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In this issue:

- Message from the Executive Director
- National Volunteer Week
- Appreciating the Appearances of the Risen Jesus - Easter Reflection
- Restorative Justice and Prison Ministry
- Twinning - Community Cooking Pots - Peru
- North of 60 - Beds and Bedding
- Question & Answer - Special Work

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Consolidating our news distribution

National currently has four different publications to share information, which people can subscribe to: *Vincenpaul* newsletter, the Monthly Reflections (Spirituality), social justice news via *Changing Times*, and ad hoc news as received from different sources.

At the March 27 National Council of Canada meeting, it was decided to change to a biweekly newsletter, that combines all four publications. This new approach will allow us to publish information more quickly, as information becomes available.

Everyone will be able to see in a consolidated manner all the information, and as a reader, you can zoom in to the sections that are of more interest to you. In addition to providing general news, information will be regrouped under headings like spirituality, social justice, formation, twinning, special projects such as North of 60, and questions and answers.

Please share your work, your stories, including pictures, or testimonials of persons in need that have been assisted. Other Vincentians across the country want to hear from you.

*Richard Pommerville, Executive Director
National Council of Canada*

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

The week of April 18-24, 2021 is National Volunteer week. This year's theme is:

**THE VALUE OF ONE. THE POWER OF MANY.
VOLUNTEERS BRING CHANGE.**

The mission of the SSVP is more important than ever. The National Council of Canada would like to thank and recognize the significant contribution members provide to persons in need, and to thank them, especially in this more difficult period due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vincentians from coast to coast have adapted with alternative and creative methods to assist in all possible ways. We are all impacted, but for some, it hurts more and our volunteers have stepped up.

APPRECIATING THE APPEARANCES OF THE RISEN JESUS

Easter Reflection 2021

Easter is not just a liturgical feast to be celebrated, it is a process meant to be entered into and lived. When Jesus told his disciples to take up their cross and follow him, he was inviting us to participate in his Paschal Mystery, involving his Passion, Death and Resurrection, the appearances to his disciples, his ascension into heaven, and the sending of the Spirit birthing the Church at Pentecost.

The most overlooked and least understood stage of this process is the appearances of Jesus, evident in that they are not mentioned in the glorious mysteries of the rosary or the creed, nor in Eucharistic canon. That is unfortunate, as the appearances of Jesus have much to teach us.

The scriptures tell us he spent forty days among them, talking to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), so living in the reign of God should also be our focus. I think Jesus was also teaching them to mourn and grieve his loss, as they could not have him back the way he was before – he had risen to a new kind of life, eternal life that he wants to share with us. That explains why he would tell Mary Magdalene “not to cling to him” as he had not yet ascended to the Father.

More particularly, the fact that no one recognized Jesus when he first appeared to them holds out another important lesson for us - the need to look more deeply to recognize him in the persons and events of our own daily lives, especially the poor.

Given the humility of our God who most often works in hidden and invisible ways, like yeast in dough, it is not surprising that God is most at home with the poor, the marginalized, the excluded. It is no accident that Jesus was born in a stable, and died between two criminals on a cross.

What a challenge it is for us to live this truth, tempted as we are to put our faith in possessions, prestige and power – the false gods Jesus rejected when tempted by them in the desert. We are fortunate that many of the saints taught and lived a preferential option for the poor. The motto of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to which I belong, is *Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me* – “He sent me to evangelize the poor.” Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta taught this: “What we would like to do for Jesus whom we cannot see, we should do for the person next to us, whom we can see, and we will be doing it to Jesus.”

Frédéric Ozanam, in a letter to Louis Janmot, November 13, 1836, put it more bluntly: “Both men and the poor we see with the eyes of the flesh; they are there and we can put finger and hand in their wounds and the scars of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads; and at this point incredulity no longer has place and we should fall at their feet and say with the Apostle, ‘*Tu est Dominus et Deus meus.*’ You, the poor, are my Lord and my God! You are our masters, and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love Him otherwise, shall we not love Him in your persons?”

Someone who lived this Paschal spirituality was the late fellow Vincentian and deacon Hyland Fraser, who participated with me in a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadalupe shrine in Mexico City. On one excursion to a popular market, our group noticed a couple seated on the sidewalk, begging. He happened to pass by them again on his own as the group went about shopping.

This time, motivated by Pope Francis' call for us to show others the mercy of Jesus by reaching out and touching the poor, he knelt down on the street, looked them in the eye, gave them some money, and placing his hand on their heads while holding one of their hands, gave them a blessing. He then asked them to give him their blessing. They nodded, placed their hands on his head, and blessed him. He was profoundly moved by this encounter, and was teary-eyed as he humbly shared a homily with our group the next day. After seeing so many churches lined with gold plating, he had found Christ not so much there, but in this encounter with a poor couple.

Pope Francis, in a talk to a gathering of popular movements, said this: "Let us together say from the heart: no family without lodging; no rural worker without land; no laborer without rights; no people without sovereignty, no individual without dignity; no child without childhood; no young person without a future and no elderly person without a venerable old age. Keep up your struggle, and please, take care of Mother Earth."

All of this is an invitation to us, this Easter, to live out the Paschal Mystery and especially the appearances of Jesus, by doing our utmost to recognize him in the faces of the poor all around us.

Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie OMI
National Spiritual Advisor

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE & PRISON MINISTRY

Our national social justice committee includes the topics of advocacy, systemic change and restorative justice. There is little doubt about the relationship between the criminal justice system and poverty. One might argue that poverty is a major factor in why people turn to crime as a means to attaining a life that resembles what we all hope for. Of course, the result is usually a criminal record and prison time away from family and loved ones, thereby contributing to, rather than alleviating, the challenges of a life lived in poverty. A criminal history is often associated with substance abuse, mental and physical health concerns as well facing huge barriers in finding employment or furthering one's education. Covid-19 has also had a number of outbreaks in prisons across Canada. There is also a higher ratio among people of colour who are affected by the criminal justice system. Victims of crime include the families of both the criminal and the victim and often result in them facing a life in poverty as well as trying to deal with the aftermath of a crime.

There are currently few Society of Saint Vincent de Paul members who are active in this area. We would like to form a national network that would include SSVP members, as well as other Catholics, who would work together in the development of a plan that would address restorative justice from a faith-based viewpoint, founded on Catholic social teachings and our own Vincentian charism. I would like to invite Vincentians who may currently be active to let us know about your work. If you have ever thought about becoming active, please let us know.

Perhaps some families or individuals we help with food and clothing have had a negative experience with crime that they would be willing to share if asked. Our home visitations and other forms of engagement with persons in need provide a great opportunity to learn more.

There are many ways we can make a positive difference and advocate where needed for systemic changes to the criminal justice system. While a prison ministry that visits inmates is certainly one way, there are more ways to help. It is understandable that, for many, a prison visit may be too difficult to undertake. We can do more! We can be there when inmates are released, often with only the clothes on their back. We can help the families of inmates who are struggling to simply live a decent life. We can collaborate with other organizations that are involved in the criminal justice system. We can PRAY for inmates, their families and all victims of crime.

Please consider joining this effort. You can start by sending an email with your name, email, location and any experiences or other comments you may have on this proposal. There are resources available which we can share that will provide a good educational background regarding criminal justice in Canada.

Finally, let us recall that Jesus died on a cross between two criminals, who were blessed by Him as they shared their deaths. Vincent ministered to criminals without judgement. Let us remember our commitment as Vincentians as we follow our mission and values. Please join me and others in this worthy and much needed ministry.

*Jim Paddon, Chair
National Social Justice Committee*

TWINNING - PANDEMIC - COMMUNITY COOKING POTS - PERU



The Superior Council of Peru manages the “Community Cooking Pots” project with the help of councils/conferences of the Lima area.



“Community Cooking Pots, Fior de Amancaes, Lima. Thank you very much for your support. God bless you all.”

The Covid-19 health crisis has hit the poor hard in Peru, seriously affecting income and family nutrition. The Superior Council of Peru, twinning with Durham Particular Council, Ontario, has asked for help for the extension of its nutrition program, *Community Cooking Pots*, in its capital, Lima. The food assistance program has been managed by the Council of Peru with supporting councils and conferences and other partners, since 2008. The new initiative is an offer of food rations to members of 496 families who have been affected by the coronavirus epidemic for a period of about six months.

The beneficiaries live in extreme poverty in the Villa Maria del Triunfo District of Lima, populated by approximately 500,000 inhabitants. This District is located on the dusty slopes of a hill, in front of a cement factory. The Society buys or accepts donations of food that is brought to nine neighborhoods in the District, where teams of women (cooking pot mothers) prepare the food and distribute rations. Food is prepared over fires in several 50-litre pots. The women cook on the streets or in houses without the minimum basic needs. (Generally, they do not have drinking water.) Beneficiaries participate in the program by supplying firewood or material for cooking.

The cost of this social endeavour totalled \$13,000 CAD with the twinning partner asked to contribute \$4,200 CAD. The project is now being delivered.

Maureen’s comments:

“The Conferences within Durham Particular Council’s area voted unanimously to support this twinning project. While continuing to support local Neighbours in Need, the overarching sentiment was that we can support those both near and far to combat food insecurity. We are all interconnected in our faith, and generosity is one small way to show our humanity.”

This is a good example of the benefits of the twinning program to those most in need in developing countries, by assisting our Vincentian brothers and sisters there.

I encourage all conferences and councils to take on twinning as part of their basic activities. Please consult our website for information about twinning at www.ssvp.ca/twinning.

*Clermont Fortin, Chair
National Twinning Committee*

*Maureen Kerr, President
Durham Particular Council, On.*



NORTH OF 60 PROJEC - BEDS AND BEDDING

A Vincentian recently said to me,

"If you want product to go to the most needy areas and people, just ask the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to do it."

Well, that is so true from an experience in December last year when [Cenovus Energy](#) offered SSVP in Edmonton about 1,200 mattress and box spring pieces. A great opportunity/problem to have. Divine Providence came through at the same time with an offering of several pallets of sheets and blankets from [Right Choice Catering](#), a work camp supply company, and beds and bedding from different northern Alberta resource industry work camps. After inspection, we found all product to be in excellent condition.

How would we store this mountain of donations? [Amnor Properties](#) came in with a short-term warehouse donation that was a perfect fit.

Edmonton conferences could distribute about 400 of these, but what to do with the rest? We put the word out to Alberta Vincentians and the network responded quickly with solutions.



Keeping a local priority, both the [Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers](#) and the [Edmonton Emergency Relief Services Society](#) advised that they would move some of our products to those whom they knew were in need.

Stepping out of the Edmonton area and working with the Indigenous communities, we started with

the SSVP conferences that have outreach programs already established and we were successful in presenting beds to the Whitefish Lake and Saddle Lake Cree Nation Communities. From there, we were in contact with Enoch First Nation, Paul First Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation and Kapawe'no First Nation.

Within these distributions, product went to

two new youth emergency shelters, one adult emergency shelter and one addiction recovery centre. One resident advised that they had not had a good sleep in an awfully long time and that these beds provided an instant solution.



But we were still not done. We had more beds and our Vincentian colleagues in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories said they were in need. Amazing how solutions to problems can be found if you grow your network.



A super B truck and trailer hauling a couple of empty sea containers to Yellowknife was able to stop at our Edmonton warehouse and pick up a couple of loads. About 80 beds were shipped and distributed by the SSVP to those in need in Yellowknife and in several other communities in the area, with the aid of

the Garage Boys, the Foster Family Coalition and Scouts Canada.

Our Vincentian work in the community is immensely powerful when we have great donations and when we can present these donations to solve some of the problems of those in need.

*Daryl Dittrich and Peter Ouellette
North of 60 Project
Western Regional Council*

QUESTION & ANSWER

Q: There are a few conferences and some councils that run Special Works. Many, but not all, are stores. There seems to be a lack of understanding concerning the proper roles and responsibilities between those Special Works and the conference or council that owns or operates them. For example, sometimes a store committee believes it has complete autonomy to make every decision without input from or oversight by the conference or council. Can you clarify how this relationship should work?

A: A Special Work is an SSVP service, program, thrift store, food bank, soup kitchen, shelter, summer camp, etc., that is governed by a council or conference and operated by members and/or paid staff. It is not self-governed, and any decision must be made with oversight and approval by its owner, either a Conference or Council. A Special Work is devoted to a specific location, with staff or volunteers working on it year-round; otherwise, it is considered a project. The relationship between a council/conference and its Special Works should exist with the understanding that any Special Work of the Society must ultimately be under the governance of a Council or a Conference with associated governance tools.