

# The Home Visit



## Why do a home visit?

“When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink

...

“Whenever you did it for any of my people ... you did it for me.” – Matthew 25-35-40



I’m sure all of you are familiar with this Bible passage. The Bible make it clear that we should help others. It’s so important to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul that it’s spelled out in detail in “The Rule,” which was developed by our founders back in the 1800s.

“The Rule” says we should see people in their homes whenever possible. We should be friendly and compassionate. We will serve anyone – regardless of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, etc. And we always do visits in pairs – just as Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs.

What sorts of things do we help with? We do emergency financial assistance, of course. But we also provide suggestions of other organizations to call, which we’ll discuss more later. I’ll also send you a copy of our resources sheet for you to refer to.

And finally, we offer spiritual support. Deacon Andy Cirmo is available to help. And we continue working with many friends beyond the initial visit.



You should make sure you're in the proper frame of mind when you accept a case. I like to say a prayer before I reach out to someone who has called us for help. We refer to these people as "friends in need" or just "friends."

REMEMBER: You represent Christ to those we serve. Be warm and compassionate. Keep an open mind. Do not be judgmental. You will need to make judgments, though, on the person's needs. You'll need to be a good listener. The conversation is about the friend, not about you.

And remember that we often can't solve problems, but we can help. You'll want to show the person that God cares. You can make this person's life a little better just by listening and showing compassion.

I came across a great quote from Sr. Rosalie Rendu, who served as a mentor to our founder, Frederic Ozanam "Be kind and love," she said, "for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you bring them."

## How cases are assigned?



A friend needing help will leave a voicemail on the St. Vincent de Paul answering machine at St. Michaels.

An intake volunteer checks the answering machine about twice a day and assigns cases that are within the five zip codes we serve. The person on intake also enters basic information into our computer software, which is called Agular.

If you volunteer to make yourself available to handle cases during a particular week, you don't need to be available every minute. Intake will check with you on your availability before assigning a case. Some calls need to be responded to immediately, such as when someone's electricity already has been turned off. With other cases, we have more time.

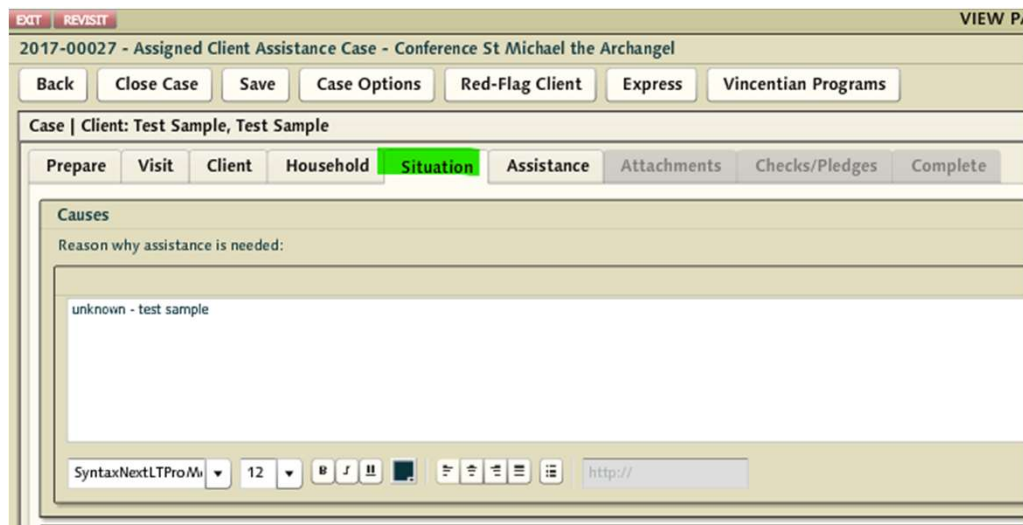
A caseworker never goes on a home visit alone. However, during COVID-19 pandemic we are handling cases by phone with a single caseworker.

When intake calls to offer you a case, you'll receive some basic background from intake about the friend. Then you'll look in Agular for details.

Your caseworker partner will be lined up by intake, or otherwise you'll find your own partner. Either way, you'll want to touch base with your fellow caseworker to talk about logistics – where you might meet, when you might meet.



## Situation tab in Agular



As you prepare for your home visit, I would also encourage you to look at the “Situation” tab in Agular. I’ve highlighted it in green so you’ll easily spot it. You’ll learn more about how to access this during Agular training.

What you’re seeing on the screen is only a sample case. If it were an actual case, you would see a few sentences describing the person’s circumstances, plus the identity of the intake person who wrote the note and the date the conversation took place.

As you work with the friend in need, you’ll also put notes in Agular.

This can be especially helpful if a friend calls us back in six months or a year. As the caseworker, you would follow up with the friend. Before you do, it’s good to check Agular to refresh your memory about how we’ve worked with this person in the past.

## Schedule your visit



Once you've got the background, it's time to call the friend in need. When you call the friend to arrange a meeting time, you should dial \*67 before you dial the person's number. Dialing \*67 will ensure that the friend can't see your phone number.

When the person answers, ask to speak to the friend by name. You introduce yourself by saying "Good morning. My name is XXXX and I'm a volunteer for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Is this a good time for you to talk?" Note that you're not providing your last name, and you're telling the person you're a volunteer, which means you're not being paid. You would follow up by saying that "Everything we discuss is held in confidence. Our conference leadership may have access to some information, but no one else." Ask the friend to explain why he called. It's OK to allow moments of quiet to encourage the person to open up. Then you would ask the friend when you could meet with him at his home.

If you can't get through, leave a message saying when you will call again and that the number you call from will be blocked.

## Travel to home visit with caseworker partner



Caseworkers usually travel together to a friend's home. Traveling together will give you a chance to pray together and discuss the case - before and after your visit.

It's also safer.

Many caseworkers meet at St. Michaels

You will also pray with your fellow caseworker before your visit and again afterward. You'll typically do this in the car. You can make up your own prayer if you wish. Also, you can find home visit prayers on the SVDP national website, <https://www.svdpusa.org/>

Be sure to have your resources sheet with you. I also like to have a copy of the Case Record form and a pen with me.



A few other things about safety. We haven't run into problems on home visits. We serve a part of the metro area that is generally very safe. But the society has some best practices that you should follow. Your safety is very important.

If you carry a purse, put that in the trunk of the car before you travel. You won't carry it into the home visit. Be sure to lock your car when you arrive.

Do take your cell phone on the visit. (I make sure I wear clothes with an easily accessible pocket where I can put my cell phone.)

Don't give out any personal information, including your last name, your phone number or your email address. As I said earlier, always dial \*67 before you call a friend.

If you need to follow up later in person, have someone with you.

## You meet your new friend at her home



Ring the doorbell and step back a few paces. Wait for the friend to answer, smile and greet him or her in a friendly way. Identify yourself and your partner by your first names and say you are with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Thank the friend for reaching out to the society.

## The conversation



- Tell the person that you're sorry to hear about the difficulties he/she is having. Ask him to explain his situation. Most people are more than willing to open up.
- Ask questions to draw the person out. Be a good listener. Remember – this conversation is about the friend, not about you. Be pleasant and empathetic.
- Observe the environment. What can you learn from your surroundings? Is there food in the house? Is there furniture? Also be attentive to body language.
- Don't play a role that you aren't qualified to play.
- If the case is straight forward, make a plan with the friend, suggesting tasks you would like him to do and saying you'll follow up within, say, 24 hours.
- If the person needs financial help, try to get the full financial picture. Here's where the Case Record Form can help. It can remind you of topics you might want to ask about, such as whether the person has loans or how much he pays for everything from mortgage to car maintenance.

## In-depth financial picture

Income	MONTHLY	Expenses	MONTHLY
Job	\$2,000	Mortgage	\$1,500
Food stamps	\$200	Electric	\$200
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,200</b>	Water	\$30
		Food	\$500
		Car payment	\$200
		Cable TV	\$100
		Cell phone	\$50
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,580</b>

- Often, you're going to want to go into some depth about the friend's finances if it appears he/she may be spending more than is coming in each month.
- This is a really abbreviated version of a budget – something you could write on a piece of paper while talking to your friend. This hypothetical friend is spending more than he/she has coming in. Maybe another member of the household could get a job, or some expenses could be trimmed.
- Also, it's possible that the friend is asking for help with one bill when it would make more sense for us to help with another. For example, it might make sense for us to pay an electric bill instead of a water bill if electricity is due to be cut off soon.
- Sometimes we can only pay a portion of a large bill. But we don't want to pay anything unless we know the bill will be paid in full.

## Take picture of bill



Use your phone to take a picture of the bill we may be paying. When we do pay a bill, we pay the company directly – we don't give money to the friend.

With rent, there typically isn't a bill. So you would take a picture of the lease agreement.

Later, if we make a payment, you will upload the photograph of the bill into Agular. You'll learn how to do that during Agular training.

During the pandemic, ask the friend to email a copy of the bill to [info@svdp-rva.org](mailto:info@svdp-rva.org). You would have him or her send it to your attention, and Dan would forward it to you. Or you could create your own email address just for SVDP business. If you do this, don't use your last name. Many Vincentians create email addresses like [marysvdp@gmail.com](mailto:marysvdp@gmail.com).

## Provide resources, maybe assign homework

Agency	Purpose
Homeless Crisis Line	Intake for all shelter services in Richmond area
Senior Connections	Administers EnergyShare for Dominion
Henrico Social Services	Provides general financial aid, referrals
Catholic Charities	Helps with budgeting
CARITAS	Furniture

I mentioned earlier that we have a resources sheet, which I will email after this meeting. I listed above a few of the agencies that tend to be among the best resources for many of the friends who contact us. Contact information for each agency is on the resources sheet.

As you become more familiar with resources, you'll have ideas off the top of your head about other organizations a friend could call. As you're getting started, you probably will want to review the resources sheet for ideas before you go on your home visit. The person on Intake also has talked to the friend and may have some ideas to suggest.

We ask that you not give out copies of the resources sheet, but you're welcome to give people names of organizations and contact information from the sheet.

## Ask friend if you can pray with her



As the home visit is winding down, ask the friend if you could say a prayer with her. This can be something in your own words. Deacon Andy Cirimo recommends using “TAP” – for “Thank, Ask, Praise.” You would ask God to bless our friend and thank God for bringing the friend to us. If you don’t feel comfortable making up your own prayer, you could say the “Our Father” or use one of the prayers on the SVDP-USA website.

The prayer is typically the most beautiful part of the home visit – and is often very meaningful to the friend. I’ve seen friends start to cry when we pray with them. Even when a friend’s problem is well beyond our reach financially, the friend really seems to appreciate the prayer. It helps give them some hope.

On the rare occasion that someone says no to praying with you, tell the person that you’d like to pray for him.

## Say goodbye and thank you



Now it's time to leave. Do not make any promises. Tell the friend you will get back to her soon. You and your fellow caseworker will get back into the car.

You take a few moments to say a prayer. There are examples of these on the SVDP-USA website, or you can choose a prayer on your own.

As you drive, discuss the case. Do you both have the same impression of the situation? Do you agree on what you think the St. Vincent de Paul Society should do, and when?

In some cases, the bills are just too high. That most often happens with rent or mortgage payments. In those cases, we can probably help some, but the friend would need to come up with the rest through family or other organizations. Sometimes, the best thing we can do is help the person prepare to become homeless.

Generally, St. Vincent de Paul will follow the caseworker's recommendation on financial assistance if it's not too expensive (a few hundred dollars). You should talk to an officer or your intake person about your recommendation before you act on it.

Also – I mentioned earlier that we keep information confidential. You can talk about a case in a general way but never in a way that would reveal a person's identity. Exception – when you're talking to Intake or an officer about how to handle a case.

## Details on financial assistance



Sometimes when we go on a home visit, we take groceries to people who have told us they need food. More often these days, we provide them with gift cards for a nearby grocery store so they can buy groceries themselves. If you do plan to provide food, be sure to ask about allergies. I'll send a separate handout with guidance on what to buy. Also, it's good to provide information on food pantries, which we have in our resources sheet.

Sometimes we put people in a hotel for a brief period when they're being evicted. We have been limiting hotel stays to three days. We are more inclined to pay for hotel nights when children are involved. We don't provide additional hotel nights for people calling us from hotels. And we don't do home visits in hotel rooms. You would meet the person in a public area of the hotel, in a nearby coffee shop or restaurant or at St. Michaels.

On electric bills, we often partner with Senior Connections, which administers EnergyShare. Senior Connections will help a customer up to three times a year. The friend must have a cut-off notice. When we work with Senior Connections, we pay a portion of the bill, and Senior Connections pays the rest.

## Spirituality – It's our mission

A network of friends, inspired by Gospel values, **growing in holiness** and building a more just world through personal relationships with and service to those in need. – *Mission Statement of Society of St. Vincent de Paul*

Finally, I'd like to touch again on spirituality before we close. Here's our mission statement. You'll notice that spirituality is mentioned before assisting those in need.

Our founder, Frederic Ozanam, urged early Vincentians to bear witness to Christ and to his Church by showing that the faith of Christians inspires them to work for the good of humanity.

Be sure to pray before and after a home visit. Ask the friend if you can pray with him or her during a home visit. There are Vincentian scriptures, such as the Beatitudes and the very familiar passage I showed you at the beginning of this presentation – about “When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat.”

Our national website is also a good resource.

## 7. Resources

[www.svdprva.org](http://www.svdprva.org)

[www.svdusa.org](http://www.svdusa.org)

[www.povertyusa.org](http://www.povertyusa.org)

[Info@svdp-rva.org](mailto:Info@svdp-rva.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/svdprva/>



And here are a few resources you should find helpful.

## Questions ?

