



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a School Conference?

A School Conference is a group of committed students who meet regularly and follow the Mission and Vision of the St Vincent de Paul Society. These students are passionate about Social Justice and seek to help those in need in a variety of creative ways. From fundraisers and collections, to advocacy and awareness raising campaigns, these students prove that young people can make a difference.

What does the word Conference actually mean?

The word Conference comes from the beginnings of the Society in Paris in 1833. The founders of the Society were 'confreres' (fellow members) who formed what they called, 'The Conference of Charity.'

Are there costs involved in starting a School Conference?

No. Resources, support from the Society and access to the School Conference HQ are free.

How long have School Conferences been running?

The very first Secondary College Conference was formed in 1908. The numbers have grown since then and at the end of 2014, 34 Catholic Secondary Colleges had an active School Conference. This represents roughly 1/3 of Catholic Colleges in Victoria.

Our school already has a Social Justice group – why would we want to consider a School Conference as well?

Often Social Justice groups are teacher led and are open for all students to attend meetings when they wish. They also might only meet for specific Social Justice events. A School Conference is generally made up of a small group of students who commit to meet regularly (e.g. Fortnightly, monthly) to not only plan Social Justice events but deepen their faith together through an ongoing commitment to do something about poverty and injustice in the community.

What is the ideal number of students for a School Conference?

The most successful Conferences tend to be made up of a small core group of between 5-15 committed students. However, every school is different and may find a larger group works best.

How often does a School Conference meet?

This is entirely up to the Conference President and members. It is advisable for Conferences to set a regular meeting time. This could be weekly, fortnightly, or monthly.

What is the teachers role?

A teacher provides a supportive/coordinating role for the group. This role is affectionately known within the Society as the 'Bailly'. This name stems from Emmanuel Bailly who was the president of the first conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Emmanuel Bailly was more experienced than the other members therefore, today; we call the teacher who assists a School conference the 'Bailly', in recognition of the wisdom and guidance they bring to the conference.

A good Bailly:

- ◆ Offers advice to the conference members
- ◆ Does not run the meetings or events, rather empowers and supports the students
- ◆ Has a knowledge of/interest in the St Vincent de Paul Society and social justice
- ◆ Has a knowledge of school policies and procedures
- ◆ Is passionate about the School conference
- ◆ Listens well

Does our School Conference have to fundraise and organise activities solely for the St Vincent de Paul Society?

No. As much as we greatly appreciate all the support given to the St Vincent de Paul Society by schools, there are a number of organisations that need support from schools too. If fundraising for another organisation, it should be made very clear that the fundraising is not for the St Vincent de Paul Society. Saying this, we do ask that there is some support given to the St Vincent de Paul Society throughout the year. Most importantly, a School Conference replicates the wider St Vincent de Paul Society model of embracing subsidiarity. The group should meet for prayer, reflection and then action based on what they themselves decide are the needs most important to them.

What is the relationship between a School Conference and a local St Vincent de Paul Conference?

A relationship between the School Conference and local Conference is strongly encouraged. It really helps students to see that they are part of a wider organisation of people giving up their time to help others in any way they can. The local conference can give talks to the students as well as provide ideas on ways the students can help them. The School Liaison Officer can put you in contact with your local conference president.

What support does the School Liaison Officer give to a School Conference?

The school liaison officer will attend start up meetings, commissioning ceremonies and special events upon request. They will supply administration resources, activity ideas as well as resources to assist with running Social Justice events. Questions, queries and concerns can be directed to the school liaison officer. It is their job to assist School Conferences to run effectively and independently as a valuable part of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

What if I have a question that isn't answered here?

Not to worry, you can direct your question to the School Liaison Officer at schools@svdp-vic.org.au