



A Self-Sufficient Wage for Employees of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

The Position of the National Council of the United States

Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council

As approved by the National Council: September 26, 2014

A Message from our President

Dear Brother and Sister Vincentians,

Our Society is well known as a network of volunteers serving those in need. However, we are also a large employer. Our role as a faith-based organization commands us to deal justly and morally with those in our employ.

I urge you and your board to study the wages your employees need to be self-sufficient and, if you are not yet providing a self-sufficient wage, to develop a timetable to get to that level.

As Vincentians, we believe in living gospel values. As the largest Catholic lay organization in the United States, it is essential that we support Catholic teachings. I urge you to ensure that those employed by the Society in the United States be afforded the greatest possible respect and a wage that reflects our values of creating self-sufficiency for whomever we serve.

Yours in Christ,
Sheila Gilbert
National President
National Council of the United States
Society of St. Vincent de Paul

A self-sufficient wage provides the income necessary to meet basic needs without public subsidies (e.g., public housing, food stamps, Medicaid or child care) and without private assistance (e.g., free babysitting by a relative or friend, food provided by churches or local food banks, or shared housing.)

www.selfsufficiencystandard.org

Self-Sufficient Wages

There is certainly no shortage of debate and confusion about wages in our country. Minimum wage, living wage, just wages are among the common terms that cause much discussion and political partisanship.

As an organization, we must follow in the footsteps of our founders and get above the political fray to truly help the people we serve and employ. We must put partisanship behind to set an example to our communities.

Of course, the concept of paying a self-sufficient wage has its confusing components. Family size, geography, local living costs - even age of the children, if you get into the deep detail, can impact the cost of living for our employees.

It is up to the local Council Board to investigate and determine a sufficient wage that creates self-sufficiency for our employees.

The Business of our Society

SVdP Thrift Stores, Councils and Special Works, like all good businesses, have the responsibility to remain economically viable. While it may not be essential that they make a profit, they must be able to generate sufficient income to defray expenses or they will become an unsustainable burden on the Council/Conference operating them. When the decision is made to hire employees, the store manager or board must be fully committed to dealing with the implications of that decision - from economic sustainability of the enterprise to fair wages for employees.

Some of the considerations that Councils and others within the Society who are responsible for employees should consider and discuss include:

- The ends never justify the means. The Society's help for the poor cannot be based upon injustice to employees.
- There is no question that increased labor costs will impact the revenue/proceeds of thrift stores and other Society operations. However, acting justly with our own employees significantly strengthens our moral authority.
- While the Society has always been a volunteer-focused organization, the moment a person is hired, we assume all the inherent responsibilities and duties of any employer. If we are to hold other employers accountable, we must set the standard.
- Serious consideration needs to be given to trade-offs in budgets and in the use of Society funds. God is calling us to justice, are we offering excuses?
- If donors, members and others object to higher wages for St. Vincent de Paul employees, then it is up to us to educate them regarding the principles of economic justice and challenge them to adopt those principles in their own lives.

Great progress has been made since our original position paper on this subject in April 2001. It is our hope that no employees currently receive a wage that requires them to depend on public or private assistance to live.

In situations where that is not the case, we pray that the local Council can find a way to rectify that situation as soon as practical.

Steps for determining a Self-Sufficient Wage

1. Investigate the cost of public benefits in our state or geography. How much money does a family of three, for example, need to be independent of SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, etc... Are we paying more than that?
2. Examine the local wage calculator (<http://livingwage.mit.edu/>). Does that calculation provide a reasonable snapshot of the cost of living in our geography? Do we need to validate any of the components? Does that wage allow people to live without long term public/private assistance?
3. Compare the self-sufficient wage with our current pay scale. If we are below that pay scale, how long would it take us to raise pay to a self-sufficient level?