

SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

National Council of Canada

GUIDELINES FOR ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL IN CANADA

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish clear lines of authority as it relates to advocacy on behalf of the Society in Canada and in any regional jurisdiction.

ADVOCACY

Mandate

The Society, as a lay Catholic charitable organization, has a responsibility to advocate for the poor it serves as well as for the protection of the environment. The Society develops advocacy programs and conducts related activities based on the following principles:

1. The Church says that one of the characteristics of a Catholic lay organization is its commitment *“to be at the service of the total dignity of the person, seeking to bring about conditions that are more just and loving within society”*(CL30).
2. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which was published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 2005.
3. One of the Fundamental Principle of the Rule states, *“the Society is concerned not only with relieving need but also with redressing the situations which cause it.”*
4. Another Fundamental Principle states that the *Society’s vision goes beyond the immediate future, looking towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations* (International Rule 7.3)
5. The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) places certain restrictions on registered charities with regards to political activity and advocacy. The Society’s resources and budget cannot be substantially spent in the pursuit of political activity and advocacy.

It may only contribute to public-policy debates as a means of furthering the organization’s charitable purposes. The Society, as a registered charity, cannot support or oppose political parties or any candidates for public office, at any level.

Advocacy to inform the public is usually to retain, oppose or change the law or policy or decisions of any level of government. It can be accomplished by the use of various means like the internet (e.g.: web site, electronic chain letters), public declarations, prepared documents (e.g.: letters to editors, presentation of memoranda to politicians, letter campaigns...) and, participation by members at demonstrations, or at public or closed venue events which identify the Society with the cause being pursued. Vincentians can engage in such activities alone, or may join other organizations who seek to raise awareness of possible advocacy.

The Society nationally seeks to identify legislation, proposed or existing, and other matters adversely affecting those in need. It gathers from its members and from wider sources, the statistics and the personal stories that illustrate the problems arising in the lives of ordinary people. It designs and delivers strategies for tackling justice and environment issues under the direction of the Board of Directors of the National Council. Together with others, when appropriate, it makes representations to Government or other bodies to attempt to bring about beneficial changes.

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While the Society may suggest ways to achieve social justice, it recognizes there may be other, equally valid or even better ways to solve a problem, so its main concern is to seek agreement on the principle involved and to ensure that the effects of decisions are fully understood.

GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR:

National Issues:

The National President is the spokesperson for the Society on matters of social justice and other related issues, in union with the National Council's Board of Directors. All strategies to pursue social justice and other issues are designed and delivered by the *Voice of the Poor Committee*. The Committee pursues specific issues as decided by the Board, either alone or in cooperation with other organizations sharing the same vision and values. The Committee may join or endorse advocacy campaigns and other activities sponsored by other civil or faith-based organizations.

Regional Issues:

The Regional Council President alone can speak for the Society on local or regional issues of social justice and other subjects that are linked to the mission and values of the Society. He/she will do so in consultation with members of the Regional Council. Any advocacy activity by members or employees conducted at the Regional level shall be reviewed and approved by the Council President. Regional Councils are encouraged to form a *Voice of the Poor Committee* for this purpose. In some cases, Regional Council may be solicited for its views or otherwise input by government into social policy. The Society can accept such invitations by presenting its views in an informative, accurate and well-reasoned way, in accordance with the principles mentioned above.

Local Issues and Advocacy:

The National President can delegate advocacy responsibility to Central Council Presidents. Members and employees of Conferences and Particular Councils as well as those involved in Special Works may wish to engage in advocacy alone or with other groups (Churches or other Faith communities) in the opposition or promotion of a particular local issue of concern (e.g.: construction of social housing in the city; opposing closure of a shelter; supporting new by-law to protect children, etc.). The Central Council President shall be consulted before affiliated Conferences and Councils engage in any such activity. The Central Council President shall seek the approval by the Regional Council President if he/she assesses the issue being pursued has a potential for controversy, or may have an impact on the reputation of the Society or is likely to affect the integrity of Society's programs and objectives in Canada.

General Guidelines:

All correspondence and documents produced by the Society on such matters shall bear the Society's letterhead and signed by the President of the Conference or Council with his/her title clearly stated. All correspondence will be sent via electronic means or mail only to addressees as determined by the President.

In the exercise of discretion, the President amongst other factors may consider: inappropriate tone or terminology; possible misinterpretation of facts; or expressing political views, or views on matters not directly related to the Society's work.

Presidents and designated employees shall maintain a specific file(s), kept on the designated premises, for correspondence and documents (including electronic mail and web site posting) relating to advocacy and social justice, and controversial matters. Reviews and abstracts of such correspondence and documents may be published in internal publications for the information of members and friends of the Society.

A President of a Council or Conference will make all public declaration, or an employee tasked to this effect by a President. The text of the declaration or speech shall have received appropriate approval as well as to the audience it is to be made. Regional President shall approve participation at demonstrations or at public or closed venue events if it meets criteria above. The number and identity of Society's members and

employees shall be determined and approved in advance as well as the spokesperson. All participants shall receive a briefing before the event as to official representation, material used (e.g. banners), behaviour and agenda.

Members, acting on behalf of the Society, may conduct advocacy activities to inform the public about issues of concern to the Society for the promotion of social justice and the protection of the environment in accordance with approved National Council Advocacy Guidelines.

The President of the relevant Conference or Particular Council to the President of the Central Council. The President of the Central Council to the President of the Regional Council. The President of the Regional Council to the President of the National Council of Canada.

Chairs of Committees to the President of the relevant Council.

REFERENCE: International Rule (*rev. October 2003*), section 7; the Canadian Rule (*ed. 2006*) sub-sections 1.1, 1.3.1.3, 2.2.2, 2.4.13, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.13, 3.21, 3.22; National Policy FIN 002.

The Rule (ed. 2006), Sub-sections 2.6 and 2.2.11, 2.3.8 and 2.3.14, 2.4.8 and 2.4.13, 2.5.7 and 2.5.11, 2.6.7, 2.6.10 and 2.6.17; sub-sections 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.17 and 3.20, National Policy FIN 002.