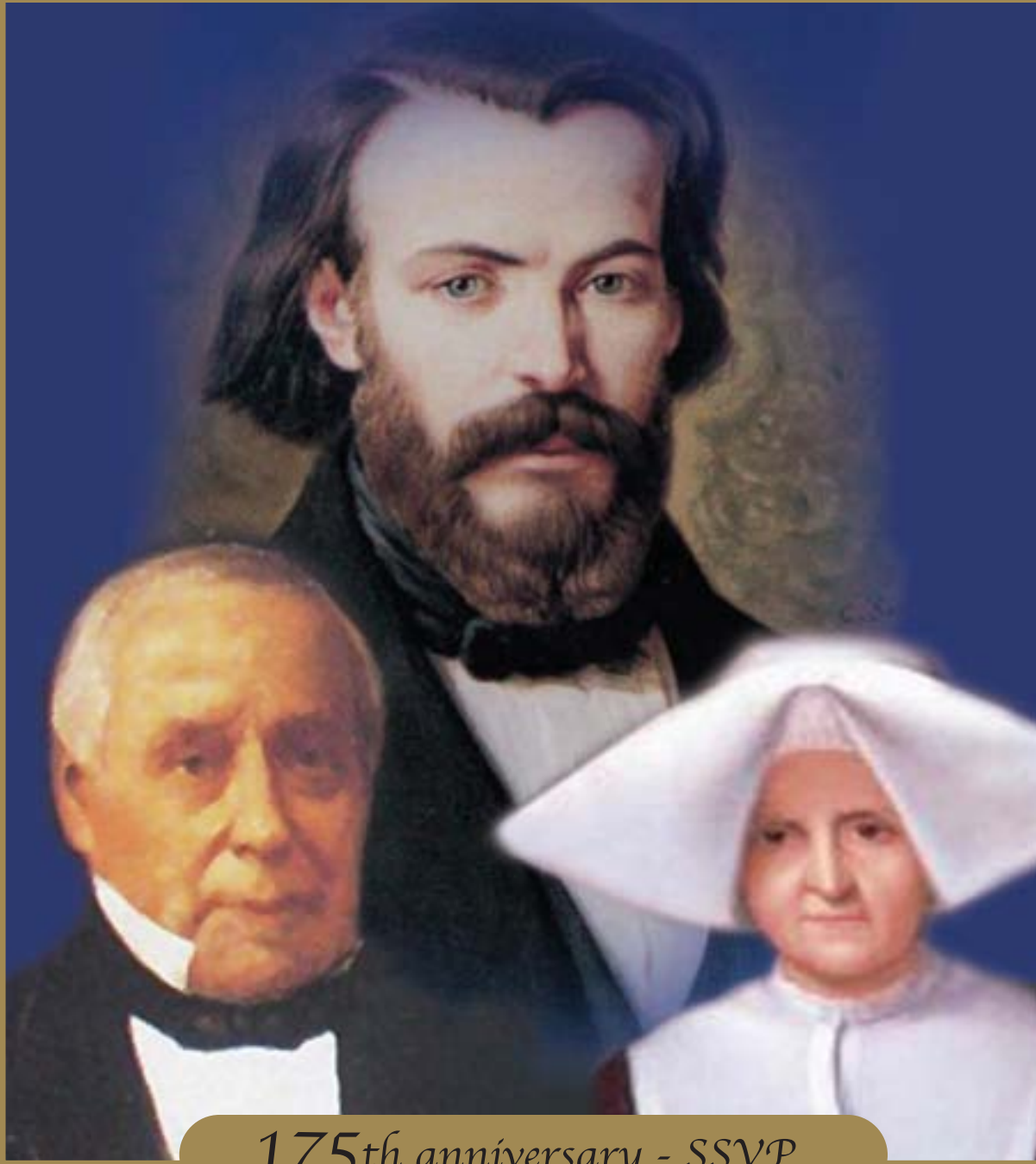


Look back on the AGA

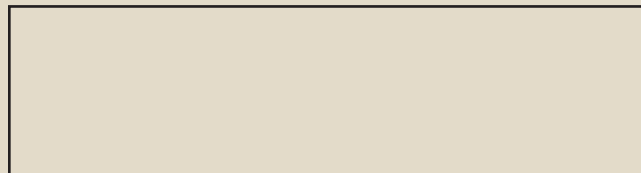


175th anniversary - SSVV

Vincenpaul-Canada

IT IS BY MY WORKS THAT I SHOW MY FAITH; LET US GO TO THE POOR!

Return Address:
National Council of Canada
1247 Kilborn Place
Ottawa ON
K1H 6K9



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SOCIETY OF
 SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL
 NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CANADA

MISSION

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a lay Catholic organization whose mission is:

To live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

VALUES

The Mission of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul implies that as Vincentians we:

- see Christ in anyone who suffers
- come together as a family
- have personal contact with the poor
- help in all possible ways

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OBITUARY

Mrs. Jeanne D'Arc Hévey, President of the St-Matthieu Conference in Gatineau, passed away last July 10. She was the wife of Mr. Roland Hévey, President of the Gatineau-Hull-Aylmer Central Council. Mrs. Hévey attended the 2008 AGA in Québec.

Dear Friends,

It is with great joy that I inform you that our prayers have been answered! After six months of chemo and a two month recovery from surgery I am cancer free from the Stage 4 Colon Cancer that had progressed to my liver. I am normal again and fully functioning as National President. The prayers for the intercession of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam certainly paid off! We are humbled by the power of your prayer and your friendship.

Yours in St. Vincent and Blessed Frédéric,

Joe Flannigan, President
 United-States Council

Important ...

**The legal name of our organization is
 Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.**

**Even though we use the article “the” before the name in a text,
 we do not use that article when the name is used alone,
 for example in a document title or on a poster.**

**The only official acronym for the
 Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is “SSVP”.**

YOU ARE MOVING, PLEASE LET US KNOW !

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Tel.: _____ Email: _____

Name of your council/conference: _____

Penny's piece

**May the peace of Christ be with
all of you!**

CELEBRATING 175 YEARS

**“Where two or three are gathered
in my name, there am I in the
midst of them.”**

It has been only one week since the AGA 2008 began in Quebec City. Yes indeed, the Spirit was moving all over this AGA!! It was truly a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led AGA!

As we all know, time just flies by. I cannot believe we have again come together for another family reunion! This of course is wonderful, especially since we had an anniversary celebration tied into it! 175 Years!!

That was quite a birthday party! And as a group we sang “happy birthday” to the Society.



Our invited guests included our International Council General President José Ramón Díaz Terremocha, his interpreter Juan Tirado, Father Yvon Laroche, the ICG Spiritual Advisor, and Fr Teodoro Barquin, the co ICG

Spiritual Advisor. All of these individuals brought the whole world closer to each one of us. The spiritual advisors' messages were ones of hope and basic spirituality, of genuinely answering God's call to serve His poor in His name. They were both such dynamic speakers. José Ramón brought the Council General into reality for all of us. He brought a message and vision that encompassed the whole world. His vision is to serve the poor without borders and without closed spirituality. He let us know that we have the good wishes and blessings of all our brother and sister Vincentians all over the world and that they look to Canada as a leader in developing strategies and programs to meet the needs of those we are called to serve.

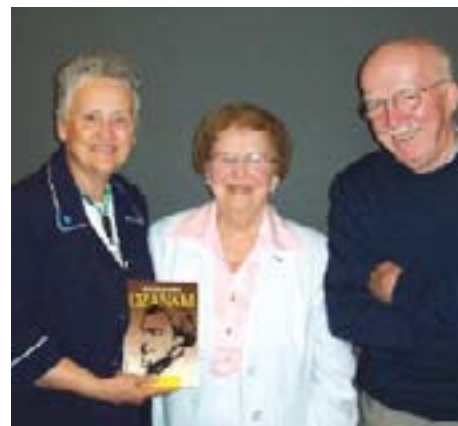


As a special event all the past presidents of National Council of Canada assembled for historic picture taking: Mme Marie Claire Letarte, Bob Martineau, Ellen Schryburt, Michael Burke and myself. Mme Letarte was “so happy” to be with us. Bob Martineau was ecstatic to see everyone and Mme Letarte also. Old



*Penny Craig,
National Council President*

friendships renewed!! It was really like seeing brothers and sisters again after a very long time. What an event!



We were also honoured by the author of the book “Ozanam”, Madeleine Des Rivières. She came to have lunch with us and celebrate this wonderful event. She was so pleased to see such a great many Vincentians together. I know that many have read her book with great admiration for its historical content and evident spirituality. Mme Des Rivières signed copies for those who wished to have a souvenir.

Of special note was the attendance of 24 youth members from Windsor and Kitchener, Ontario. Their presence was duly noted by the President

Penny's piece

General. He was so pleased to see them in attendance. He was also truly impressed with Caroline's participation at the Youth meeting in Spain.

I cannot say enough about the great organizing team from the Quebec Central Council. What a group! They had everything down to a fine science. It did not matter what was needed, it appeared. The hotel staff group was also so very accommodating.



Sister Nantel with our graphic artist, Josée Laforest.

Ghislaine DuNord our translator had to work and sent her regrets. It was very nice for the members to meet the faces behind the scenes.

A very special thanks to Ellen Schryburt who acted as the "protocol person" and "go between" to the AGA planning committee.

The parade of banners, to begin the Friday morning session, was a new innovation, followed by the Quebec welcome song, "C'est à ton tour de te laisser parler d'amour" led by M. Gerard Dion of Montreal. Everyone participated with enthusiasm whether they could speak French or not. The parade consisted of each regional president carrying in their regional banner when they were called as the St Vincent de Paul song was being



Gérard Dion, of Montreal

Smiles, smiles, smiles everywhere!! José Ramón remarked to everyone about the accommodating smiles, he just loved it! He considers Canada the example of what the formation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul intended and should be. He was truly impressed with all aspects of the AGA. We had 69 of 139 voting members present!!! How wonderful!

As always, our staff did a marvelous job of ensuring that all aspects of meeting requirements were attended to. All staff were invited to the AGA. We got to meet Josée Laforest our graphic artist who designs the layout for our magazines and other material,

played over the loudspeakers. Our thanks to Cathy Mahony and her choir from the Church of Our Lady Parish in Guelph for the recording of the song. The organist was Joe Carrier.

Another new application was the president's round table discussion with voting members. This was a time to share, ask questions, and develop new ideas without the formality of a meeting. We visited the questions, "What is strong about what we are doing?" and secondly, "What are the strengths yet to come?"

Overall, everyone was very pleased and had very positive things to say regarding the VincenPaul magazine. They have found the articles interesting and informative. The latest issue that contained the article regarding the \$240.00 contribution and its process was deemed very informative. A request to have the process for Aggregations and Institutions as an article in a subsequent issue was noted and shall be forthcoming.

It will be a tradition that we will carry forward from year to year.

We paid attention to special events in member's lives as you would in a family. These included Lucille Bienvenue, wife of Jean Claude Bienvenue, regional president Quebec. Lucille is in terrible pain and awaiting hip surgery, Agnes Martineau is also very ill. We have to understand how much it took for

these two men to leave their wives at home in order to attend this AGA. Conversely, these two ladies also knew how special it was for both of their husbands to attend. We thought about our brother in the USA – President Joe Flannigan, who is battling cancer and is recovering from surgery, as well as a number of others whose names were mentioned at the time.

We celebrated 50 years of ordination of Msgr Andre Drouin; and 50 years of profession of vows of Fr. Joe Quinn, who will celebrate 50 years of ordination next year. There were numerous 50th wedding anniversaries. All of this to share in the lives of our brother and sister Vincentians as a family would do. A moment for deceased members was shared by all as well.

The excursions to Quebec City, the opening ceremonies at Mount Ste Anne and the Friday night dinner at the Sugar Shack were very rewarding experiences.

As always, we brought the AGA to a close with our special Mass in Ste Anne de Beaupre church and followed that by our traditional commissioning ceremony. The Mass featured the installation of Dave Grant as the new president of Atlantic Region.

The final activity was the banquet on Saturday night. Again what a great time everyone had! I am sure the photos in this issue will certainly

speaking for themselves. Enjoy! All in all, everyone came away feeling very energized and hopeful. I know I certainly did. I cannot thank everyone enough for all they did to make this AGA the best ever!

Penny Craig

I have just received the following message from José Ramón:

Dear Penny,

Coming back to Europe the first thing I want to do is to send you all my gratitude, firstly for your invitation, and secondly for the experience I have lived thanks to this trip, meeting all the Canadian Brothers and Sisters during this plenary in Quebec.

I have seen, my dear friend, a strongly united Society, under your leadership, and I have appreciated very much the wonderful, efficient and discrete team you have. All these good points let me think that we can expect exceptional fruits in the service of the Canadian Society and for its future development.

You know that the Council General and especially I are at your entire disposal for all you may need in a personal or Vincentian aspect.

Congratulations my dear friend! I am so happy to see the important and exigent direction you have defined for the Society in your wonderful speech during the closing ceremony. Thanks for being so close to the

Council General. It is proof that you are open minded and that you have the ability to see further than today.

Keeping you in my prayers and with all my affection,

José Ramón Díaz Torremocha



Annual Report

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT 2007-08

The last year has been spent in cultivating ways to assist the Society to grow and realize its full potential. The ministry of administration continues to evolve as a caring and spirituality based mission that more clearly defines who we are as "people of the water and the towel" in the administration of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

At this time it would be worthwhile to provide a quick snapshot regarding the health of each area of the ministry of administration. Each committee, as you know will provide a more detailed report of its activities. It is not my intention to reiterate these reports. These reports are available on our website: www.ssvp.ca.

Administration: (Strategic Direction)

Several key areas that are visible manifestations of this ministry included revising the administrative staffing. We now have two administrative assistants. One full-time and one part-time. This in turn provided the opportunity for streamlining office procedures and the delegation of certain activities to each of these staff. In the Ottawa office Joanne Fillion is the full time staff member, and Nicole Schryburt out of the Montreal office is part time.

I have also been able to be present in the office one day before all executive and board meetings, thus providing for better interactions, communications, staff meetings

and coaching process for the staff. Results have been favourable. We now have a defined process for such things as Aggregations and Institutions and follow-up for inquiries. Other standard operating office procedures are also being developed and are on the horizon.

Human Resources Committee under the leadership of Clermont Fortin, has also been very busy assembling all of the legal documentation requirements to care for our staff.

A vote of thanks to our staff, Nicole and Joanne, and to our consultants Ghislaine Nord, who does our translations sometimes with very little turnaround time notice, and to Josée Laforest, our graphic artist who does a great job of graphics and set up for our Vincenpaul magazine and other national council items such as the new brochures. We certainly appreciate all of you!

Board Orientation Day

The Board of Directors had two day meetings both in November and May. The Friday of the November meeting is considered a Board Orientation Day. New board members learn all aspects of the administration of the National Council and meet the staff that assist members to learn their staff functions. As well, all board members learn their own role in the administration and communications between the national council board and the members of their regions.

Board Retreat Day

In May, the Friday is spent as a day

of retreat/spirituality. The time is spent reflecting on the importance of who we are as stewards and members of the board and the administrative team. We celebrate the gifts we each bring to the ministry of administration and within the Society. The day begins with prayer and recitation of the rosary and ends with the celebration of Mass.

As members have stated, "a very full day and very worthwhile for both events".

Spirituality Committee chaired by Yvon Bussieres, has been instrumental in making the May Retreat Day a very remarkable and edifying experience. Our National Spiritual Advisor, Msgr Peter Schonenbach, provides the insights needed to ground our decision-making both at the board level and at the executive level. The terms of reference for this committee were expanded to allow for a number of spirituality focused areas to emerge. Under the strategic planning process one area identified was that "There are no visible signs of spirituality within the Society". Through this committee will come measures to ensure that there ARE visible signs of spirituality within the Society. Yvon and his team will endeavor to ensure that Spirituality is a viable and visible presence at all Society gatherings and communications. This task does not rest with Msgr Peter alone, we all have a responsibility to animate the Spirituality of the Society!

Education/Formation (Strategic Direction)

Under the leadership of Carol

Horne VP, meetings and communications have taken place that will generate the results that the Strategic Planning had identified as important concerns for membership.

The establishment of the Education/Formation committee has begun to manifest signs as a very fruitful endeavour.

Strategic Planning will also continue under Carol Horne's leadership. It is so life-giving when strategic issues are identified and attained. This gives life to both the committee itself and the organization. As a council we have met objectives in a timely fashion with tangible results. This is due in most part to the dedication of all of you as members of the Society wanting to see the Society grow and flourish in your local areas. Well done!

International Emergency/Disaster Relief under the stewardship of Clermont Fortin, VP again has been instrumental in providing assistance not only to international situations, but also here at home. Quebec City suffered a severe fire that saw 16 families left homeless. Our national council provided some financial means to assist our brothers and sisters of the conference in the area.

Twinning

Kathy Weswick, as the national chair, and Nicole have worked very diligently to maintain the integrity of the twinning process for all concerned. Twinning has once again been very busy developing relationships and providing safe mecha-

nisms that will see twinning connections made and the provision of monetary support find its way to those twins that rely on assistance both internally and externally outside Canada. A new brochure and twinning manual have been prepared.

Finance

The Finance Committee, chaired by Marcel Tremblay VP, has met a couple of times to develop processes that will provide for good stewardship of those funds that come to the national council for whatever reason. Our Treasurer Germain Souigny has been instrumental in assisting the administration of the national council with the development of practices that enable sustainability throughout the fiscal year.

The finance committee has also developed Financial Guidelines that will assist everyone to understand the basics of financial practices as they relate to the national council administration. These new guidelines assist in the annual council budget preparations. Communications to members regarding what happens with funds was paramount in helping to assist members to understand the need for and basis for funding.

As more conferences and councils recognize the need, the national council finds itself slowly moving toward the expected goal of \$240.00 annual contribution from conferences and councils in all regions.

Last year we budgeted \$240,000.00

for the last fiscal year and we attained \$185,000.00. Bravo to all of you that can support the national council in this fashion, and also, bravo to all of you that send more in order to help those conferences and councils that cannot afford to send the annual contribution! Together, we can make a difference!

The Vincenpaul Spring Issue contains an article that explains the necessity of the \$240.00 contribution to the national council. This was in response to a question posed by a conference president. It occurred to me that if she did not understand, then obviously, there may be others who also do not understand. I called it "a teachable moment", and asked Marcel to help me write an article to help answer the question.

Voice of the Poor - Advocacy

The Voice of the Poor Committee is now underway. Both Clermont Fortin VP, and Michael Burke PP, along with Msgr Peter Schonenbach have undertaken to make this committee an audible voice within the Society for and with the poor that we serve. Issues will come forward for input and action as the committee plans strategies to make our voice heard. There indeed will be no shortage of issues and concerns.

Youth Committee

Our Youth Committee is under the able leadership of Caroline Gilbert and John O'Flynn. Caroline will have attended the International Youth Conference in Salamanca Spain in the beginning of June and

Annual Report

I know she will have much to share in her Youth Committee Report. Both John and Caroline have a passion for the work that is conducted with and for youth. We are so very pleased she is a member of the Board of Directors. We also have 4 youth and two adults attending the World Youth Days in Australia in July.

John will be retiring as co chair of this committee, and we thank him for his contributions to the national board of directors. I know he will continue to serve the BC/Yukon Region very well.

Board Administrative Communication

This aspect of administrative communication has been well provided for by having Diane Pearson as the secretary of the board. Her knowledge of both French and English assists with the comprehensiveness of her minute taking. Together we have established timelines for both the notices of meetings and the dissemination of minutes. Joanne becomes the main facilitator throughout this process as she communicates with the translator Ghislaine Nord so that timeliness can be maintained.

Communications/Public Relations (Strategic Direction)

Communications/Public Relations is another of the identified strategic directions that members identified as important for continued growth of the Society throughout the country. It is well acknowledged that we need to be seen as well as heard. Our National Council materials

need to be comprehensive, concise, and correct; they need to have the look of the organization be consistent. In this last year, we have created a new Society of Saint Vincent de Paul National Council brochure, a new Twinning brochure, prayer cards, mission cards, etc, all with the distinctive international logo and blue and white colours that define the Society in Canada.

Caroline Gilbert expressed a desire to work at establishing the “branding” of the Society on all of its material by creating a Branding Manual that will define the look of the Society throughout the country. I know there are several others interested in doing the same thing along with her. We look forward to their creativity.

Website/Operations Manual (Strategic Direction)

The Operations Manual and Website: both of these have been updated. In these days of electronics, it is a mortal sin not to have these up and functioning correctly. Our thanks to Nicole for her diligence in managing that aspect for us.

Vincepaul Magazine

Vincepaul Magazine has been managed by both Nicole and Ellen Schryburt. Both of these ladies have been gathering news stories and with the help of our translator and our graphic artist, have assembled a very informative magazine. We have received a number of compliments on how well done it is. Thanks to each of you, Nicole, Ellen, Ghislaine, and Josée for your

hard work. However, a vote of thanks goes to all of you for submitting interesting articles...especially if there are pictures!

We do get a great deal of magazines returned to the national office as undeliverable. This can be due to deceased members, change of presidents etc. This past fall Joanne printed the mailing list. These were sorted according to province or region and circulated to the regional president for their region to review and correct. Our thanks to all of you for your help in getting this corrected and revitalized .

Screening Process

Screening process is well underway in most regions. It is a tribute to those who have helped to make it all possible. Each region has truly worked diligently to ensure that the process is understood and is indeed moving forward.

National Audit

At the time of this writing, the national audit has almost been completed. We are awaiting the report of one region. It is my hope that we can bring this report to the AGA in June. We can then send our report to the International Council General for their records.

As of this AGA 2008, I have the following numbers to report: Congratulations to all of you. We are nearing our 1000 conference in order to have standing at the International Executive Meeting.

Special Note: the President General has appointed Canada to

the Executive Committee with full voting privileges for the next two years!!! We have that long to get another 12 conferences aggregated...way to go everyone!

President's Travel

As I reported in the Vincepaul Magazine I have attended meetings in Joliette Quebec, Austin Texas, Paris, Ottawa, Victoria BC, Edmonton, and Spain in June. These have been wonderful opportunities for me to see the many good works conducted in the name of the Society and to meet so many brothers and sisters. Presence means so much to all of these persons and taking the time to go to meet with everyone is very life-giving to all concerned. What an invaluable resource we are to one another!

Past Presidents

I could not possibly complete this report unless I paid tribute to the past presidents of this National Council of Canada of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. We cannot and should not ever ignore or dispense with the expertise that has gone before us. We have come so very far under their leadership.

Each of these presidents continues to offer their services in what ever capacity the council may deem useful to further the efforts and work of

the Society. To this end, even Madame Marie Claire Letarte has offered herself to come to visit our AGA and provide a very welcoming presence; Brother Bob Martineau has been instrumental in the writing of the Canadian Statutes and is always available for consultations; Sister Ellen Schryburt is very instrumental in the production of the Vincenpaul Magazine – taking pictures and assembling the articles, she is also the liaison for the coordinating members of AGA planning committees; Michael Burke has offered to assist with the Voice of the Poor Committee and Advocacy, as well as provide his expertise in areas that may require mediations.

What a wonderful legacy we have in the Society, people who want to continue to live out their spirituality in the name of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. What a gift!

International The USA Annual General Assembly

The International Level has been very interesting. I had the occasion to attend the USA Annual meeting in Austin Texas last September. A very welcoming, and evidently spirit filled and spirit led meeting. Connecting with many new brothers and sisters provided a wider horizon of the work of the Society.

It was all so very interesting, the time really went by all too quickly.

The International General Council Executive Meeting

I received a call to attend the International Council General Meeting in November. Of course this was so exciting to have the chance to go back into history and see where it all began. To meet and visit with the President General, to meet the members of the Society from all over the world, knowing they were all brothers and sisters doing Christ's work just as we do back home. It was interesting to be among these people, some whom you could not speak with, but it did not make any difference. We all knew why we were there. We came together and listened, laughed, prayed and ate together. It was interesting to note that we all came away knowing just what needed to be done. Brother Jose Ramon provided the grounding needed to assist everyone to realize that we are all in the business of doing God's work together.

Father Larouche and Father Barquin, as the International Spiritual Advisors, helped everyone strip away the differences that language made and brought everyone to the task of truly being mindful of our vocational call to the Society by their thoughtful spiritual reflections.

While the visit was very different for me, it also showed me that everyone is in the same boat. The issues and concerns in one country are not really too much different than those of any other country. As with Canada depending on the

	Conferences		Particular C.		Central C.		Regions		Total Units
	Prev. 2008	2008	Prev. 2008	2008	Prev. 2008	2008	Prev. 2008	2008	2008
CB/Yukon	45	39	5	5	1	1	1	1	46
West	42	48	3	7	1	2	1	1	58
Ontario	333	465	35	35	5	5	1	1	506
Quebec	358	359	38	42	5	6	1	1	403
Atlantic	68	68	6	6	0	0	1	1	75
Total	846	989	95	133	13	13	5	5	1088

Annual Report

“conferences and councils” to support the administrative work at the national level to support its work in our country, so too does the ICG depends on “countries” to support its work all over the world. We are truly brothers and sisters in this work of charity!

Vincentian Caring and Sharing

We also saw assistance go to Nicaragua to help them with their X ray machine module repair. These are all tangible ways that the Society provided assistance and relief to those who came looking for assistance. Each region contributed to the appeal most generously.

The Vincentians in Nicaragua were most appreciative!

Summation

I will endeavor to continue to assist my brother and sister Vincentians to continually move forward in sharing their gifts in the ministry of administration. For in sharing who we are as gifts, we become more of who we are! Those who receive our gifts in the spirit of good stewardship can only be graced and blessed with the desire to do more!

**As always I pray that we may be,
“...all one in truth and charity!”**

Penny Craig, President



Five Canadian National Presidents along with the President General



Quebec Central Council



*José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha
XIV Président Général International*

CIRCULAR LETTER TO MY DEAR FELLOW-MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCES OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN THE WORLD.

Dear Friends and Fellow-Members:

Three subjects I want to offer for reflection to my worldwide fellow-members in this intimate and fraternal communication, that I customarily have with you each mid year.

“When he had received the wine, Jesus said: It is finished. With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (Gospel of John 19:30)

A): What do you want of me Lord?

The Gospel of St. John that our Holy Church offers on Good Friday, reminds us year after year of these words - the final ones of Jesus - before giving up his spirit. Truly all was finished.

The Redeemer had come with a clear mission to live among us and to bring the gift of God’s forgiveness, offering His life in exchange

for that gift. All was consummated after a few years of teaching: from how to address ourselves to the Father, to how we should comprehend our relationship with the rest of mankind, all through the introduction of the new commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). All that remained was to give up His life and He did.

The Son of God, He who had become a man to live among us, arrived into the world with one mission and He had completed it. That is: His birth, His public life, the handing of Himself over to torture, His death and resurrection. This was not just coincidence or an accident. No! It was the full assumption - conscious and responsible - of a mission entrusted and accepted even to its final consequence. And Jesus defeats the temptation to escape that consequence, to avoid the torture that he knows of beforehand, and exclaims to the One who had sent Him: “Not my will but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

It is the final act of a life completely offered for the mission. Not only Jesus - even though in much less measure and fundamentally without comparing ours to the grandeur of His mission - we also came into the world entrusted with a mission.

That is: When God contemplates the birth of each one of us, He dreams of a life, a mission, an obligation that He wishes us to discover and commit ourselves to, our contribution to better the world and the very History of Salvation. Afterward, He follows with interest how each of us makes use of the

freedom that He has granted, and observes - most of the time with sadness - how we utilize the seed He has deposited in our soul. Or rather, how we do not utilize it in our hurry through vain illusions that are bound to lead us away from that entrusted mission.

Each member of the Conferences of St. Vincent should meditate profoundly on this passage of the Gospel of John and ask ourselves, What is my mission that will allow me to say, at the moment of surrendering my life, “all is completed”

What does the Creator of the world ask of us and what answer does He expect of each of us, in order to continue belonging to Him. It is not something that affects only others. Rather, it is a call that affects each of us, each of the members of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul and a call in which we often fail with equal intensity, just as the rest of humanity does. Coming to meetings, lodging within the Conference, remaining year after year amidst the members and partaking in the suffering of the poorest, is not enough, if we do not achieve the discovery that this is what the Lord expects of each of those who serve the Conferences, the place to which we have been coming in search of our vocation of serving the poorest of the poor. Even the most humble among us has a mission of God, dreamt by Him for each of us and of which we have the obligation to discover and commit ourselves to. For each member a process of discernment is necessary, the intimate knowledge of its deepest values and also of its defects. A process of discernment in which we shall find,

International - circular letter

without doubt, the assistance of those around us, when we listen to them attentively, so that they consider us more useful. And why should we be less? It is a process of discernment that we will always find in the encounter with God through personal and community prayer within the bosom of the Conference.

The question, "What do you want of me, Lord?," could be and should be a question for all of us. What does God expect of you, dear friend, who is reading these lines, in your service to the Conferences, in your service specifically to the one in which you serve? "What do you want of me, Lord?" It is certain that you will find which particular and intimate mission God has reserved for you and that it will be, undoubtedly, different from the one that is entrusted to me as a goal or to any of the other members. "What do you want of me, Lord?" That process of discernment will obligate us to be permanently on guard as to what happens around us.

However, the Lord does not usually speak to us directly, but frequently does through those who accompany us in life or who, at any moment, cross our paths. Who has not felt questioned by the words of a fellow member, words of a friend, about an act that by chance has occurred in our midst? Each Conference, in service to the poorest of the poor, and also to its members, is nothing more than the sum of the wills of its components. That is, its service will be directly influenced by the quality of each of its members in their commitment to the community life of the Conference.

Therefore, the life of each Conference will be directly influenced by its capacity to serve, by our capacity of having listened to what God expects of each of us and how we will put it into service, listening then all together to what the Spirit of Truth, the Lord and Giver of Life, expects of us as a Christian Community at the service of the poor.

What do you ask of me, Lord?, is a fundamental question for each one of us that should illuminate our very life and enrich the life of the Conference one is a member of. Studying in depth, indeed beyond individuality, is a question that needs to be asked by each Conference in the world, each time its service in favor of the poor is examined. Is it accurate then to say that we are doing what God wants us to do and what the poor are in need of? We are to suppose, dear fellow-members, what each of us shall be capable of giving the world if we listen to the call, decode it, accept it and then apply it to our way of life. We are to be conscious that we shall make a better world if each one of us is capable of responding affirmatively to the mission God entrusts to us.

We are to understand that if we do not function in this way, something will result that will not enrich the world because of our carelessness and that this world will be a little less good because we were not capable - or we did not desire it - of investigating or committing ourselves to the mission that the Creator had entrusted to us.

These are questions, be they made

individually or collectively, each of us Vincentians should ask ourselves continually so that some day we can say, imitating Our Lord: "All is completed." These are questions that will make us abandon the complacency in which many of us live and will draw us to the authentic restlessness of whether we are truly responding to the expectations that God, since the beginning of time, desired from each one of us.

There is a question that might seem incredible, inconceivable and bordering on the disrespectful. But permit me to include it, in terminating the reflection of this first part of my letter. What would become of each of us - indeed of all humanity - if Jesus, in exercising His own freedom, had betrayed the will of His Father? if he never would have been able to say "All is finished." What hope would we have today? It will not have the same repercussion. Evidently! But for the continuity of the History of Salvation, God desires to depend on the small contributions that inspire each and every one of us alive today, each of the baptized.

What would we miss contributing to the world if we did not ask ourselves the question: "What do you want of me, Lord?," if afterwards we flee from the chalice that He has entrusted to us? It is a question that we all should ask ourselves continually, throughout all our lives.

B): Open and in Defense of Christian Values.

In the space of the twentieth century, two movements have powerfully influenced the last 50 years. Both

began in Europe during the 1960's. On the one hand, the Second Vatican Council arrives to update Christian values - evangelical values - in the light of new knowledge and theological advances and to the new lifestyles toward which the world is opening. But without forgetting to what point those values are to influence Western Civilization which has fully been presided over by them during the last fifteen hundred years. Likewise, the Church is not conscious that the rhythms of change have profoundly evolved. And we have not been conscious that if the results of a Council, which before took centuries to take shape, but now with modern methods of Communication and the frenetic life the world has acquired over the current century, necessarily require a much more aggressive campaign of normalization for the extension of that Conciliar message among all those of good will.

The Holy Church has lost some very valuable years in conveying to all humanity - into each ones bosom - much of the richness of the Council, factors that continue being unknown absolutes to many and, what is more dangerous, unknown to many Catholics. How many of us are familiar with the Conciliar documents?

How many of us are capable of explaining them - in a simple manner - to others that live around us, so that they would fall in love with them, as, without doubt would occur, if we were capable of doing so? And these are not the only problems that present themselves to what the Council has enacted. How

many of us are capable of explaining thoroughly and with simplicity, the fabulous Social Doctrine of the Church? A Doctrine open to all and for all. On the other hand, the opposing movement, the one that arises from and has its "blind affection" in the name "May 1968,"* is presided over by a fierce nihilism** and elevates counter values - as a counter culture - that flow from its bosom toward a dominant ideology where the impulses of each person are to be the only values that count; the truly important ones. They destroy not only the majority of moral limits, which we had established for ourselves in all fields of action since Greece and Rome - not only! - but advance to be considered frustrators to all humans in their physical and mental development. They are much smarter than the movement led by the Church - the Council - and fundamentally more daring. They convince many good people of their generation, that "old concepts have done, now do and will continue to do harm to the development of human preservation," and they must be defeated.

These concepts, absolutely demonic, are accepted - just as in olden times - as truths of faith. All is in movement, nothing is permanent. All is submitted for review. There are no moral limits that indicate the difference between right and wrong.

What's more, the concept of Rousseau, that evil does not exist, is accepted more and more with conviction. Evil hides and wins in many souls, the battle of the lie: of its nonexistence. Today, this distancing from the values represented

by the philosophy inherited from the Greeks and Romans - and later enriched by Christianity - that has permitted human beings to reach heights, imperfectly for sure, yet unimaginable in the times of the Resurrection of the Savior, constitutes an impoverishment of mankind that humanity will regret if we are not capable of returning to live within the reasonable limits of the Christian message. That is, if we are not capable of once again understanding that good and evil exist and that only by wagering on the good can we continue building the "Civitas Terrena" aspiring to the truly "Civitas Dei," both defined by St. Augustine.

Otherwise it will be the moral impoverishment of the world that will reach magnitudes possibly never before seen. This battle, this war to recover morality: Should it be the arena of work for the Conferences? I believe so, without a doubt. The loss of values - the feeling to do good or evil, and of being conscious of it - implies a povertyⁱⁱⁱ that moves, in the majority of occasions beyond other poverties that appear more evident, or are easier to detect and less complicated and demanding, in the struggle against them. If the Rule reminds us that "no work of charity is foreign to the Society^{iv}," I do not doubt that this new poverty of mankind, since the beginning of this century - but most likely also continuing in successive ones - should be addressed by our Conferences. It is one more poverty that presents itself at our door and it challenges us to attend to it for Love; for the Love of God.

International - circular letter

We should all make an enormous effort - through our permanent formation that allows us in simple ways, as mentioned above - to be able to explain by our means, the position of the Magisterium of the Holy Church, the questions that are currently debated in any of the settings in which we customarily exercise our apostolate, and even in those others - family, profession, friendships - where doubts may arise over concepts and values that we all should clearly understand and know, so as to share them with knowledge and seriousness with others. Persons of good will, who are, little by little, being absorbed into the dominant philosophy, are not capable of or do not desire confrontations with those who learned and shared the faith from childhood. Especially important is this mission to the youngest among us. With them - our youngest members - we should spread all our knowledge so that they will know and assume the values of good against evil, before some are dragged into a counterculture that will doubtless make them unhappy, sooner or later.

Formation, therefore, is an extremely important challenge for the Society in general and for each member in particular. The organization, in this day and time, does not have the capacity to work with each member on necessary and permanent formation. But it does have the ability to encourage each member toward that permanent formation that we must never abandon during the entire life of our apostolate.

We shall not aspire to be masters of anyone; only to be bearers of some

necessary knowledge, but always in the simplicity of our actions.

C): Systemic Change

To conclude this Circular Letter, permit me dear fellow-members, to refer to an issue that is being dealt with in the meetings of the Vincentian Family - at an international level - over the past two years. It is about what has been called "systemic change." Under this title, the Family that takes its inspiration from St. Vincent de Paul, aims to remind us of the necessity of providing for the drastic changes in the material existence of the poor whom we reach out to help. That is, we are called today by the whole Family, to what so many times we have heard in the Conferences, ever since their foundation: Without the intention, whenever possible, of redemption of the situation in which they find themselves, there is no truly charitable action; there is no true action of Love.

It is important that each Conference engage all its resources in the attainment of touching the one who suffers and whom we help, achieve the defeat of that suffering so that the possibility of becoming self-sufficient and living without our help, is restored. We should strive to have as our objective that those brothers and sisters whom we give assistance to, achieve the dignity of facing their needs on their own. We are to believe, in the meantime, not only in the helping works that so often we are capable of building, but also in going further and undertaking the task of the advancement of all human beings.

And we are to carry this out wherever possible, in collaboration with that formidable army of charity that comes together under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul. I have recalled on many other occasions, that today our labors are a bit incomplete and diminished of strength, when we do not work together with the rest of the Vincentian Family, in the places where we find two or more of our organizations working toward the same fruits.

The Daughters of Charity, the Vincentian Fathers (CM), the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, the International Association of Charity (AIC), are inestimable collaborators always for the benefit of the poorest. Let us unite with them wherever we should meet. Let us not let one misunderstood jealousy lead us to serve alone, when the poor would be better served if we worked together. With another year more, dear fellow-members - of having addressed you - I do not want to conclude without also addressing Our Lady. She, who is Mother of the Church, and who, with love, watches over all movements that strive to follow the Way of Love revealed by her Son, will help us obtain, each day, a better and more demanding service for those whom Christ Himself wished to leave us as His representatives.

With my prayer and affection,

José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha XIV
President General (I.N.E.D.)

Incremental Growth.

In the first three months of the current year, Toyota sold 160,000 more cars than General Motors, the company that has led automakers in sales for the past 75 years. In a short, but informative article in the May 12/08 issue of the New Yorker, James Surowicki traces the long innovative history of Toyota. He notes the many books written on the firm's methodology and how the auto industry has copied many Toyota ideas. The real secret of Toyota's success is that, contrary to the prevailing notion that innovation comes from experts and moves in spurts, it puts in practice what the Japanese call Kaizen, which means, continuous improvement or incremental growth. Such growth comes from everyone involved; suggestions are vigorously encouraged and many are acted upon quickly. We have much to learn from such an approach.

What befuddles certain Conferences is that routine solidifies and leads to stagnation. What is needed is built-in

renewal. Our Christian underpinning is of great help in this matter. To earnestly put what we are about in the hands of God, asking for his inspiration, means that we are open to growth and renewal. This religious stance should lead to internal procedures that include regular assessment and the openness to suggestions. It is good to recall that in the Monastic Rule of St. Benedict, the Abbot, before making a decision must consult, beginning with the youngest monk.

A St Vincent de Paul Conference that is truly alive embodies the notion of Kaizen, as noted above, continuous improvement. Since every Conference faces unique challenges emanating from its human environment, helping our neighbour is work that should be examined continuously so that it is done with greater love, with utmost efficiency, with wisdom and courage. Helping my neighbour means that I am entering into his story and if I do it well, through me Christ will enter the said story. Vincentian work resonates in eternity.



*Mgr Peter Schonenbach
Spiritual Advisor*

There is another area where a Conference requires continuous growth. I refer to the Conference's identity as a prime agent helping the parish become a Christian community along the lines of the Second Vatican Council, as Sacrament to the civil community wherein it exists. Being convinced of this reality becomes empowerment toward establishing Conferences in parishes wherein none exist.

Mgr Peter Schonenbach

REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME:

It is by my works that I show my Faith; let us go to the poor!

Some years ago, a popular TV commercial featured an elderly lady in a hamburger outlet making the comment, Where's the beef! This message resonated with many people because there is a universal dislike of claims that cannot be substantiated. We want value for our money.

Faith is that all-important living relationship with Almighty God. Such a relationship will be alive in so far as we grow in our understanding of God's nature. His love and interest covers all people, and if we are his friends, we will

endeavor to emulate Him. Showing compassion and deep personal interest toward the poor are clear indications that our friendship with God is not mere window dressing.

Going to the poor entails more than generosity. It also means that we are seeking relationship. We are convinced of the dignity of each human being and want our going to the poor to have lasting implications. Our Faith tells us that our action will be Spirit-filled and even if we are rebuffed, we will not give up.

The theme calls us to be genuine and it is appropriate to recall the eloquent word on this topic by Bernard Lonergan in his book *Insight: Genuineness* does not brush questions aside, smother doubts, push problems down, escape to activity,

to chatter, to passive entertainment. It confronts issues, inspects them, studies their many aspects, works out their many implications, contemplates their concrete consequences on one's own life and the lives of others. If it respects habits as necessary conservative forces, it does not conclude that a defective routine is to be maintained because one has grown accustomed to it. Though it fears the cold plunge into becoming other than one is, it does not dodge the issue, nor pretend bravery, nor act out of bravado. It is capable of assurance and confidence, not only in what has been tried and found successful, but in what is yet to be tried.

May these ideas help you mine the great richness of our 2008 theme!

Mgr Peter Schonenbach

INTERNATIONAL VINCENTIAN YOUTH STUDY DAYS: INNOVATION IN THE LISTENING PROCESS

The International Vincentian Youth Study Days took place last June 4-8. Approximately 80 youths, from around the world, between the ages of 17 and 35 met in Salamanca, Spain. I was lucky enough to be part of that group!

The call of the International Council was a first: one youth representative per country was to travel to Spain to discuss issues and the future. From 7:30 A.M. to 9 P.M., there were lectures, group workshops, improvised gatherings, and very few breaks, to benefit as much as possible from all this excitement!

Young people are very anxious to get the attention of the International Council, which is eager to listen to Vincentians' requests and comments.

The stay ended with critiques, questions, and solutions stated by the young participants. As for CGI, it has set up an international youth committee, and appointed a youth representative on the Paris Board.

Before going back home, the participants created a Facebook group now allowing 34 of us to share comments, e-mail, and pictures on the web. Thus, work can easily continue, in spite of physical distance.

It was with great joy that I represented Canada at the first IVYSD.

That was for me an unprecedented human experience. To meet, during the same day, young adults from Cambodia, Mali, Argentina, Hong Kong, South Africa, Australia, Chile, Dominican Republic, Italy, and France is something I could never have dreamed of. We communicated in English, Spanish, French, and... mime! There was an unconditional brotherly spirit around us. We were all brothers and sisters, regardless of our culture. War had disappeared, as well as political parties; there remained only love and the will to help the needy.

Such a gathering provides a great quantity of hope for the future. I came back from Spain a better person, and planning to continue the work accomplished with my fellow Vincentians in Salamanca.

Caroline Gilbert,
Canada Youth Representative



Caroline Gilbert, Representative of our Youth committee with M. Juan Tirado



Father Laroche with young Vincentians in Salamanca, Spain



International president with youth representatives, from different countries

Letter to the Prime Minister

LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Right Honourable Stephen Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada,
House of Commons,
Ottawa, Ontario.

April 18, 2008

Re: Using food crops as bio fuels.

A major food shortage crisis has developed on the planet over the last few months. The demand for basic food staples, like rice, maize and wheat, exceeds supply. Grain stocks are at a 40-year low and prices are rising. There is also an energy crisis being felt all over the world for the same reasons. In Canada, the price of corn and canola has risen considerably as well as energy cost; both are major contributors to inflation. The poor are the most severely affected by the higher prices. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul¹ has served the underprivileged in Canada since 1846. The Society has been witnessing the devastating effects of higher food and energy prices on low-income families during the past year. An even larger portion of their meagre revenues must now be spent for food and utilities (heating, electricity, etc.).

In Canada, the use of food staples to produce bio fuels is contributing to this sad situation. The Society opposes corn, canola and other basic crops being diverted for the production of so-called green fuels as we consider this a factor for the aggravation of poverty in Canada, and not an environmental solution to the energy shortage. The Society believes that public policy should encourage an agriculture based on a variety of basic food staples, with crops used exclusively to nourish people and animals.

The incentives provided by the federal and some provincial governments to cultivate corn and canola and other staple foods for the production of bio fuel, such as the ethanol blended fuel, is one of the factors for higher prices of the staples, and less diversified crops as those most in demand and providing higher revenues are cultivated. The Society does not support such an orientation and policies that create poverty and suffering in Canada. Food should not be used to feed motor vehicles and perpetuate our expensive way of life. This is morally and ethically wrong and the current crisis proves it.

Crop fuels are not a green alternative/supplement to fossil fuels as their production consumes as much energy as it saves. One must, therefore, question if this is a solution to global warming. And it deprives millions of individuals of feeding themselves at reasonable prices. Canada has abundant oil and gas to extract and transform for many years to come; and the Society welcomes initiatives by governments in research and development of renewable sources of energy (e.g.: wind, solar, etc.) as well as aggressive energy conservation measures.

The Society, on behalf of the poor it serves and for the reasons exposed above, are asking your government to re-consider support, financial or otherwise, to the bio fuels industry. The Society is also asking that your government take all necessary measures to correct the current imbalance in the food supply which leads to so much suffering, mostly amongst the most vulnerable Canadians.

Clermont Fortin,
1st Vice President,
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,
National Council of Canada,
Chair, Voice of the Poor Committee
Tel: (613) 824-9984
e-mail:
clermont.fortin2@sympatico.ca

CC: Hon. Stéphane Dion, Leader, Liberal Party of Canada and Leader of the Opposition, House of Commons, Hon. Jack Layton, Leader, New Democratic Party, Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario.

¹ The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is an international Catholic lay organisation whose mission is to serve the Poor in all possible ways. The Society is not only concerned with relieving need but also with redressing the situations which cause it. Established in Canada in 1846, the Society has close to 9,000 volunteer members, active in all provinces, the North West Territories and Nunavut. For more information: www.ssvp.ca

The voice of the poor

HOMELESSNESS – A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

Have you ever been in the stressful situation of not having enough money to pay your rent, month after month? Of having to make hard decisions about feeding the family, paying utilities and debts, or paying your rent because your income is simply too low to meet all those needs? Tens of thousands of Canadian families and individuals are faced with such difficult choices. A family should normally spend about 30% of its monthly net income on housing; however, in Ottawa as in most Canadian cities about a quarter of renters spend more than 50% of their income on rent¹. Those most affected are women who are single parents with children, seniors and aboriginals.

A Society's fundamental principle invites us to be not only concerned with charity but finding root causes of poverty and suffering. Decent housing is a basic need and a Charter right. Vincentians can do more to redress the lamentable housing situation for low-income earners of our neighbourhoods. This is a social justice issue and part of the Society's mission.

Housing is a complex and delicate socio-economic problem. Many poor we serve, including the working poor, are either at risk of becoming homeless or without a permanent address (street people), or live in shelters or with

friends/relatives. A good number of families and seniors rent insalubrious apartments or rooms, as they cannot afford better accommodation. This is causing a constant stress on low-income people as they struggle to have ends meet. During home visits, the poor often ask for food and clothing to save sufficient money to pay the rent at the end of the month and keep their apartment. In fact, the main problem is that the cost of housing is simply too high, a situation fuelled by the scarcity of affordable accommodation and inadequate housing assistance programs by the governments.

Vincentians can help the poor with their housing problems in several ways. The first action to be taken is educating conference members about the housing situation in their area and about government assistance programs. Vincentians should keep informed about this most important socio-economic issue. Why not invite a social housing representative to talk to members about the local housing situation and the programs that exist to counter homelessness. Why not have a Conference member assigned with responsibilities for housing and related topics (e.g.: contacts at utilities companies, etc.), and acquiring a good knowledge about the rights and duties of tenants and property owners in the province. We are already in the social justice sphere, as Vincentians will be better equipped to inform



Clermont Fortin

and support the poor with regards to housing issues. For example, in Ontario, municipalities have primary responsibilities for social housing. However, provincial government programs exist to help low incomers pay rent (e.g.: Rental Opportunities for Ontario Families - ROOF program).

A second activity is to sensitize local elected officials about the lack of affordable housing for the poor in your area and to promote solutions to the shortage and to the cost of overpriced apartments. Decent housing has a direct impact on the health and well-being of families and individuals; children's health is affected by apartments poorly insulated or not maintained to standards; they may develop illnesses or learning problems as they are not fed properly and feel socially excluded. It is part of the mission of the Society to advocate on behalf of the poor for better living conditions.

Vincentians have the respect of their community and will get support to engage in more concrete actions to correct a deficient housing offer in their city. Members of a Central Council or Particular

Council can initiate a housing project to renovate or build apartments for the poor, with other community groups and government, if possible. While this is an ambitious and demanding endeavour, it can be done as Vincentians have done it in the past.

For its part, the National Council is moving forward with its Voice of the Poor Program. A Committee has been formed; policy and guidelines have been approved. The Council will hire a part time resource person to conduct advocacy activities on behalf of the National Council as soon as funding is received for this purpose. The Committee will identify,

research and develop a specific advocacy theme this year in defence of the poor.

I am inviting all Vincentians to pray and reflect on activities in defence of the poor, particularly with regard to housing, a major social justice issue in Canada. This is continuing Christ's mission to serve the poor, with love, respect, justice and joy.

Clermont Fortin
1st Vice President
National Council of Canada
Chair, Voice of the Poor
Committee

Following the beatification of Frederic Ozanam, a superb book was published. It is an album entitled "Blessed Frederic Ozanam."

This 144 page album evokes in words and pictures the main aspects of the long process of the beatification, since the introduction of the cause in 1925, up to the solemn recognition by the Church of the sanctity of the principal founder of the Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul, during the celebration presided by Pope John Paul II, at Notre-Dame de Paris, on the 22nd of August, 1997.

We have several copies at the office of the National Council. Originally priced at \$25, they are now offered at \$5 each and can be ordered as usual from the national office.

These albums are ideal gifts to reward Vincentians for their work with the poor.

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Council in action

MARTINEAU HOME LATEST EXPANSION OF SSVP SERVICES

DEVELOPED WITH GOVERNMENT FUNDING

How can we best extend our special works to help, work with and improve the lives of many more of our friends in need in our communities?

Especially, when we have a difficult lack of resources - funding, professional staff, and space.

The answers are in the numerous funding programs of the federal, provincial and municipal governments. This was highlighted at our SSVP Annual General Assembly held in Quebec City (June 19-22) in a presentation by Danny Bourne, President of the Toronto Central Council (powerpoint available).

Victoria, Okanagan, Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto Central and other locations are active in getting and making great use of government funding to give necessary comfortable housing and serious support to improve lives.



A special example is the Martineau House just opening in Toronto. It is a home for the care of adults with developmental challenges. There are 18 beds and constant staff. Capital and operating budgets are provided by the Province of Ontario, Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Robert Martineau is the Past National President of our Society, serving two (2) terms from March 1983 to June 1995. Bob was Ontario Provincial Council founder and President from 1976 to 1982 - after joining our SSVP in 1963 in Scarborough (Toronto). Bob gave outstanding leadership to our SSVP in a time of major growth and progress - and continues to contribute his experience.

The Ontario Government is deeply involved in poverty reduction. A Cabinet Committee was established; led by Deb Matthews, Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs. We - SSVP with intimate knowledge of poverty - will contribute to the successes of this Committee.

Toronto is working on a poverty reduction plan in which we will participate. How is your city or town coming to grips with reducing poverty?

Our Society will work with all orders - levels - of government to advance the cause of social justice and life building programs. We can provide governments with our experience as front line workers with poverty and its damaging effects.

We can and will offer suggested action steps to reduce poverty, and give these to governments.

In addition to the Martineau Home we have received government funds for other major special works, for example:



Kitchener-Waterloo Marillac Place

Marillac is a home for 10 single women and their children. With our Society's supportive atmosphere and the provision of life skills training residents are prepared and encouraged to acquire job skills. It is transitional housing. Women and children grow in abilities and training to move to independent, self-sustained living. One time Federal funding provided a major grant for renovations - which won the Society a prize for best use of funds.

Toronto

Four (4) Women's Shelters and developmental centers, which are funded by the municipality on a per diem payment per bed, occupied per night. These are also really transitional housing, building skills and confidence to find permanent housing and employment.

Home for 24 persons with mental illnesses following initial treatment - city funding helps with the rent; a home for 11 men waiting placement in addiction recovery - with block funding from the Ministry of Health program; additional resources, use of some city owned buildings and a combination of government funding patterns.

Apartment building of 164 family suites, with Ontario Ministry of Housing direct grant of \$21,280,000 to develop and build, with continuing operating subsi-

dies. Over 10 years 49 families, in on social assistance, move out in 4,5 or 6 years to buy their own homes.

Through these government funded opportunities we can bring caring Vincentian values and vision to these works and especially help in improving the lives of many more neighbors in need that we serve.

These are unique special works. Our well-managed and successful SSVP run social improvements give us greater credibility when encouraging governments to maintain, increase and expand this important funding.

Our combined voices will be heard, recognized and heeded when we ask for increased support for our friends greatly needing our care.

For further info contact:
nick_volk@yahoo.com
416-924-2160



Confeder@tio News

News from the Society in the world...

Special 175th Anniversary edition
1833 - 2008

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL IS 175 YEARS OLD!

A little bit of history... Founding the Society!

The Conference of Charity was founded in Paris, the capital city of France, on April 23, 1833, in an atmosphere of political instability and great social misery, where the laity's role in the Church had been strengthened as a result of the religious persecution during the Revolution, and as the importance of 'works' increased to respond to those who criticised the 'uselessness' of religion.

During a stormy student debate at the « History Conferences », Le Taillandier expressed his weariness at these discussions, and suggested that Christian students should meet for practical charity only. This idea was taken up by Ozanam, and agreed by their friends, in response to a frontal attack: "Once upon a time, Christianity performed miracles, but nowadays Christianity is dead. You who boast of being Catholics, what do you do?"

Where are the works that would demonstrate your faith, that could make us respect and admire you?"

On 23 April 1833 at 8 pm, Emmanuel Bailly, a mature man of 40 years old and six students, from 19 to 23 years of age - Frédéric Ozanam, Paul Lamache, Auguste



Tribune catholique, the clergy newspaper, of which Bailly himself was the owner and chief editor. We do not know the role of the individuals at the meeting, and we can only consider this founding of the Conference of Charity as being a collective action.

Already there were certain features which would reappear later: the arrangement of the room (green baize table, candles, the hat passed round for the collection at the end of the meeting), etc. They did not discuss poor families at that meeting as they knew none, but they did decide to adopt the basic principle of home visiting.

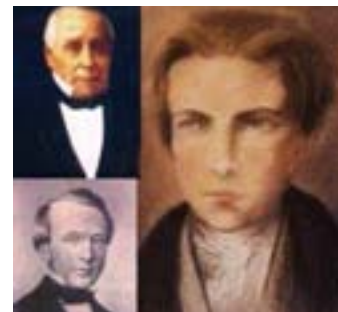
Other fundamental principles appeared:

- The importance of prayer and catholic work: Prayer came first, charity second. Faith was the goal, charity the means. The priorities were not reversed until the 1840s as the level of misery became apparent, and older men with more experience of charitable work joined the society

- Collective organisation for the charity: it is not a personal task, but goes through the Conference. Leaving it to individuals alone makes the work dependent on personal feelings, and available time, often poorly allocated and in the end ineffective.

LeTaillandier, François Lallier, Jules Devaux and Félix Clavé – met at 18 rue du Petit Bourbon - Saint Sulpice, in the offices of the

- Home visiting suggested by Bailly who had already been doing this for twenty years.



E. Bailly, P. Lamache and F. Ozanam

So the Conference of Charity was born, but where were the poor? These young, middleclass men didn't know any! They did, nonetheless, live in the poorest district of Paris (Mouffetard, St Médard). It was also known as Sister Rosalie's district. She was a Daughter of Charity, a personal friend of Emmanuel Bailly's wife. She therefore provided the first lists, and helped the Conference in its early work.

Little by little it grew: in 1834, the members chose Saint Vincent de Paul as their patron and the Virgin Mary as their protector. As the meeting became too large (over 200 members) it split into several sections, parish-based, allowing it to extend beyond the student environment, outside the Latin Quarter, and outside Paris. The Conference of Charity became the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Extract from talk given by Matthieu Bréjon de Lavergnée at the Vincentian Youth World Study Days.

Meteoric growth

Even before promulgation of the first Rule, on 8 December 1835, the students leaving Paris after their studies founded Conferences: 10 February 1835 in Nîmes, 16 August 1836 in Lyon, then Rennes, Nantes and so on.

After the provinces, the Society crossed borders: Rome in 1842, then Belgium, Scotland and Ireland in 1843, England 1844. In 1846, the Society crossed the Atlantic, to the United States and Mexico. In 1854, it reached Asia (India) and Oceania (Australia) then Africa in 1855 (Mauritius).

1836 saw the creation of a "Board of Management" which on 27 December 1840, took the name Council General, which has been its name ever since. The Bulletin of the Society, intended to keep members in touch with each other dates from 1848. Thus was OZANAM's wish realised: "I would like to clasp the whole world in a network of charity."

27 years after the foundation of the Society, it already had around 2500 Conferences worldwide, with 50,000 members. By 1913 this had



Sr Rosalie

risen to 8000 Conferences, and 133,000 members. The 1914-1918 war did not reduce the enthusiasm of the Vincentians, there were even Conferences in army camps in Germany. By the time of its centenary, the Society was present in 33 countries, with 12,000 Conferences and some 200,000 members around the world. On its 150th anniversary, there were 38,000 conferences and 750,000 members.

Today: a truly International Organisation



The Society today is present in 141 countries with 145 Superior,

National and Assimilated Councils.

It has 50,000 Conferences and over 700,000 members. It distributes over 550 million euros in aid every year around the world.

Despite having an international presence so quickly, it really only became truly "international" from 2003, when the new Rule was adopted, and the International Confederation established.

The previously very « French » Council General is now led by a truly international Office: a Spanish president, a German Secretary General, Singaporean, Irish and French Vice-Presidents and a Scottish treasurer, a

Canadian Spiritual Adviser. The Permanent Section, the legal representative body of the Council General, also mainly French until very recently, now has 18 nationalities on its strength, and the Territorial Technical Commission, responsible for studying projects submitted to the Council General has 7 nationalities among its 15 members.

It is only recently that the International Executive Committee, which represents the 9 « largest » Vincentian countries with 5 new countries just added, has had its role and power increased, particularly through the new Rule, which further emphasises the international nature of our Society. The adoption of the new international logo in 2002, which is gradually coming into use around the world, is highly symbolic of this process, and finally the purchase of new international offices by the CGI with contributions from all Vincentian countries has given the Society a truly international headquarters belonging to every member throughout the world!



And what now...?

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is now confronting a major challenge: after experiencing the 19th and 20th centuries, it has now entered the 21st century without in any way betraying its origins. It must now face the reduction in the number of its members in many



« rich » countries, as well as the increase in the average age of Vincentians in these countries.

But it can also rely on the often impressive growth of the Society in many developing countries, as well as the youth of these new members. It must also pursue its « internationalisation » started under the presidency of José-Ramón Díaz Torremocha, second International President General of the Society's history, and in particular, it must seek greater international recognition. Although it is true that the SSVP is very well known everywhere, how many times do we hear people say, "I didn't know the SSVP was an international organisation"?

We can highlight several encouraging signs in this area: recently the Council General received its first funding from the European Union, for the « Mobility in Europe » project, and the Society is also about to obtain official status as a Consultant to the United Nations.

A Brazilian initiative also led to the Society of St Vincent de Paul being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2008.

As Brazil is the leading Vincentian country in the world in terms of number of Conferences, and members, especially young people, there is another piece of good news from this country: a young Brazilian Vincentian, Rodrigo de Castro

Resende, a university student from Viçosa and an active member for more than 10 years, has just been awarded a Unesco prize in a competition in which his submission was selected from over 40,000 participants.

The CGI Office at the Paris headquarters

Best wishes for a very happy 175th anniversary of our foundation!

A WORD FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SPIRITUAL ADVISER

In 1833, could the seven founders of the first conference ever have imagined that by 2008 their charitable action would have spread to the four corners of the globe? Of course not! How did it happen?

Gradually, these young university students felt the fire burning within them and realised that this fire had a magnificent name: CHARITY. It is nothing less than the presence of the Blessed Trinity, whose life is simply LOVE and which spreads wide its light and heat. Mysteriously, respecting the decisions of these followers of Christ, CHARITY aroused everything around them.

She awakened them to the crying needs of their brothers and sisters. She drove them on and won them over.

In our time, upholders of secularism don't miss the opportunity to comment on the social effects of our Society. Such an analysis of its beginnings would be classified as esoteric, however. In plain language, they would in fact say: « the

pessimists are right, but only stubborn optimists ever change things», which is not wrong either.

Is it that recalling the humble beginnings of our Society touches something deep within us, giving new energy to our voluntary involvement, and transforming us? May our response become a source of hope for the Society, since « all the flowers of the future are in the seeds we sow today ». What are we sowing? The souls of the young feel greatly disappointed when they are not offered a grand ideal, and for us, this ideal is CHARITY.

On 12 July 1833, during the year of the first conference, Jean-Léon Le Prevost wrote, before he joined the Society: « My God! How weak are our human efforts: faith moves mountains, but absolutely everything is a mountain for us! And if the hand of God isn't pushing with us, the mountain will not move! »

In the presence of contemporary materialism, secularism and relativism, will we be content with philanthropy?

Let us throw ourselves once and for all into the arms of the Risen Christ, like a swimmer diving into deep water, who feels gently supported by the waves. He will bear us up and preserve us from dishonest compromise and inconsistency. For as we have already said, our life is CHARITY!

Father Yvon Laroche, RSV,
International Spiritual Adviser





Letter from the Prime Minister



PRIME MINISTER · PREMIER MINISTRE

It is with great pleasure that I extend my warmest greetings to everyone celebrating the 175th anniversary of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Originally founded in 1833 to aid the less fortunate, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul now operates in 145 countries and has helped millions of people. Here in Canada, the Society's roots can be traced back to 1846 and the historic Notre Dame Cathedral in Québec, a place where epidemics and economic hardship drove the need for assistance.

Today, nearly three quarters of a million people from around the world are counted as part of this respected charitable organization. I would like to commend the many Vincentians present for this year's assembly and anniversary celebration for their exceptional commitment to voluntarism and their unwavering compassion toward others. You may take great pride in knowing that your valuable work has made a tangible difference in the lives of your fellow Canadians.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, please accept my best wishes for a memorable celebration, and for every success in the years to come.

The Rt. Hon Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.

Update on AGA 2008

BACK FROM MY TRIP

While on the plane returning to Europe, I had time to reflect on what it has meant for me to participate in this fabulous experience: participating in the General Assembly in Canada.

I discovered a Society that is perfectly united around its National Council President, Penny Craig, supported by a great team. A Society that provides excellent service to all those who suffer in Canada, while looking towards the future, and solidly prepared to face the various challenges generated by the new types of poverty that will keep arising. It is a dynamic Society that is entirely united with other Conferences in the world, and ready to assume its role as a member of the Executive Committee, over the next two years.

At least for the next two years, because I sincerely wish that Canada goes once again beyond the limit of 1000 conferences prescribed by our Statutes, to become a member by right of the Committee.

I was enthusiastic about conclusions reached by the various workshops and interventions by Regional Presidents. Everything shows the possibility of a great future at the service of Canadian conferences.

I was particularly happy to talk to brothers and sisters and among them, the younger ones. I remem-

ber my conversation with a youth conference President from Ontario, accompanied by another young brother acting as interpreter. That youth conference President expressed her deep commitment to serve the poor through the Society, and she assured me that we “would see each other again one day”. I absolutely have no doubt about that, dear sister, and it will certainly happen, if God wants it.

Another young sister, from Waterloo, was requesting that the next time I go to Australia, when I meet with young people, I sleep one night with them under the tent. I was somewhat ashamed to confess that at my age, I could not be a hero anymore, and I was branded as “softer” than the President, Penny Craig, who said she would do it. Penny is certainly younger in spirit than the brother who signs this article.

Through these few lines, I send my thanks to all Canadian brothers and sisters for everything they taught me during the Assembly, and for their pleasant and warm contact, and I ask them to remember while praying, their brother who will keep wonderful memories of his trip to the beautiful city of Québec, as well as the welcome he received from Vincentians that he met there.

I thank God for that.

José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha
XIV Président Général International



THE 2008 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY WAS FANTASTIC

Members of the various 2008 AGA planning committees are very proud of the great number of participants, as well as the visit of José-Ramón Diaz-Torremocha, President General of the Society, and Father Laroche, Spiritual Advisor of the International Council. Their message was clear: the Vincentian commitment is a commitment of service that leads our entire life, and our Society is a universal organization, with over 700,000 members in 142 countries.

Both French and English workshops were greatly appreciated and, once more, showed the spiritual and entrepreneurial strength of Canadian Vincentians.

As we are engaged together in our national organization, the conference was, according to many Vincentian participants a great demonstration of brotherhood, and a guarantee of a solid future for our Society, which wishes to SERVE IN HOPE, to help the poor in several ways and everywhere.

Thanking you for contributing to the success of the AGA, and hoping to meet you again in Kitchener/Waterloo, in June 2009.

Pierre Morissette, President
Québec Central Council



Update on AGA 2008

Nineteen youth from the province of Ontario attended the 2008 AGA in Quebec City this year and they would like to convey a special thanks to all the volunteers that organized the events. "The faith level is so strong in Quebec, that I feel blessed to be here" said by a young Vincentian. The youth truly love coming to the AGAs to see how their brother and sister Vincentians are working to better their communities. The youth had the opportunity to attend many workshops and take part in the rosary and masses. "This year the AGA was amazing, each and every workshop was astonishing, and I am so glad I could visit some very divine places while in Québec...Thank You".

This year the Windsor Essex youth have a lot planned for expanding young Vincentians across Canada. It has given Sara Latouf and Joshua Pfaff distinct honor to accept on behalf of the Windsor- Essex Youth Group, the position of Youth Activities Coordinators at the 2009 AGA hosted in Waterloo. It is our Goal to have over two hundred youth's at the meeting. Stay tuned for more information on this soon to be annual youth gathering.

Josh Pfaff

Here is a compilation of notes from the youth that attended the AGA.

- I felt that the AGA was very informative and really gave me an idea of what Vincentians actually



do and how we help the communities that we are a part of. I am glad that I am a part of the society and that I can help people through our mission. It has inspired me to do more and be more of a Vincentian.

Marieke, Waterloo

- Being at the AGA was something else. The biggest thing was that you were able to talk to people that you would otherwise never be able to meet. Also, it was a great way to bond with the people who're already in your group, since you were with them on a day to day basis, and not just seeing each other during volunteer work, or meetings, or the like.

Ryan, Windsor

- This was my first AGA, and was an experience I will never forget. There were so many people to meet, and so many close friendships developed. The workshops were very interesting and informa-

tive. I will take what I have learned during this trip and apply it to how I interact with the people I serve in order to become a better Vincentian. I was sad to see it end, and cannot wait for next year!!"

Aidan, Waterloo

- Every year I feel more and more blessed at the opportunity to contribute to this amazing celebration, and this year was no exception."

Jarred Latouf

- I had a wonderful experience at this year's AGA. I discussed with our youth their impressions, which were very positive. They enjoyed meeting and the fellowship with the Kitchener/Waterloo youth and mixing with all members of the AGA. The many presentations and the general impression of the Spirituality of those present was one of the highlights of our meeting. The Advocacy appeal, Prison Ministry, Youth, Expansion of

Update on AGA 2008

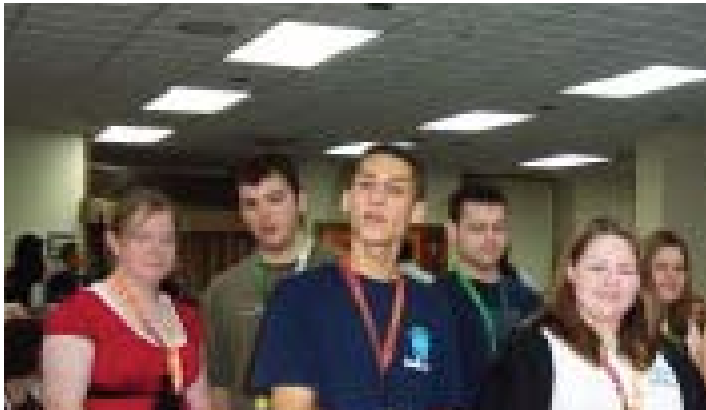
Conferences, especially Aboriginal conferences, is exciting. The Ontario Region is heading in the right direction.

Serving in Hope
John

- This was a wonderful opportunity to expose our youth to other like-minded individuals. A sense of unity and belonging to something greater than us was achieved by all. Old friendships were rekindled and

new ones born. There was an open exchange of ideas and information. The AGA is an event, which not only bonds our members together but also renews our faith in our work and in God. Thank you Quebec for all your hard work and dedication in making this a memorable AGA for young and old.

Carmela



Update on AGA 2008 - Official Opening



*Procession of the banners
with Youth Honor Guard*



The five Regional Banners along with the Quebec Central banner



A delegation of vincentians



The youth at the Opening Ceremony.

Update on AGA 2008 - Official Opening



Yvon Bussières presents a book to the President General, in the name of the Mayor of Québec



National Council present a soap stone sculpture of a bear to the President General, following his speech



Monsignor André Drouin, Past Spiritual Advisor of the National Council leads the opening prayer.



Father Yvon Laroche speaks on the theme: It is by my works that I show my faith. Let us go to the Poor.



A welcoming by Michel Guimont, Federal Deputy of Charlevoix/Côte de Beupré

Update on AGA 2008 - Spiritual Advisor Luncheon

A special luncheon for Spiritual Advisor's is held every year during our AGA. The Spiritual Advisor to the Council General International, Father Yvon Laroche, who attended our meeting this year as part of our 175th anniversary celebrations was asked to speak at the luncheon. Our National Spiritual Director, Msgr. Peter Schonenbach facilitated the meeting that was appreciated by all.

I believe the Spiritual Advisors' luncheon was an event where more real dialogue took place this year. The fact that someone from the international perspective was there made for a new context and the dynamic of continuous translation may have aided in giving people time to ruminate what was going on.

*Msgr. Peter Schonenbach,
National Spiritual Advisor*

I had a wonderful stay in Canada and enjoyed every single minute of the General Assembly in Quebec. It was one of the best SSVP meetings I have attended. My talk in the workshop on the Vincentian Spirituality and Identity was very enriching for me. I am sending you pictures of the Spiritual Advisor's luncheon.

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind invitation to attend and to take an active part in the meeting. It was a further enriching experience with my apostolate of charity with the Vincentians.

Regards and greetings. God Bless

Fr. Teodoro Barquín C.M.



*Patricia Bennetto, Yvon Bussières, Father Laroche,
Father Barquin, Mgr. Schonenbach*



Spiritual Advisors and members of the Spiritual Committee.

Update on AGA 2008 - Dinner at Mont Ste. Anne



Let's go to the top of the mountain !



Some people loved the experience...



... others took out their rosary



Inside the restaurant



José Ramón with the musicians

Update on AGA 2008- Sugar Shack night



Entrance to the sugar shack



First time visitors to a sugar shack



Guided tour



Boiling the maple syrup



The youth of Ontario loved the experience



Dancing and laughing were the order of the day

Update on AGA 2008 - Basilica Mass



Installation of David Grant as President of the Atlantic Regional Council



Commissioning of the National President



Vincentians promise



Patricia Bennetto, president of the Western Regional Council and John Staley, president of the Ontario Regional Council, giving a picture and medal to Vincentians and commissioning them: Go forth and serve the poor in the name of the Church and according to the Rule.