

Concerns from SVDP and Former SVDP Members

Below are some of the concerns and issues that have surfaced since 2008. We hope this sheet will help clarify many of these. (updated August 19, 2010).

- 1. Some may wonder why a local parish group should belong to a national/international organization?** Over the years, parishes who were interested in certain ministries or movements could have established their own parish groups (men, women, outreach to the poor, etc.) but have found it more helpful and more efficient to belong to a Diocesan, National or International organization (e.g. Knights of Columbus, Holy Name Society, National Conference of Catholic Women, St. Vincent de Paul Society, etc.). The above are examples of a few of the many organizations that have been blessed and supported by the Church over the years. The local parish doesn't have to reinvent the wheel and can use something that has been tried and found true (structure, rule, spirituality, etc.), that had a ready made network of support, etc. Bishop Richard Lennon supports the SVDP.
- 2. SVDP---only a grassroots organization?** The question has also come up about the SVDP being primarily a "grassroots" organization and that the National Council is trying to lead from the top. Instead of "either/or" it should be "both/and." The National Council is in a position to do many things that lower levels of the SVDP cannot do in the way of fundraising, public relations, etc. This is very similar to the Knights of Columbus in Ohio and in the United States.
- 3. Tax exempt status:** The SVDP (Diocesan and District Councils) in the Cleveland Diocese continues to have tax exempt status so donations continue to be IRS tax deductible because of our inclusion in the 2010 and 2011 OCD Directory (OCD-Official Catholic Directory of the Church in the United States; also known as the Kenedy Directory). The parish Conferences will continue to be included with their parish to maintain the Conference's tax exempt status as at present. Bishop Lennon plans on doing this again in 2011. In 2011, the SVDP in the Diocese will begin the process to obtain its own tax exempt status. Options are being looked into at present (be under the National SVDP IRS exemption, have each District Council obtain their own IRS exemption, obtain an SVDP Diocesan Group IRS exemption, etc.). Diocesan and Catholic Charities attorneys are available as needed to help us in these efforts. It doesn't appear that anything official will be done on this until late 2011.
Background: around 1999 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) told the National SVDP that at some point in the future, the National SVDP and local SVDP Councils would have to obtain their own tax exempt status. Since 1946, the SVDP Councils and parish groups have been obtaining their tax exempt status through the USCCB via their local diocese. Since 1999, the National SVDP has been working towards getting this. A first step (of many required by the IRS) was to develop a standard set of bylaws that clarify the legal relationship between the National and local SVDP units and contain required IRS language. These suggested bylaws were approved by the members of the National SVDP Council (112 members representing the local U.S. dioceses where the SVDP is established); these were approved in 2005. Parish Conferences, when all is said and done, will be similar legally (IRS regulations) to local Knights of Columbus Councils.
- 4. Liability insurance:** SVDP District Councils and volunteers, as a result of being included in the OCD (Kenedy Directory), will continue to be covered by Directors and Officers Insurance along with general liability insurance as at present through the Diocese of Cleveland (DISC). Parish SVDP members will also continue to be covered by their parish with the same liability insurance for the coming years, 2010 and 2011. When the Cleveland SVDP obtains its own tax exempt status through the IRS, we will obtain our own insurance as other Councils outside the Cleveland Diocese have had for years (e.g. Christian Brothers; National SVDP, etc.).
- 5. Relationship to the parish and governance:** The SVDP parish Conference, under Church Canon Law (Canon 215), has always been considered a separate entity from the parish as a private lay association; it is only in recent years that steps have been proposed or even needed to make this clearer from a legal basis in the U.S. Even though the SVDP parish Conference may be legally separate from the parish, the close relationship Vincentians have with their parish and pastor will continue. This is somewhat similar to the Knights of Columbus who have close relationships to many parishes but legally and canonically are separate entities from the local parish; the pastor is not a signer on their KofC accounts.
Pastors can still be signers on the SVDP checking account if they desire: Pastors can continue to be signers on the SVDP checking account as long as they are not the main signers. The SVDP is a lay organization and the checks should be normally signed by the lay members, not the pastor.
Bylaws (Code of Regulations): In addition to being required by the IRS, bylaws help the SVDP Councils and Conferences live out their mission by providing stability and order (predictability, not have to spend time starting

from scratch---e.g. elect leaders, finances, etc.), protects rights of members, remind the group of their values, standards and the focus of their ministry.

EIN Number: Some have been concerned that SVDP Parish Conferences will, at some point in the future, need an EIN(Employee Identification Number) different from the parish. The main reason for this is that the IRS has found that some charities have misused their funds and are requiring more from all charities and the EIN number helps them do this. As mentioned above, every Knights of Columbus Council has an EIN number that is different from the parish but this doesn't prevent them from having a close relationship with the parish/pastor.

6. **SVDP Rule**: The United States SVDP Manual states that "the Rule should neither be ignored nor worshipped..."(page 14). The SVDP Rule is not a straight jacket but is meant to be a living, breathing embodiment of the original spirit of Frederic Ozanam and his companions. There was never any intention by the National Council to imply that immediate, 100% compliance to the Rule was necessary for Conferences to be considered part of the Society or to be included in the Society's tax exempt status, insurance, etc. The Vincentian Rule and its spirit is an expression of oneness with Vincentians worldwide. Members should always be striving to follow the Rule's spirit and intention in their SVDP ministry. The SVDP Rule is lived out in member's lives in the real world and the International SVDP understands this and does allow exceptions to what is written in the Rule.
7. **SVDP Donations to Other Charities**: The SVDP parish Conference collects money from parishioners and it is the intent of the donor that is paramount in this discussion which must always be respected (civilly and canonically). Parishioners give money to the SVDP and presume it will be used by the SVDP in their person to person work with the poor. Is it OK for the SVDP to give this money to other charities not connected with the SVDP? It depends! Each situation is unique, so each case has to be judged individually. As long as the donor knows before he/she donates, there are many situations where this would be permissible(e.g. SVDP members are involved in a hot meal, shelter, etc. in the inner city; a coalition of local churches come together to better serve people on a person to person basis where the member churches have direct contact with those in need). The bulletin is a great vehicle in sharing information about where their SVDP donation will be used.
8. **SVDP Parish Conference Record Keeping**: There will be no changes in what record keeping is required by local parish Conferences whether on cases or of income and expenditures. As with every Church ministry good stewardship requires having good records. If your Conference is keeping good records at the present time, there will be no changes needed.
9. **Future SVDP Parish Network and Structure**: Our hope is to continue to maintain a type of network for all parish helping groups(SVDP and non SVDP) for the sake of collaboration and communication especially with the clustering process proceeding in the Diocese of Cleveland and present economic conditions This would include all parishes that have a group that helps the needy and suffering. We can do more together than as individual parish groups. We need each other to more effectively serve the poor in the Diocese of Cleveland. Examples of this are our Ozanam Centers, Back to School Collection, Blanket Sunday, etc.. Serving the poor should be our main focus.

Meetings have been held with the SVDP parish Conferences remaining with the SVDP and new Greater Cleveland District Councils are being formed at the present time.

Other Pertinent Information

10. **SVDP Relationship to the Diocese of Cleveland**: The reorganized SVDP has a very good relationship with the Diocese of Cleveland. Bishop Richard Lennon helped us obtain office space with the Diocese at Cathedral Square Plaza, 1404 East Ninth St., Third Floor, Cleveland, Ohio 44114; 216-696-6525, ext. 3150. Tom Mullen of Catholic Charities continues to help support our SVDP Central Office operation.
11. **Local SVDP Relationship to the National SVDP**: The reorganized SVDP in the Diocese of Cleveland has a good relationship with the National Council of the United States and its officers. Our Board members and staff have attended a number of recent(2009 and 2010) National and Mideast Regional meetings and renewed many past friendships. We continue to be part of the National SVDP as are 112 SVDP Diocesan Councils in other Dioceses in the US where there is an SVDP presence.