



The newsletter of the
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
National Council of Canada
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Photo by Mikael Theimer

ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL EDITION

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

First and foremost, I want to wish you a very good year in 2019, filled with beautiful Vincentian moments. May your volunteer work nourish your faith and bring you joy.

If you do not already do so, I hope that in 2019, you will add **home visits and visits to isolated people** to your list of activities. People in need often suffer from solitude as well, and having someone who takes the time to listen can make a real difference. When you do that, you give them hope and faith in life, because they realize that they are worthy human beings who are not rejected.

Let us not forget people who are alone. That new reality is becoming a larger problem in our increasingly digital world. **Solitude isolates and confines affected people in a world that seems surreal.** They slowly lose interest in life and withdraw into their solitude a little more every day. **As Vincentians, we cannot ignore that suffering and we must address it.** Across the country, there are close to 15,000 of us, ready to help people in need. I think that we may easily include such a gesture of solidarity and help to reduce the scale of that suffering.

In their name, I thank you.

*Jean-Noël Cormier, President
National Council*

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year!

Good mental and physical health are what we often wish for the people we love, and love is a sign of having a good heart. The joy and satisfaction of helping by giving one's time or by collecting donations are priceless. By serving the poor with love, respect, justice and joy, we are given the opportunity to experience the human values that Vincentians live by, day after day.

The months of November and December are always very busy months for the Society's volunteers. **To all of you who worked on the guignolée, fundraising activities, the collection of non-perishable food items, and their distribution to people in need, our most sincere thanks!**

As Jesus is quoted in Matthew 25,

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

*Richard Pommerville
Executive Director
National Council*

**Trees of Warmth
SSVP in Prince George, B.C.
Collecting new or slightly used men's
winter gloves and winter boots.**

SPIRITUALITY

SOME OLD IDEAS FOR THE NEW YEAR

The 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. Serviens in spe - To serve in hope

These are familiar phrases to members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Our mission statement and our motto reflect both what we do and how we do it; at least they tell us what we should be doing and how we should be doing it.

HOPE is the motto of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. There are those who say that the current state of our local communities and our world has caused them to lose hope. Disrespect for others and for creation is certainly serious. But even as we shed tears for the homeless, the abandoned, the refugee, the addict, and so many others, we Christians still have hope, hope in the loving God who can and will save His people. Hope is our motto and our message. We serve in hope.

LOVE is God and God is love. Vincentians bring love as well as food and clothing in our personal contact with the poor. We also receive love in the person of Christ revealed to us in those we serve, for He is there in every child and every adult who needs us. The homeless man on the street, the woman in prison, the senior citizen who has no other visitor this week – these are Christ to us. Jesus' own words explain it: "As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me." As often as we reach out to a neighbour in need, we see and are touched by our all loving God.

RESPECT is the right of every human person. Whenever we offer assistance, in the name of our Society, we do so humbly and with the greatest respect. We try to maintain the dignity of anyone we encounter, not judging, but giving freely the material goods that have been given to us. Vincentians respect the privacy and personal rights of all those we are privileged to serve, remembering that Saint Vincent said, "The poor are our masters."

JUSTICE is not based on our social status, gender, religion, or on any other group into which we fall. Justice, like respect, must be given to all. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul works diligently toward justice. Advocacy, social justice, human rights have goals achievable only when we recognize that, as Vincentians, we must work together for everyone.

JOY sounds like the easiest of these key words. Yet sometimes we confuse happiness with joy. Happiness is transient; joy is within us and joy endures. If happiness is our goal, we will certainly not find joy. In fact we might feel defeated, becoming the joyless, 'sourpusses' that Pope Francis wrote about in The Joy of the Gospel. Saint Teresa of Avila is quoted: "God save us from joyless saints!" Those we encounter don't need to see sourpusses – they have enough troubles without seeing a stern, unhappy Vincentian! When we pray before our visits, let's pray for a joy-filled countenance.

As 2019 begins, Vincentians look back, remembering all who have come before us. We value their contributions and celebrate their successes. Those men and women are our models; we ask them to pray for us. We also look forward, with awe and wonder at the challenges ahead, remembering the words that we hear at every Eucharist, "... as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

May God bless us and those we serve,

Denise Bondy, Spiritual Advisor - Ontario Regional Council

IN MEMORIAM

It is with deep regret that we announce the following deaths:

Stephen Charles Edward

St. Mary Star of the Sea Conference
Mississauga, Ontario
June 9, 2018

Elizabeth Stang

St. Andrew's Conference
Edmonton, Alberta
July 19, 2018

Gordon Aucoin

Precious Blood Conference
Surrey, British Columbia
July 22, 2018

Len Warmerdam

St. Matthew's Conference
Surrey, British Columbia
August 2, 2018

Gerald Francis Fagan

St. Catherine of Siena Conference
Mississauga, Ontario
August 10, 2018

Mary Hutchinson

St. Raphael Conference
Burlington, Ontario
August 10, 2018

Romi Dailaire

St. Joseph Basilica Conference
Edmonton, Alberta
November 29, 2018

Lord, we pray that all the good they did bear fruit and be continued.

Let us keep them in our prayers.

Please send your death notices to editor@ssvp.ca

HOW TO CONDUCT A QUALITY HOME VISIT (HV)

Home visits (HV) are central to what we do as Vincentians. They provide us with the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with God through the people we serve. For some Vincentians, it may be a struggle to recognize this spiritual benefit because, in part, their HV process may be in need of rejuvenation. In these cases, it may be prudent to review their HV procedures, taking into consideration the following points:

Who can conduct HV's? – Not everyone has the necessary skills to conduct an HV. It is important to ensure that those doing visits fully represent SSVV qualities. Remember, we are guests in their home.

First point of contact by a person in need starts with the call to the church or designated Vincentian answering machine. At this stage, people in need are at a critical point where they have gathered the courage to call and tell a stranger, "I need help." We need to ensure that this call is received with respect and processed promptly. If a conference has guidelines to screen who may qualify, the contact person must be able to effectively communicate these guidelines. The guidelines should be reviewed periodically.

The visit has several stages, starting with prayer. Always pray to ask for guidance so that you will listen and serve as Jesus would do. In the next stages of a visit, a Vincentian may be confronted with situations that make them uncomfortable, triggering insecurities that can affect the way a visit is handled. These stages include:

- Arrival at the property of the person in need. The visual surroundings may be disturbing. You need to be able to look beyond the appearance and acknowledge that this is home to the person you are visiting.
- The greeting at the door. At this stage, you are presenting yourself as a guest. Identify yourself from SSVV and make a simple request, "May we come into your home to chat?"
- You enter the home. Similar to arrival to the property, there are numerous observations of the conditions in the home that may affect your immediate direction and the tone of your comments in discussion with the person in need. Our reactions to the environment can be viewed positively or negatively by the person we meet. Remember, we are guests.
- Starting and maintaining a conversation is critical to the success of the visit. Observing mementos in the home may serve well to initiate dialogue on a safe and neutral topic. It also serves very well to provide you with some insight about the person visited. The statement you use to introduce why you are visiting and what you hope to accomplish should be sensitive and open. Consider the following statement, "You called SSVV seeking help because of difficult challenges in your life at this time. Would you mind sharing with us what these challenges are? It will help us better understand your situation and how best we can help you."
- If you need to get a deeper understanding, ask 'supportive' probing questions. Consider, "Your income is limited, how do you manage to cover your daily and unexpected needs."
- Preparing to leave a home must go beyond just saying, "Goodbye and good luck." Consider offering to pray for the person, possibly asking if you can follow up in a few weeks to see if their situation has improved.

Extreme challenges may occur periodically, whereby all the Vincentian qualities necessary to conduct a quality HV will test you. You may be stumped, but at this stage ask yourself, 'If Jesus was your partner on the visit, how would He respond to the situation? What questions would He use?' Use this answer to guide you in your actions.

Post HV Recap. Your conference meetings should include an opportunity to debrief with other Vincentians, sharing your experience so others can benefit in their spiritual growth and development in the same manner you experienced.

*Phil Bondy, Ontario Regional Council Vice President
Council/Conference Rejuvenation*

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GONE FISHIN'

"... Fourteen years ago, the Society was born. It must not get old as its founders grow old and charity becomes a routine practice. Youth are useful for their audacity, even for their imprudence, for the new ideas they bring, for the works which we had not thought of." *A.F. Ozanam*

Blessed Frédéric set us on a path for success as an organization, focused on charity and systemic change. He was a leader who had vision and energy, building for the future. Yet, today when we take a look at the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Canada, we see an imbalance of age demographics and a decline in new membership. The Ontario rejuvenation team sees many conferences in decline.

What happened? Groups are dying off, and dedicated seasoned members are left carrying the weight of the work and have less energy to take on new projects, more families, new ideas or systemic change ventures. Many of our long-standing members are, understandably, growing tired.

A healthy conference constantly invites new members into its ranks. Blessed Frédéric proposed the same approach.

It's time to be intentional and strategic and invite new members into this amazing ministry, building us back up to reach our potential to serve the families. We will ask for the intercession of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam as we intentionally move into recruitment mode!

But where do we start? Who is going to join the SSVP and why will they join us? The strategy that has proven to be most successful includes a fishing net and pole approach. First, the net is cast. Second, the pole is used with one-on-one conversations. Everyone can and must play a part to build the conference membership. The saying, **ABR - Always Be Recruiting!** is the new mantra and it stands as a reminder that we have to build strength and keep the SSVP vibrant and active.

How do we cast the net? The most effective means is through an address to the congregation. Invite the most energetic and passionate member to use his or her public speaking skills to present at the pulpit. Explain what the SSVP is and explain what it is not. We do not only help Catholics and we are not only about handing out food. There is a lot more that we do and there is a lot more that we want to do once we have new members to help with the work. Active groups are attractive groups! If your conference is busy helping the families "in all possible ways", the work will be attractive and new members will be enticed to step forward.

On its own, however, an address to the congregation might not be so fruitful. The fishing pole approach allows for follow-up conversations at the back of the church to welcome

people who have heard the call to serve and wish to find out more. Members with clipboards and a big smile are essential. Be ready to explain why you love the ministry of SSVP, why it is different from other volunteer opportunities and why you love the families we serve. Yes, we need to love the families to be able to recruit. If we have grown tired of the families, it's time to move aside and **welcome in a new team who will have the energy to serve**. Ensure that every mass has coverage, with at least one friendly SSVP face ready to talk to people after the address. A contact list, a plan to follow up with each person within 48 hours, and an invitation to attend an orientation session are all essential elements of successful fishing.

The volunteer cycle of recruit, engage, train and retain, can hold us together into the next chapter of SSVP. Recruitment is only the first step. We have to create an effective engagement process to retain the skilled, energetic, enthusiastic members we recruit. That will be for another article. Your suggestions and success stories must be shared so we can all learn while we build. **Don't forget - ABR!**

Judith Nunn, Linda Alexander and the Ontario Regional Council Rejuvenation Team

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THE GRACED JOURNEY TO OUR NEXT STORE

After more than 150 years of service in Brantford and Brant County, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Particular Council of Brant (SSVP Brant) has a new home – for its thrift store operation as well as its five conferences and council. The entire journey has been blessed by the prayers of local Vincentians and many instances of divine providence.

The store operation began in 1990 in rented premises. In 1994, the incorporated council purchased the building at 197 Colborne and set up the Valu Shoppe. The fully-volunteer operation thrived, provided revenue to support service to local neighbours in need and allowed the mortgage to be paid off in four years!

Fast forward to 2015. Both adjacent buildings have been sold. The three pre-1875 structures are attached. Issues including only on-street parking, dependence on a 1940s-era elevator, lack of accessibility and, more recently, overcrowding, provide increasing stress. Council takes the bold step of listing the building for sale – and secures a buyer within two months.

In late 2015, faced with a long closing date of April 2017, they set about locating a new spot. Led by a steering committee of council executive members

and advised by a group of community members with skills in engineering, marketing, fundraising/grants, human resources, construction, etc. (Next Store Committee NSC), local Vincentians meet in a visioning session to consider key questions such as the role of the store and its location. Armed with this direction, the group negotiates with the local YMCA which is in the midst of its own relocation. A charity-to-charity deal is struck.

Fundraisers begin to work their magic, using a brochure outlining the service provided by SSVP Brant, the local need for that service and how SSVP is unique in this role. Meanwhile, with the expertise of our NSC marketing professional, a marketing plan is developed, then adapted into a business plan for SSVP Brant and its Next Store Project. Convinced by the business plan, the Diocese of Hamilton offers substantial support - both gift and interest-free loan. Together with donations raised from local companies and individuals by the fundraising team, the \$2 million project promises to be debt-free by the end of the interest-free period.

As the success of this endeavour depends on upping their game, local Vincentians research best practices through visits to other thrift stores (SSVP

and others); conduct price comparison studies locally; train in areas as diverse as pricing and first aid; implement the marketing plan with strategies ranging from ads in church bulletins to social and print media presence using a newly-developed visual identity funded by local grants; and snap up retail fixtures from store closings including two Sears outlets.

Keeping to their guiding principle of “uninterrupted service to our neighbours in need”, the Valu Shoppe closes its doors on September 28th and the newly-branded thrift store opens on October 2nd. More than 700 people attend its soft opening celebration on October 13th. A growing cadre of volunteers continues to refine the operation according to the well-developed plan – and awaits the grand opening and blessing by Bishop Douglas Crosby in May 2019.

With thanks to our Lord,

*Pat Lenz, President
SSVP Brant, Ontario*

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SSVP Brant Store, at 197 Colborne

SSVP Brant Store, at 143 Wellington



MISSION

The 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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