



SOCIETY OF
ST VINCENT DE PAUL

003-193-NPO
REGISTERED
PUBLIC BENEFIT ORGANISATION (P.B.O.)
www.ssvp.org.za

c/o Frederic Place
28 Riversdale Street
Coronationville
Johannesburg, 2093
South Africa

P.O. Box 88152
Newclare, 2112

February 2026

**STATEMENT OF THE AUTONOMY
OF
THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL**

FEBRUARY 2026 (UPDATED)

SSVP South Africa issues this clarification statement in response to queries received from members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Clergy of the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa in respect of the relationship between the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP SA), the Roman Catholic Church, Caritas and other Catholic Sodalities. We trust that this statement provides the requisite clarity in respect of these relationships.

SSVP HISTORY

SSVP was founded in 1833, and its first Rule was developed in 1835, a document embodying the practices of the society, independent in its administration and organisation. The Society began to grow, and by 1845 it was already present throughout France and had reached other countries in Europe, as well as the United States.

In 1845, Pope Gregory XVI approved the goals and methods of the SSVP and granted its active members and volunteers a set of plenary indulgences and stated: *“As we recognise that this Society, established under the patronage and in the name of Saint Vincent de Paul, dedicated to practical works of charity, makes a powerful contribution to the good of religion, and is beneficial for the faithful; so that it is daily growing and flourishing.”*

SSVP INDEPENDENCE

The independence of the Society was not devoid of tension. During the presidency of Adolphe Baudon (1848-1886), the 3rd President General of the Society, bishops and priests in several European countries wanted to use the name of the SSVP with a different structure. In other places too, priests were Conference presidents, and bishops led Councils.

In 1851, Pope Pius IX appointed a cardinal protector of the SSVP and also granted indulgences for the families assisted, and for the members’ parents.

Pope Leo XIII, in 1888, granted indulgences to the wives of conference members, and, in 1913, Pope St Pius X granted them to active members attending Assemblies.

In 1917, the Code of Canon Law was approved, in which associations were defined as bodies created, controlled and in some way also governed by the Church hierarchy. Lay people had to abide by the rules and obey only their pastors.



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National Board:

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THE 'CORRIENTENSIS' RESOLUTION DATED 13 NOVEMBER 1920

The Bishop of the Diocese of Corrientes (Argentina), Msgr. Luis María Niella, submitted a query to the Holy See, concerning the relationship of the Ordinary with SSVP Conferences, and the appropriateness for them to be independent from its authority, since he found no basis for this in the new Code, and because there was a debate about the administration of SSVP assets in Corrientes.

The Council's Sacred Congregation issued a decree recognising the autonomy of the SSVP's decisions and the rights of association. This resolution, called "Corrientensis", dated 13 November 1920, is now 102 years old. The text reads as follows:

"Insofar as an association does not owe its existence to the Church, nor is recognised for legal purposes by the Church, neither can it be governed or led by the ecclesiastical authority, but only by the laity appointed in its own statutes. Among these associations, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (or Vincentian Conferences) stands out in recent times for its renown and its example".

With the 102nd anniversary of this recognition by the Holy See regarding the autonomy in government and administration of the SSVP, it must be acknowledged that there is a close and healthy relationship between the Conferences and the Church. The SSVP liaises with and is part of the Church, through its identity, charism and organisation, as stated in Art. 5.2 of its Rule:

"The Society is legally autonomous as to its existence, constitution, organisation, rules, activities and internal government. Members freely choose their own officers and manage the Society's activities and assets with full autonomy, in accordance with their own Statutes and the legislation in effect in each country."

The International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, represented by the Council General International is a member of two official bodies at the Vatican, with a seat and a vote on each:

1. Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life;
2. Dicastery for Service of Integral Human Development.

SSVP is also in permanent touch with the "Dicastery for Communications" and the "Congregation for the Causes of the Saints" for our fellow members, whose exemplary lives are being examined for canonisation, including one of our founders, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

The President General of SSVP, Renato Lima de Oliveira, states that *"the autonomy recognised by the Church should be regarded as an asset when it comes to electing officials, to preserving our heritage and to*

observing the procedures, rules or regulations of our institution. As for doctrinal, spiritual and liturgical matters, we shall blithely abide by the decisions taken by the Church and the Holy Father. In view of all this, our autonomy entails responsibility, balance and cooperation."



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ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PARISH RELATIONSHIP WITH SSVP

Although SSVP autonomy is a longstanding fact and operational reality worldwide, SSVP in South Africa is committed to the establishment and maintenance of harmonious working relationships between its conferences and their parishes. This commitment is set out in Section 8 of the SSVP SA Vincentian Spiritual and Service Guidance for Members, Councils and Conferences. Section 8. header states: *“The Parish is the Catholic base for our conferences and provides some of the needs and some of the means with which we undertake our good works. SSVP members should prioritise the nurturing of the relationship between the Conference and the Parish Structures to develop strong bonds of deep trust.”*

This document can be viewed in full on the SSVP SA website: www.ssvp.org.za.

This clarification statement is hereby confirmed and approved by the SA National Council Office Bearers listed below as the official position on the autonomy of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in South Africa.

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