Planning for a thriving conference
In many areas of our lives, (for example, budgeting our
expenditure, carrying out our weekly chores, setting our career
aims, encouraging and supporting our children in their hopes and
expectations) we make plans, set ourselves targets and periodically
review the progress we are making. We do this automatically but
how do we conduct our Conference business?
Do we keep it simple and just react to events and demands made on us as they happen - our prayers and readings; our finances, our reports of visits made and visits for the next week? Or do we from time to time, review our work to see if we could do better, e.g. by asking ourselves whether there are needs in our area which are not being met which we could meet, either immediately, or which we could plan to meet next week, next month or further ahead? If we just react to events as they happen, even though we manage our weekly business efficiently, we may not be growing in our work and application. It is often said that a group which doesn't grow, stagnates and then we need to question how long we might exist as a viable effective force for good.
Blessed Frederic put it this way "Let us remember that in human affairs there is no possibility of success without continual development - ADVANCE OR SLIP BACK."
However, if we do review our work from time to time and identify how we can be more effective and relevant to the needs around us, we can grow and use our talents and resources to better advantage following the examples of St Vincent and Blessed Frederic.
To serve the needy with all the resources available to us, we can't just leave it to chance; we need to plan and work together at all levels in the Society from Conferences and Councils all the way up to Council General. The reasons for our weekly Conference meetings are to develop our spiritual life and to maintain our regular visits to those in need. But we should also consider what further needs and challenges we could meet. There are two aspects to this; first, identifying what projects should be included in an ACTION PLAN, and second, SETTING TARGETS to bring projects to completion.

THE ACTION PLAN

In identifying needs in our area, there will be some that the Conference could meet with its existing members and resources but there may well be others that could only be met by, for example, increasing the numbers and a better balance of brothers and sisters. Our action plan needs to include projects which meet both of these possibilities. Making plans is an important activity and to do it property and ensure that as many members as possible take part, it is recommended that sufficient time be allocated and notice given for this. The Society recommends Conferences to set aside one meeting a year to carry out a review but more than one meeting could be devoted to it if necessary.
Select some of the areas of need appropriate to your area and determine a list of priorities. Only you know best what is needed and some imagination is required. However, some examples are:

• having a recruitment drive to revitalise a flagging Conference or start

a new one:

• establishing a Youth Conference in the local school;

• holding development sessions on Visitation or running a Conference;

• having sessions to help Conference Officers carry out their responsibilities;

• viewing the videos on the lives of St Vincent and Blessed Frederic;

• doing some fundraising. This could be as simple as raising money to
send a family on a holiday or as complicated as developing a Community Shop. Both these are actual examples of SVP work. Whilst our main role is to give ourselves by our person to person contact with those in need, we need funds to oil the machinery of our activities.

It is important that the contents of the action plan should be agreed by all the Conference. Therefore, any proposals, short term or long term, should be written down and shared by the whole group so that they can be questioned, analysed, criticised, developed, or even, sometimes discarded. In this way, all members will feel involved in the decision-making process, and will be more likely to support the decisions made, even those members who may have some reservations.

bers in session
at Hinsley Hall, Leeds

SETTING TARGETS

Targets should be realistic and
attainable but not too easy.
It is no use reaching for the
moon; only astronauts have
been there! In other words,
targets should be challenging
yet achievable. This requires
agreement on time scales.
For example, arrangements to
have a video presented, or a
presentation on "Visitation"
could be achieved in say, 2 months; to have a recruitment drive to set up a new Conference in say, 3 months; to set up a Youth Group, in say 4 months. When time scales have been agreed, it is necessary to check progress at regular intervals, e.g. 3, 6, 9 or 12 months depending on the scope of each project. In setting time scales, account must be taken on the amount of time members can give and priorities of projects agreed accordingly. As in agreeing the action plan, targets should be discussed and agreed by the Conference. In this way, all members will feel part of the process, giving them ownership through the decision-making process and thus they will be more likely to work harmoniously together. Without such discussion and agreement there may be dissent with those dissenting being reluctant to give their full support to the work involved. Finally, do not be discouraged if all projects do not succeed; some will and some may not. Do not feel that you are alone. Your District Council and Central Council are there to encourage you and give practical help and the National Recruitment and Development Team are always on hand to give advice via the National Office.

20 7407 4644 il - info@svp.org.uk