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### In this issue:

- The Papal Visit To Canada - Indigenous Expectations and a Vincentian Response
- Annual National Formation - A Time in my Vincentian Journey
- Annual National Formation - Twinning Promotion Activities
- North of 60 - Brooklyn's Bundles
- Vincentians Honoured - Saint-Tite-des-Caps Vincentians
- Question & Answer

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## THE PAPAL VISIT TO CANADA INDIGENOUS EXPECTATIONS AND A VINCENTIAN RESPONSE

On Thursday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, the Solemnity of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, the itinerary of Pope Francis for his upcoming journey to Canada was officially announced. He will land in Edmonton for four events: Maskwacis First Nation – home of TRC commissioner Chief Willie Littlechild and site of a former residential school; Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples whose pastor Fr. Susai Jesu OMI placed a stole on him at the general audience in Rome; a Eucharist for the public at the Commonwealth Stadium, and a visit to the Lac St Anne pilgrimage site. From there he will travel to Quebec City for two days, then up to Ikaluit for a short encounter with survivors, and from there he will fly back to Rome.

Although the health of Pope Francis is an issue, resulting in the cancellation or postponing of journeys to two other countries, it seems his encounter with the Indigenous delegations in Rome touched him deeply, and cemented his resolve to come and meet with survivors, especially, of the residential schools here in Canada.

According to Chief Willie Littlechild, the path to reconciliation includes truth-telling, listening, healing and justice. I believe Pope Francis shares that view, and sees this journey and his encounters with the Indigenous as living out these elements of reconciliation. In Rome, he personally welcomed each delegate, and listened intently to the pain of the survivors. Their hope of being heard and understood was met by him, as evidenced by his message delivered there, which is a masterpiece. We would all do well to ponder that message again and again, and let its profound significance penetrate our hearts as well.

His mention of taking into consideration the impact on the seventh generation, his allusion to the image of branches of a tree buffeted by strong winds, the care of Indigenous for the land, their suffering from political, ideological and economic colonization, and especially the hardship and various forms of abuse suffered at the schools, revealed that he heard their cry.

Above all, he was both able to say with all his heart that he was very sorry, and also ask their pardon, along with the Canadian bishops. Then he made a commitment to stand with the Indigenous people and continue to journey with them.

Here in Canada, it seems his message at each event will become a short chapter in a booklet dedicated to healing and reconciliation. It is my hope that he will also address and clarify that the so-called Doctrine of Discovery, which has been so insidiously used by many governments to justify taking land from the Indigenous peoples, has been abrogated, and now needs to be removed from the civil laws of our lands.

Our task as Vincentians is to be as present as we can be, to the unfolding of this historic and purposeful visit of Pope Francis to Canada; to ponder his messages; to be listening witnesses to the survivors of both abuse and the effects of colonization; to read the TRC report, and to do what we can to follow the TRC calls to action – especially those addressed to the Church. With Pope Francis, let us resolve to continue journeying with the Indigenous peoples of this land towards greater healing and reconciliation.

*Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie OMI*  
*National Spiritual Advisor*



## A TIME IN MY VINCENTIAN JOURNEY

*Jose I. Torres*

*“By their fruits, you will know them.” (Matthew 7:16)*

As a regular member at the St. John of the Cross Mississauga, Ontario, Conference since 2019, I’ve immersed myself in my Conference and, of late, a few Greater Toronto Central Council works. My interest bolstered by my fellow Conference Vincentians’ positive accounts led me to this year’s Annual National Formation (ANF), which was held at the Carleton University Campus, Ottawa from June 17th and 18<sup>th</sup>.

The two-year hiatus brought about by public health restrictions could have made this year’s gathering of old and new friends alike more anticipated and welcomed.

The 2022 ANF headlined and explored the theme, “Hunger” and its many threads: physical hunger, spiritual hunger, hunger to connect and interact, to belong. Here are my takeaways on café-style booths, sessions held in the auditorium and breakout rooms and the over-all event.

### ***It was informative and enlightening in many fronts.***

The ANF might have zoomed in on here-and-now challenges, but there were a number of learnings I had come to expect, hear and interact on – some were notable did-you-knows.

The session with the Chief of Operations (Quebec and Nunavut) of Second Harvest, Canada’s largest food rescue organization, highlighted 41 million pounds it rescued in 2021, supporting 4.2 million Canadians. Rescue is the action of preventing good surplus food from being wasted by collecting it and redistributing it to feed people in need. In partnership with the organization, 40 SSVPs across Canada rescued 28,529 pounds. Studies showed 6.7 million Canadians relied on charitable food organizations, and roughly 60% of Canadians found it difficult to feed their families.

The North of 60 Project: Rankin Inlet was one to marvel about. How have our fellow Vincentians, through a myriad of challenges like identifying community needs, scheduling, gathering and preparing goods, storing, arranging for containers, and other logistics, worked hard to reach out to those families in-need in the far North, those struggling with exorbitant cost of food? Rankin Inlet is one of eight communities served in Ontario under the SSVP North of 60 Project.

The session on the “Complexity of Hunger” broke down and addressed the root causes of food insecurity and food bank use: poverty and low incomes.

Social justice, as echoed in that session, does not only play out in street protests or legislative halls but also in the basic works we do – the indispensable living our faith in action – tracing its roots back to the Society’s founding years. At its core is the Catholic Social Teaching which embodies our values and embraces the dignity of the human person, promotion of the common good and preferential option for the poor, among others. It is also referenced in analysis of social situations and discernment for upcoming decisions. The knowledge of social justice’s foothold and long tradition in the Church, pillars and relationship with charity, helps give confidence in the Society’s current directions, and certainty in its foreseeable actions and outcomes.

***It was thought-provoking and compelling on a range of issues.***

Why not provide our neighbours-in-need with culturally appropriate food baskets given their diversity and uniqueness? In perhaps the most colourful booth, replete with flags of various countries and the presenter donning a chef's hat, "Reframing SSVP Family Food Basket", drew on the rich culture of Canadian food.

Also, why not replicate in other Conferences the "Seeds of Hope" project, including its pillars, the Canada Learning Bond and Dental Project: Healthy Smiles? These are designed to raise awareness and improve access, and break down barriers to the federal government's education savings program and the Healthy Smiles Ontario program; nurture hope for better future among families-in-need, position them in life-altering paths; and interact closely with them.

Finally, in the light of a long list of descriptions for "Persons We Serve" (all 13 under Rule 1.2) noted in the session, "Hunger to be Seen", how does the Society keep pace with continually emerging socio-economic and personal factors heaping pressure on the Society, and remain agile, geared-up and innovative in its approach?

***It was foreboding yet impelling.***

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food sounded off the alarm about a looming food crisis, as a result of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with that country being one of the world's top wheat suppliers, and Russia a major fertilizer exporter. The conflict not only threatens less-developed countries with a wave of hunger and destitution but is also poised to add to the already off-the chart high cost of living in Canada in the coming winter months. What does the Society need to prepare for the worsening food insecurity felt by our population's vulnerable in the ensuing few months?

***It was both inspiring and reassuring.***

St. Louise de Marillac Youth Conference, currently 45-member strong, and based in London, Ontario, highlighted among others, their On-the-Street event, outreach to long-term care facilities; work with the Boys and Girls Clubs and Ronald McDonald House Charities; and The Last Post, a Remembrance weekend event spent in cleaning the gravesites of impoverished soldiers – these young Vincentians personifying the future of the Society. Their sharing was punctuated by a moving presentation, including a group exercise, on "Hunger: Not Physical" which touched on the spiritual hunger among the elderly and those who have lost loved ones.

And of course, the several attendees who have been with the Society long-term: one was recognized for 50 years of service as a Vincentian and two for completing their term as Regional Council Presidents. Nothing could be more inspiring than to see both generations, united and grounded in one mission, sharing the enduring passion of service to those in need. The generous sharing of experiences and views both had the power to mutually draw inspiration, optimism and confidence.

***Finally, it was celebratory and invigorating.***

No doubt attendees were only too happy to hear of SSVP Canada Twinning's continuing effort to work hand in hand with the world's poorest through financial resources and friendship, as well as its goal of

increasing the number of partners in order to broaden the scope of its assistance in recipient countries, currently at 20, which is made more compelling by some hit hard by the pandemic.

Camaraderie among the 68 participants from coast to coast was palpable - enough to put first-timers at ease. Animated talks and cordial mingling during breaks and meals, after each working and during networking sessions, and at residence and cafeteria, made no secret of the warm goodwill among the attendees, some who have taken part in past annual formations and therefore have become either acquaintances or friends. I listened to many tell with vigour their SSVP stories and personal witness, and share candidly their Vincentian life experiences, pains and joys. In Q&As, I raptly heard them share their viewpoints.

The 2022 ANF, short as it was, might have left a few questions not asked or answered, and a few issues that could have found a window for discourse. However, its fruits overall were worth the four months of diligent event preparation, especially for me, it being my first Annual National Formation. I now look at the fruits the event has borne in my Vincentian journey as both telling and meaningful.

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**About the writer:** *Jose has been with the SSVP Saint John of the Cross, Mississauga, Ontario, Peel North Council for three years now, aside from being involved in his parish activities over several years. He recently joined the SSVP Greater Toronto Central Council Spirituality Committee as member, wrote spiritual reflections for that Council and the SSVP National Council Newsletter and contributed essays to the Jesuit igNation blog.*



## ANF - TWINNING PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

On June 17, during the Annual National Formation, the first in-person since 2019, the national twinning committee took the opportunity to promote the program.

Friday evening was the Live Chat Room, a forum where members, conferences and councils can identify a topic for discussion or share their successful initiatives/projects with other Vincentians.

We set up a kiosk with a display showing photographs of activities carried out thanks to Canada's twinning contributions. Nicole Schryburt, Twinning Administrative Assistant at the National Council of Canada, provided information and answered questions from Vincentians.

Also, an exchange by Zoom videoconference took place with representatives of national councils of two countries twinned with Canada. A one-hour live chat was conducted in English with Janet Rivière, President of the National Council of Dominica, as well as two of her colleagues, Theodora and Hymar. In French, the exchanges were carried out with Dieudel Lagredel, responsible for twinning at the National Council of Haiti. Vincentians from Canada, present at the ANF, exchanged with these representatives and were able to ask questions about their activities and challenges. Nicole Schryburt, Judy Peddle, Twinning Coordinator, Atlantic Region, and Claude Roy, Twinning Coordinator, Quebec Region, moderated the conversations.

Here are the comments received from our colleagues in Dominica and Haiti following the event:

“It was nice chatting with you last night. I hope all goes well for your meeting today. God bless you. Greetings, Janette B. Riviere »

“Really it was a moment of reunion, I was very happy to speak with you and also the other members. Lagredel-Dieudel »

A big thank you to Nicole for her innovative idea and her involvement in the success of the event and to the regional coordinators for their collaboration.

*Clermont-Fortin, Chairperson  
National twinning committee*







## BROOKLYN'S BUNDLES

I started a project in memory of my daughter, Brooklyn. It is called “Brooklyn’s Bundles”. She passed very suddenly, from this world to the next, in 2017 and she was only 18 years of age, from a spontaneous cerebral hemorrhage. This has devastated our family. Brooklyn loved babies, littles ones and was very active in her faith community. With that sentiment, I am gathering lightly used and new clothing for babies and toddlers. I am washing, sorting the clothing into coordinated outfits and putting them in zip lock bags with labels. I have to admit that in my grief, shopping seems to be a way of finding peace, the thought of helping others is great therapy and keeping my beautiful daughter’s memory alive.

*Val Johnson, St. Albert, Alberta*

Many kits of clothing were shipped to Ulukhaktok and to Tsiigehtchic, SSVP North of 60 Project communities. Since these cans were packed up and shipped North, Val continued to shop and made more than a hundred more bundles. Those were delivered recently to the SSVP distribution centre for distribution to Edmonton area clients.

*Linda Tutt, Chair*

*St. Albert Conference, North of 60 Project (with Ulukhaktok)*





## VINCENTIANS HONOURED

On June 5, as Volunteer of the Year, the Municipality of Saint-Tite-des-Caps chose to honour an organization that has been in existence in the municipality for 35 years: the Saint-Tite-des-Caps Conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

A plaque was presented to the organization, in addition to the plaques given to the volunteers who have been involved with this conference for over 20 years.

Congratulations to the members of the Saint-Tite-des-Caps Conference!

*Photo, from left to right: Jocelyne Duclos, Yolande Pichette, Guy Ferland, Gaston Simard, Louise Morency, Hélène Gravel, Claude Simard and Hélène Blouin*







## QUESTION & ANSWER

**Q: Can a husband and wife belong to the same conference?**

**A:** Husbands and wives can indeed belong to the same conference; this is not against the Rule. As Vincentians, we are encouraged to increase membership by extending an invitation to our family members to join. However, husband and wife should not both serve as officers simultaneously on the same conference or council. Officer positions are President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer.