



# CREATING A NEW CONFERENCE

## Purpose of This Guide

This guide explains how to establish a new **St Vincent de Paul Society Conference**, from the initial idea through to providing assistance in the community. It is designed to support members, parish leaders, and staff to work together in a clear, supported, and Vincentian way.

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## What Is a Conference?

A Conference is a local group of members who:

- Serve people experiencing poverty or hardship
- Support one another spiritually and practically
- Meet regularly for prayer, reflection, and action

A Conference may be established in a **parish, town, suburb, school, university, workplace, or community group**, and must be attached to an appropriate **Council**.

Every Conference has three essential dimensions:

- Service to people in need
  - Spiritual development of members
  - Vincentian friendship and mutual support
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## Values and Foundations

All Conferences operate in accordance with:

- The **Mission, Vision, and Values** of the Society
- **Catholic Social Teaching**, including:
  - Dignity of the human person
  - Common good
  - Subsidiarity
  - Solidarity
  - Preferential option for the poor
  - Participation and community

- Care for our common home

People who are not Catholic but who respect the Catholic foundations and values of the Society are welcome to join.

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## Minimum Requirements to Form a Conference

The recommended **minimum number of members is five:**

- President
- Vice-President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Spiritual Advisor
- Plus any additional members

Members must:

- Agree to abide by **The Rule**
  - Complete required **membership paperwork**
  - Meet local **training and safeguarding requirements**
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## Creating a New Conference: Step-by-step

### Identify the Need

A need to start a Conference may be identified by:

- A parish or community
- A Council
- Members of the Society
- Staff working with local communities

This includes confirming that:

- There is a genuine local need
  - There is interest from potential members
  - The Conference will complement existing services
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## Seek Local Agreement and Support

Before proceeding:

- Seek agreement from the **Parish Priest and Parish Team** (for parish-based Conferences)
  - Confirm support from the relevant **Regional Council**
  - Identify a **Conference Support Officer or staff contact**
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## Appoint an Acting President

An experienced Vincentian is appointed as **Acting Conference President** to:

- Mentor the emerging group
  - Guide early formation and meetings
  - Support elections and decision making
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## Gather Interested Members

Work with the Council and staff to promote the new Conference through:

- Parish bulletins or newsletters
- Announcements at Mass or community gatherings
- Information sessions (“Come and See”)
- Parish or community surveys (where appropriate)

During this stage:

- Explain the role and commitment of members
  - Discuss meeting times and expected activities
  - Welcome people with a passion for social justice who respect the Society’s values
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## Agree to Form the Conference

Once a core group is established:

- Confirm collective agreement to form the Conference
  - Notify the relevant **Council and Central Office**
  - Begin **new member paperwork and compliance checks**
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## Early Conference Meetings (Formation Phase)

Across the first few meetings, the group should:

- Learn about the Society’s history, mission, and Rule
  - Build relationships and Vincentian culture
  - Identify local needs and community context
  - Discuss possible service models and activities
  - Confirm a regular meeting place and time
  - Participate actively in Regional Council meetings to support learning, strengthen connections, and benefit from the experience of established members
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## Early Decisions

The Conference formally:

- Elects a **Conference President**
- Confirms the **Conference name**
- Agrees on **geographic boundaries**
- Confirms how assistance will be provided

The Conference President, after consultation with the Conference members, appoints office bearers, at least a Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, from among Conference members.

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## Set Up Systems and Supports

With support from staff and Council:

- Office bearer details are provided so accounts can be established
  - Access to companion database (Community Data Solutions) is set up
  - Member induction and training are scheduled
  - Assistance tools are organised (e.g. vouchers, gift cards, databases)
  - Relevant stakeholders (Helpline, Vinnies Shops, Centres) are notified
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## Commence Service

The Conference:

- Confirms a start date
  - Begins providing assistance in line with agreed processes
  - Continues mentoring and training support
  - Invite new members to participate in a commissioning ceremony, combined with Mass or a paraliturgy where appropriate, to formally welcome them into the Society
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## Review and Ongoing Support

After approximately three months:

- A follow-up meeting is held with the Council, Support Officer, and mentor
  - Early experiences, challenges, and successes are reviewed
  - Ongoing support needs are identified
  - After the Conference has operated for 12 months, begin the application process for a **Certificate of Aggregation** by contacting Conference Support, completing the required application, and submitting it through the Regional Council for endorsement and onward consideration
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## Support Available

You are not expected to do this alone.

**Support is available at every stage, including:**

- Guidance from the relevant Council
  - Practical support from Conference Support Officers
  - Mentoring from experienced Vincentians
  - Access to training, templates, and resources
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## Key Resources

Depending on your State or Territory, resources may include:

- Membership and compliance forms
  - Conference handbooks
  - Training materials
  - Parish or community survey templates
  - Maps of Councils and governance structures
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## Final Note

Starting a Conference is about **responding to local need with faith, friendship, and practical action**.  
With the right support, a new Conference can become a strong and lifegiving presence in the community.

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