



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE US SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Formation Planning for Conferences and Councils

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Introduction

It can seem like a big challenge, especially if you are a new Council Formation Coordinator or Conference Spiritual Advisor, to try to deliver a formation plan when you may never have even seen one before.

The purpose of these guidelines is to make the planning process simpler for you.

The list of events and publications in this document is by no means comprehensive but does include a core set of tools that will support a robust Formation Plan. Start with these and grow over time.

Formation Events

These are typical events offered by Conferences, Councils, and Regions.

National Council/Regions	Diocesan/District Councils	Conferences
National Assembly	Ozanam Orientation	Spiritual Reflections
Midyear Meeting	Spiritual Advisor Workshops	Conference Retreats
Regional Meetings	Leadership Workshops/Retreats	Vincentian Feast Days
Invitation for Renewal	Home Visit Workshops	Serving in Hope
Getting Ahead	Spiritual Retreats	Vincentian Celebrations
Poverty Institute	Systemic Change	Praying the Rosary
Voice of the Poor	Council Assembly	

Formation Publications

Available by Download

[Spiritual Advisor Handbook](#)

[Vincentian Celebrations](#)

[Vincentian Reflections](#)

[Vincentian Contemplations](#)

[Vincentian Liturgies](#)

[Formation Guidelines \(rev. March 2020\)](#)

[Formation Program Portal](#)

Available for Purchase

[Spiritual Advisor Handbook](#)

[Vincentian Pathway](#)

[Serving in Hope](#)

[Home Visit Journal](#)

[Vincentian Library](#)

Sample Goals for Conference Formation Plan

Every Formation Plan begins with a simple set of goals. You don't need to have 30 goals! In fact, setting too many goals can make the plan unachievable.

Below are some sample goals from which you might choose. Remember, events put on by your Council, your Region, and the National Council are for all Vincentians - they meant to be part of *your* Conference Formation Plan – be sure to include them!

1. All members have attended Ozanam Orientation:
 - a. Within one year of joining; and
 - b. Again, every five years
2. The Conference will:
 - a. Celebrate at least one Vincentian Feast Day by attending Mass together.
 - b. Conduct a Commissioning and Annual Commitment Ceremony
 - c. Complete *Serving in Hope*, Module ___
 - d. Conduct one Spiritual Retreat
3. The Conference will use the Vincentian Reflections throughout the year.
4. Conference Members will be given the Home Visit Journal and will use them for group reflections.
5. The Spiritual Advisor and an Associate Spiritual Advisor will complete Spiritual Advisor Training.
6. At least x members will attend:
 - a. The Council Assembly
 - b. The Regional Meeting
 - c. A Home Visit Workshop
7. At least x members will attend:
 - a. The National Assembly
 - b. Invitation for Renewal
8. The Conference will establish a Vincentian Spirituality Library, including:
 - a. Turn Everything to Love, by Fr. Robert Maloney
 - b. [Vincentian Library](#), a collection available in the online store
9. The Conference will review and reflect together on what items of the Vincentian Pathway they might complete in the coming year.

Conference Formation Planning

Key Planners: Spiritual Advisor, Conference President

Once your goals are set, the rest of the plan is just figuring out the steps to achieve each of them.

I. Conference Activities

These are events that are primarily planned and run by the Conference, particularly the Spiritual Advisor, using resources provided by the National Council. The Conference President should fully support by asking members to help with logistics and planning.

a. Annual

- i. Commitment Ceremonies. Plan ceremonies to be conducted within a regular Conference Meeting, or as part of a Spiritual Retreat or Mass. Sample Commitment Ceremonies can be found in the “Vincentian Celebrations” book.
- ii. Spiritual Retreat. At least once per year, plan a Spiritual Retreat outside of the regular meetings. Planning resources include:
 - Serving in Hope – purchase copies for members.
 - Sample retreats on the National Council web site

b. Weekly (at each meeting)

- i. Spiritual Reflections. This is the first agenda item for every Conference Meeting! Resources available include:
 - Vincentian Reflections – download and make copies for members.
 - Serving in Hope – purchase copies for members.
 - Home Visit Journal – purchase copies for members

c. Pray Together. Conferences are communities of “prayer and action.”

- i. Plan to attend Mass together as a Conference on as many Vincentian Feast Days as you can. These days are listed in the Rule and the Manual.
- ii. Consider, in cooperation with your Pastor, using Vincentian Liturgies.
- iii. Pray a monthly Rosary together as a Conference.

II. Council Activities.

Run by your District or (Arch)Diocesan Council, these events are meant to be part of your Conference Formation Plan! The primary role of the Conference is to encourage (and in some cases record) Member participation.

a. Ozanam Orientation.

- i. All members must attend within first year of membership.
- ii. All members should attend at least once every five years.
- iii. First, find out who needs to attend. If the Conference has no record of this, it is a good time to start recording!
- iv. Find out the Ozanam Orientation schedule from your District or (Arch)Diocesan Council, encourage members to attend, and record in the Member Database.

b. Spiritual Retreats. Find out schedule and encourage Member participation!

- c. Training and Formation Workshops. Find out schedule and encourage Member participation! These offerings vary between Councils, and topics may include:
 - i. Servant Leadership
 - ii. Home Visits
 - iii. Spiritual Advisors

III. National Council and Regional Activities

Run by the National Council or by your Region, these events are meant to be part of your Conference Formation Plan! The primary role of the Conference is to encourage (and in some cases record) Member participation.

- a. Regional Meetings. Held annually, these meetings typically include a variety of workshops, such as Formator and Spiritual Advisor Training, along with many more of general interest. They also foster our Cultural Belief in *One Society*.
- b. Invitation for Renewal. Normally held twice annually, all servant leaders are encouraged to attend this four-day retreat, but registration, though limited, is open to all who are interested.
- c. National Assembly. Large annual event including inspirational keynote speakers, workshops, and liturgies.
- d. Online events, such as workshops, training, and discussions are often hosted by Regions and by the National Council, as well as some local Councils.

Sample Conference Formation Plan

Goals:

1. Ensure all Members have attended Ozanam Orientation within the past five years.
 - a. Get event dates from local council.
 - b. Check Conference records (or survey members)
 - c. Help members sign up for an Orientation.
 - d. Record in Member Database when completed.
2. Hold one Conference Spiritual Retreat
 - a. Purchase copies of Serving in Hope, Module I for all members.
 - b. Schedule meeting room for three hours on Saturday, January 23
 - c. President to appoint planning committee for A/V, refreshments, etc.
3. Spiritual Reflections at every Conference Meeting
 - a. Download Vincentian Reflections
 - b. Make a copy of current week's reflection for each member.
4. Conference Mass and Commitment/Commissioning Ceremony
 - a. Coordinate with Pastor.
 - i. Preferably on a Vincentian Feast Day
 - ii. To include the Ceremony within, or immediately after, Mass
 - b. Purchase Member pins for any members who do not have them.
 - c. Print copies of the ceremony for all members.

And that's it. Four simple goals, and a few simple steps to achieve them. Over time, as the Conference becomes accustomed to doing these things, you can add more goals. It is very important that you record and report things such as Ozanam Orientation attendance, as well.

The next step is to put these things onto a calendar and do them!

If your Council does not have a Formation Committee, this recorded webinar will give you some ideas on how to form one.

[Creating and Nurturing Formation Teams](#)

Council Formation Planning

Key Planners: Council President, Formation Committee

I. Formation Committee.

- a. Every Council is expected to have a Formation Committee that is responsible for planning and coordinating activities for Formation, Training, and Spirituality within the Council. If your Council does not have one, creating it should be the first goal of your formation plan! (Refer to the [Formation Guidelines](#).)
- b. In addition to the committee, recruiting and maintaining the Council formation teams – Formators and Presenters – should be a regular and ongoing goal within your formation plan. You may find helpful tips for this in the recorded webinar on [Creating and Nurturing Formation Teams Webinar](#).
- c. Keep in close contact with your Regional Formation Coordinator, who can offer support and training.

II. Council Activities

- a. Ozanam Orientation

Perhaps the most important formation obligation of the Council is offering the Ozanam Orientation. Since every member is required to attend, the plan should attempt to make it as accessible as possible to as many members as possible. Some considerations:

 - i. Location. If your Council is widely dispersed geographically, consider rotating the location of the Ozanam Orientation. For example, if you offer it quarterly, schedule one each in the north, south, east, and west of the Council's geography.
 - ii. Hosts. If you have Conferences that may be struggling, or in need of revitalization, asking those Conferences to host the Ozanam Orientation can help, if for no other reason than that the Members will be attending!
 - iii. Publicity. Always invite (not instruct) every single member of your Council to attend every single Ozanam Orientation. Remind them it is required for all new members to attend and recommended for all members to return every few years. *You* may get tired of repeating this, but every time you do, somebody is hearing/reading it for the first time.
 - iv. Goals. Remember that everything you do in planning Ozanam Orientations should be focused on a single goal: 100% attendance by all members every five years. That won't happen by scolding them! It will happen by making it easy for them to attend and by presenting engaging sessions when they do!
 - v. Budget. Plan to purchase AV equipment sufficient to present videos and PPT slides as needed.
- b. Other Workshops. As your formation team matures, plan additional workshops such as Home Visit Workshops, Servant Leadership Workshops, and Spiritual Advisor Workshops.

- c. Spiritual Retreats.
 - i. As Vincentians, we grow in holiness together. In addition to the regular prayers and reflections in our meetings, setting aside time for retreats helps us to grow in holiness together.
 - ii. It is typically the Council Spiritual Advisor who is the main planner and facilitator for these. Aim for at least one per year – and more is better!
 - iii. Look to the National Formation Committee for ideas and resources to help plan retreats.

III. National and Regional Events

Like Conferences, Councils should always incorporate these events into their own Formation Plan and calendar.

- a. Regional Meetings. Held annually, these meetings typically include a variety of workshops, such as Formator and Spiritual Advisor Training, along with many more of general interest. They also foster our Cultural Belief in *One Society*.
- b. Invitation for Renewal. Normally held twice annually, all servant leaders are encouraged to attend this four day retreat, but registration, though limited, is open to all who are interested.
- c. National Assembly. Large annual event including inspirational keynote speakers, workshops, and liturgies.