsecured messaging for sharing sensitive information.

Rosters & Communications

Shared by the Secretary after each meeting to ensure members have updated information on visits, duties, and decisions.

Typical meeting flow (example)

- Opening prayer and spiritual reflection/formation.
- Welcome, apologies, confirmation of previous minutes/actions, WHS and Safeguarding
- Service sharing: visit updates, learnings, and follow-ups.
- New requests for assistance and decisions (in line with guidelines and available funds).
- Administration: rosters, training/compliance reminders, events, reporting.
- Closing reflection and prayer.

Assistance & Support Activities

Home or Community Visits

A core Vincentian practice involving compassionate engagement with companions in their home or community setting. Guided by the Vincentian Visitation Guidelines.

Emergency Relief

Support such as food, fuel, utilities, rent assistance, medication, referrals, or emergency items delivered through Conference funds or regional case work programs.

Assistance Cards / Vouchers

Tools enabling Conferences to provide practical support while maintaining dignity and autonomy for companions.

Furniture, Whitegoods & Material Aid

Assistance organised through internal request processes or external partners.

Governance & Oversight

Council

Every Conference belongs to a Region. Regional Councils support and oversee Conferences, and Regions belong to the Territory Council.

Region / Regional Council

The Regional Council provides guidance, support, and oversight to Conferences within a geographic area. It helps with formation, governance, reporting, and escalation of any concerns.

Territory Council

The body that provides leadership and governance across the Territory, supporting Regions and Conferences and ensuring alignment with the Rule and national requirements.

Membership Records

Maintained by Conference Support.

Reporting Requirements

Conferences may provide reports to Regional Council on meeting frequency, membership, activities, and service statistics.

Formation & Resources

The Rule

The governing document for the Society, outlining mission, values, spirituality, and structural expectations. Frequently referenced in all Conference resources. [The Rule](#)

MemberConnect

Central hub for forms, procedures, and training materials supporting Conference work. <https://memberconnect.vinnies-cg.org.au/>

CDS (Community Data Solutions)

This system is used to record companion interactions and assistance. Accurate, factual entries support continuity of care, reporting, and privacy controls.

Prospective Member/Induction Packs

Introductory materials that explain Vincentian values, history, and local operations.

Common Acronyms

- **WWVP / WWCC** – Working with Vulnerable People / Working with Children Check
- **ER** – Emergency Relief
- **OPP** – Overseas Partnership Program
- **PD** – Position Description
- **RAPT** – Risk Assessment & Treatment Plan
- **CDS** – Community Data Solutions