



## LEADERSHIP PROFILE

**Chief Executive Officer  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA**

**St. Louis, MO**

---

*"A network of friends, inspired by Gospel values, growing in holiness and building a more just world through personal relationships with and service to people in need."*

---

# A Special Opportunity

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a venerable institution with a rich history and a compelling future. Its mission is deeply rooted in the tradition of serving neighbors in need through personal relationships and direct aid offered with dignity and respect.

Founded in Paris in 1833, the Society expanded to the United States just twelve years later, when the first US Conference was established in St. Louis (1845).<sup>1</sup>

Just shy of 180 years later, the [Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA](#),<sup>2</sup> still based in St. Louis, has evolved into one of the country's largest and most impactful grassroots charities. Today, there are nearly 90,000 members—"Vincentians"—in over 4000 local Conferences serving the needs of some five million neighbors in need every year, one person at a time.

Vincentians offer hope and help to the impoverished, the unhoused, those facing a temporary bump in the road to stability and self-sufficiency, and anyone else beset by burdens that might be lightened by personal intervention. Whether a mother and children fleeing an abusive relationship, a homeless family living in a tent, an elderly man facing eviction, or someone just laid off from their job and unable to pay the bills, all are among the thousands served every day by the men and women of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

According to *Forbes* magazine, the Society is among the 100 largest charities in the US.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, SVDP has grown through attraction

---

<sup>1</sup> "Conference" is SVDP's term for what other organizations might call chapters or affiliates. Most SVDP Conferences are based in individual Catholic parishes.

<sup>2</sup> The full name, National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul, is commonly shortened to Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA or SVDP USA.

<sup>3</sup> Per *Forbes*, SVDP USA was the country's 75th largest charity by revenues in 2023.



“

We don't just stand with the poor; we sit with them.

“

The present search for Chief Executive Officer is designed to identify and attract an executive with the management experience, the cultural sensitivity, and the spiritual grounding to be the leader this extraordinary mission deserves.



rather than promotion, as the Society is a low-key organization that rarely attracts attention to itself, reflecting Vincentians' deep-seated commitment to simplicity, humility, gentleness, and selflessness.

Yet, the Society also has a formal, longstanding commitment to renewal, a commitment that will inform the CEO search and the work that follows. As stated in *The Rule*, the Society's foundational spiritual and governance document,

“Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly thrives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions.”<sup>4</sup>

The intersection of three recent developments makes 2024 a time of special opportunity for such renewal:

- The Society's CEO recently announced plans to retire later this year after eleven years in the role.
- The National Council elected a new President, the functional equivalent of board chair, with aspirations to a more cohesive, collaborative future that supports and scales the innovation, creativity, and best practices evident in many parts of SVDP's network while addressing the reality of declining membership elsewhere.
- In its first in-person meeting in February 2024, the newly constituted board of directors embraced a process of reflection and renewal, recognizing, as one member put it, “We are at a tipping point.”

Accordingly, the present search for Chief Executive Officer of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA<sup>5</sup> is designed to identify and attract an executive

<sup>4</sup> *The Rule*, Section 1.6. First crafted in 1835 and updated most recently in 2003, *The Rule* is the Society's foundational spiritual and governance document. The digital version, available [here](#), includes 2018 revisions to Part III, the Statutes governing SVDP USA.

<sup>5</sup> The full title is Chief Executive Officer, National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul, commonly shortened to CEO, Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA or CEO, SVDP USA.

with the management experience, the cultural sensitivity, and the spiritual grounding to be the leader this extraordinary mission deserves.

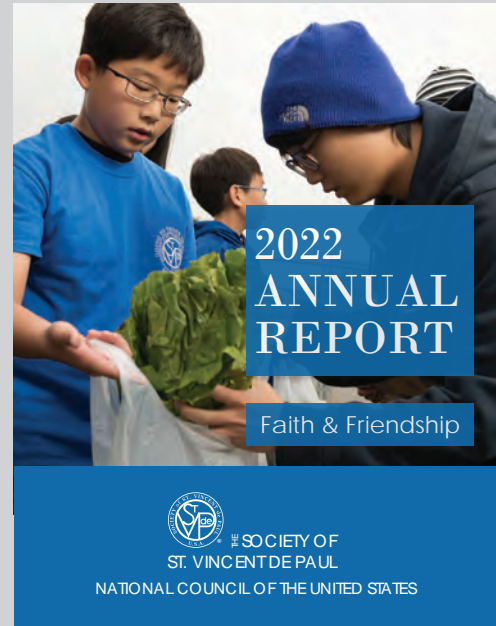
## The Organization

A worldwide network of 800,000 lay Catholics, members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are inspired by Gospel values to grow in holiness and build a more just world through personal relationships with and service to people in need.

In the United States, Vincentians serve tens of thousands of people in need every day, one at a time. Vincentians operate the largest thrift store in Los Angeles, staff the largest pharmacy in Louisiana, and serve thousands of meals every day in Phoenix. Each week, they conduct home visits, the Society's core program of faith-in-action, in remotest Alaska, rural Georgia and the 4000+ other communities served by SVDP, offering a compassionate ear, conversation and direct aid to thousands of individuals and families every day.

Collectively, in 2023 the Society had a documented impact on poverty in the United States of over \$1.4 billion, with some \$500 million of that coming in direct financial support to individuals and families in need, but its impact on the lives of both volunteers and those being served is incalculable. As one board member observed, "We serve the poor, but we are evangelized *by* the poor." A recent SVDP columnist noted, "We are not just delivering food or clothes, or payments of rent and utilities. We are bringing love to those who suffer the terrible poverty of feeling unloved, uncared for, and abandoned." Another volunteered, "What Vincentians offer is the gift of *listening*."

Supporting this vast network is a multi-tiered organization committed to the principle of subsidiarity, in which decisions are made at the lowest appropriate level, free from excessive bureaucracy. As shown in the graphic nearby,



“

In the United States, Vincentians serve tens of thousands of people in need every day, one at a time.

“

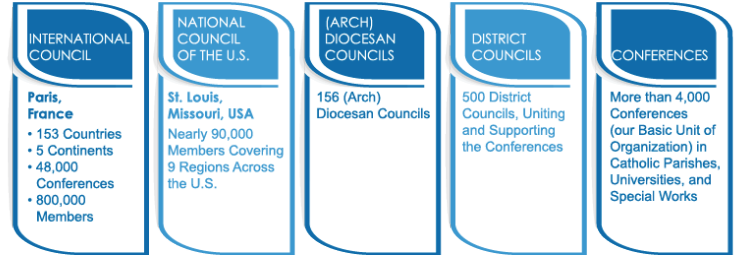
The President appoints most of the 25-person board of directors, SVDP’s governing body, who, like the President, serve for six years.



parish-based conferences are SVDP’s basic unit of organization, rolling up to the National Council of the US, which elects the National President. The President appoints most of the 25-person board of directors, SVDP’s governing body, who, like the President, serve for six years.

## The Society’s Organizational Structure

The National Council of the U.S., Society of St. Vincent de Paul provides leadership and support for the growth and health of the Society’s Councils, Conferences, and Special Works. The National Council enables Vincentians to better serve their local communities by offering financial support for Vincentians responding to neighbors in need; supporting spiritual formation; providing guidance on advocacy and justice issues; and offering assistance to disaster survivors.



The National Office of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA has an Operating Budget of about \$8 million, derived primarily from two sources, individual contributions and solidarity dues from Councils and Conferences.

The staff at SVDP USA headquarters in St. Louis is imbued with the same spirit of service that characterizes Vincentians’ work across the country, except their “clients” are the US Councils and Conferences rather than individuals. The staff is organized along traditional lines, with teams devoted to administration, finance, operations, governance, membership services and development.

SVDP USA is part of the [International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul](#), headquartered in Paris, France, and the President of SVDP USA is a member of the International governing board. Globally, SVDP operates in 155 countries, with some 800,000 members in 48,000 conferences. The US operation is the third largest in number of conferences (after Brazil and India) and the second largest in contributions, after Australia.

# The Mandate

“Charity is inventive to infinity,” noted St. Vincent de Paul, the Society’s patron saint, and Vincentians are rightly pleased by the inventive ways the Society serves those in need.

Despite the hit to membership the Society has taken in recent years, partly a function of the pandemic but also reflective of trends in the institutional church and beyond, there has been a surge in innovation and creativity in programs and services. Many of these have become part of a better, more effective, and more far-reaching support system within SVDP. Capturing and promoting such inventiveness and strengthening the Society’s appeal (and messaging) to a changing audience will be critical to SVDP’s success in the coming years.

With a new President and board of directors in place, SVDP USA is blessed with volunteers and staff who share a deep commitment to the mission, a genuine respect for the Society’s heritage and traditions, and a realistic perspective on the opportunities and challenges ahead.

From group discussions with the CEO search committee and the board of directors and individual conversations with numerous board members, the incumbent CEO, each member of the senior staff and individual Vincentians in several markets, a number of overlapping priorities have emerged which the next CEO can expect as part of the role’s mandate:

- **Strategic clarity and focus.** “No work of charity is foreign to the society” is one of SVDP’s central tenets, as embodied in *The Rule*.<sup>6</sup> As a broad concept, it is both inviting and empowering, but as a management precept, it can be challenging.

<sup>6</sup> *The Rule*, Section 1.3.



“

“No work of charity is foreign to the society” is one of SVDP’s central tenets, as embodied in *The Rule*.

“

The opportunities for a more proactive leadership style are appealing, but exactly what that looks like in an organization entrenched in servant leadership has yet to be tested.

The whole network would be well served by a fuller understanding of how the St. Louis organization can add real value to the good work being done in Councils and Conferences across the country and how St. Louis might amplify successes achieved and lessons learned from innovative efforts in local markets.

Capitalizing on a broad-based desire for greater strategic clarity, the next CEO must work with the President and board of directors to ensure the intentional setting of priorities within the context of an evolving strategy that inspires stakeholders, invites support and enhances SVDP USA's work in real time.

The first steps in this regard have been taken with the recent announcement of *Vision SVdP*, a Synodal conversation across the Society's US family that will inform the ways the Society adapts to changing conditions. In a process that is still evolving, *Vision SVdP* will start with listening sessions at every level of the Society, from individual thrift stores, food pantries and pharmacies to the board and National Council itself, "because every voice matters."

- **Proactive leadership.** The staff in St. Louis has been a source of pride for its leanness, but some investment in staff is inevitable to minimize any self-imposed barriers to effectiveness and impact.

The staff is thoroughly respected for its responsiveness. The opportunities for a more proactive leadership style are appealing, but exactly what that looks like in an organization entrenched in servant leadership has yet to be tested.

At a different level, few organizations have as full a view of the practical implications of homelessness or poverty as SVDP does, and few have more experience with effective solutions. SVDP is well connected in Catholic circles, but it has engaged much less with other



actors in spaces relevant to its mission and the people it serves. At the national level, there appears to be significant opportunity for the CEO to leverage the Society's knowledge and resources in collaboration with respected peers in support of shared goals.

- **Internal culture, systems, and processes.**

Personal engagement with people in need will always be central to Vincentian service, but the national headquarters has yet to embrace technology as a critical means of supporting that personal engagement. SVDP USA does not need to be a technological pioneer, but the next CEO will be expected to be savvy enough technologically to leverage tools, systems and media that could enhance the overall effectiveness.

For example, given SVDP's daily encounters across the country, the Society might have the best data anywhere on poverty and homelessness. Is capturing such data just a pipedream, or could it be a key component in capitalizing on the transformational opportunities ahead?

Additionally, to promote teaming and minimize the silos that plague many nonprofits, the CEO must lead with transparency, combining a collaborative attitude with respect for all team members' abilities. Reinforcing a spirit of community, professional development, and mutual accountability within the headquarters team itself will be an important ingredient in lasting success.

- **Relationships and connectivity.** Relationships and connectivity are at the heart of SVDP's work. Every national organization that supports local affiliates is challenged to demonstrate its relevance and value to entities in the field, and the Society is no exception. How relevance is strengthened and value is delivered



“

The CEO must lead with transparency, combining a collaborative attitude with respect for all team members' abilities.



will depend in large part on how the CEO establishes and nurtures relationships, both within the Society and beyond.

## The Relationships

“

The Society’s next CEO will be an experienced executive with a deep commitment to the “why” of the Society’s work.



"The Society"

Click the image for a video overview of The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

<p><b>SVDP’s CEO reports to:</b></p>	<p>The President and Board of Directors, National Council of the US Society of St. Vincent de Paul</p>
<p><b>And manages a national staff of about 25 through six direct reports:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Operating Officer/Chief Financial Officer</li> <li>• Chief Advancement Officer</li> <li>• National Director, Vincentian Formation</li> <li>• National Director, Governance &amp; Membership Service</li> <li>• National Director, Poverty Programs</li> <li>• Director, Program and Strategic Development [recruitment underway]</li> </ul>
<p><b>While stewarding other important relationships, such as:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the National Council</li> <li>• Key leaders in (Arch) Diocesan and District Councils</li> <li>• Other units of the <a href="#">Vincentian Family</a></li> <li>• Peer leaders in other Catholic organizations</li> <li>• Leaders of national nonprofits and foundations who share the Society’s goals on critical issues</li> </ul>

## The Candidate

The CEO role at The Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA is one of persuasion rather than direction. The Society’s next CEO will be an experienced executive with a deep commitment to the “why” of the Society’s work. The most appealing prospects will be practicing Catholics with the demonstrated ability to lead a national organization through a time of renewal and reinvention, respecting

past practices and norms while embracing opportunities for enhanced impact.

While it is not essential for the next CEO to be a Vincentian, experience with the Society would be highly additive, and comfort with its purpose and its approach is essential.

The search committee will be most receptive to those whose leadership has been shaped by diverse operating environments and diverse constituencies. Experience in organizations serving “the least of these among us,” both personally and at scale, would be highly desirable.

**Competence: Among the traits and experiences being sought, SVDP expects to hire**

- A nurturing CEO with the stature, confidence, and credibility to lead a complex, multifaceted national organization serving a complex, multifaceted mission.
- An executive whose approach to management is deeply informed by his/her own faith journey; a servant leader who guides with humility and a deft hand.
- A CEO with an ear for strategy and an eye for detail; a leader/manager with the commitment and capability to ensure that operational excellence is itself a strategic priority, so that everything SVDP undertakes is done efficiently, effectively, and respectfully.
- A bridge-builder with compelling leadership experiences, ideally including nonprofits with influence well beyond their local markets.
- Experience with the systems, technology, and digital media appropriate to SVDP’s scale and its need to attract younger and more diverse members.
- A compassionate executive who leads by listening.



“

The search committee will be most receptive to those whose leadership has been shaped by diverse operating environments and diverse constituencies.

“

SVDP's CEO should embody creativity, candor, empathy, and authenticity.



- A board-savvy manager at ease with people of different generations, economic circumstances, and backgrounds; someone who respects the power of diversity and has demonstrated it in the make-up of leadership teams s/he has built.
- A manager and mentor who models the power of relationships in leadership.
- A CEO accustomed to leading by influence rather than authority; a decisive yet diplomatic team-builder who is comfortable operating in an environment that prizes consensus.
- A compelling communicator and dynamic public speaker who excels in the “why” of SVDP’s work as much as the “how.”
- A magnet for resources; someone who naturally attracts talent and financial support; a prolific fundraiser.

**Culture: SVDP's CEO should embody**

- The calling that informs the commitment of so many Vincentians.
- A respectful balance of business acumen and spirituality; someone for whom faith is an empowering asset, not a limiting one.
- A true heart for SVDP’s work.
- Creativity, candor, empathy, and authenticity.
- A collaborative style; someone who respects (and models) the power of relationships in leadership.
- “Humility, civility, stability and tranquility.”<sup>7</sup>
- Cultural and social dexterity; an executive comfortable with the special demands of leadership in an enterprise with local ties and a national footprint.

<sup>7</sup> As highlighted in [this video](#), as relevant today as when first produced a decade ago.

# The Location

The CEO of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA is based in the Society's headquarters office in Maryland Heights, MO, a suburb of St. Louis. The Society has been headquartered in St. Louis since 1845, when the Society's first US conference was established at the Basilica of St. Louis, King of France, "The Old Cathedral."

Metropolitan St. Louis (pop. 2.8 million) is a family-friendly urban and suburban region with a cost of living about 6% lower than the national average.

It is home to the [Gateway Arch](#) and [Forest Park](#), one of the nation's greatest urban public parks, three research universities<sup>8</sup> and four professional sports teams.<sup>9</sup> Known for its blues and its barbeque, the area is ripe with walkable neighborhoods offering a variety of restaurants with unique charm and local personality.



---

<sup>8</sup> Washington University, St. Louis University, and the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

<sup>9</sup> St. Louis Cardinals (baseball), St. Louis Blues (hockey), St. Louis BattleHawks (football) and St. Louis City SC (soccer).

For potential consideration  
or to suggest a prospect, email  
[SVDPCEO@BoardWalkConsulting.com](mailto:SVDPCEO@BoardWalkConsulting.com)  
or call **Sam Pettway** or **Patti Kish**  
at 404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).