

The Role of the Conference Spiritual Advisor

(excerpted from *For Your Love Alone* by Michael Syslo)

Of all of the members and officers of a St. Vincent de Paul Conference, the Spiritual Advisor has the most significant influence on the spiritual growth of the Conference member. Unfortunately, there has been an ever-growing tendency to downplay this role and expect the Spiritual Advisor to simply lead prayer and provide a spiritual reading. There is a lot more to it than just that; so, it seems appropriate to take time now to review what is really involved.

First, who can be a Spiritual Advisor? This can be a “priest, deacon, religious man or woman, or a qualified lay person” (Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy) who accepts the role and responsibilities of this position. So, who is qualified? According to *Guidelines for Spiritual Advisors*, a person “should have an understanding of the basic theology of Christian Service work and of the Society’s Rule and philosophy ... understand how the Society’s goals relate to the Church’s mission of service and of preaching the Good News.” A person who does not have this background should become familiar with it within a year or two of becoming a Spiritual Advisor.

Now for the responsibilities: The Conference Spiritual Advisor is asked to do the following:

- a. Lead opening and closing prayers;
- b. Obtain, prepare, and read, or assign to be read, a spiritual reading for each meeting;
- c. Lead discussion after each reading, encouraging all members to participate in the discussion;
- d. Ensure that all meetings are conducted in a spirit of Christian joy and charity;
- e. Work with the Council Spiritual Advisor in setting up programs for spiritual development of the Conferences; help design, plan and execute special prayers and formational sessions, such as days of recollection, paraliturgical services, etc.
- f. Help members of the Society reach a deeper faith awareness of their participation in the mystery of the Church; their need for openness to others; their vocation as Christians and Vincentians to serve and minister to others, person to person; their identity with the poor and needy;
- g. Encourage group discussion and prayer as an essential and indispensable portion of any Conference meeting;
- h. Understand and encourage the development of Vincentian Spirituality in himself/herself and in the other members of the Conference;
- i. If possible, attend Council, Regional, and National meetings dealing with or related to spirituality; and
- j. If feasible, provide resource material for the membership to aid in their personal spiritual development.

As mentioned above, it is more than just prayers and a spiritual reading.

