



My vision for the SSVP Canada
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National AGA, Halifax, N.S.
June, 2026

To present myself and to share my vision as president the SSVP of Canada, I decided to refer to a process called: “the 4 pillars of Involvement”. It is Father Paul Abbass who taught me this process. I met Father Paul Abbass when we were both on the national Board of Big Brother, Big Sister of Canada. He died not so long ago, I miss him very much. Father Paul was a spiritual man that still inspires me in many ways. I want to honor him by using this process.

The process he taught me, helped me to reflect on my choice on where and how I want to get involved as President.

1st Pillar: Keeper of the flame:

Father Paul explained that the mission is the flame of the organization and the choice of getting involve in it is because the flame attracts/calling/speaks to us. If we decide to answer to that attraction/call, we are taking the responsibility of becoming keeper the flame by keeping it alive and strong.

What attracted me to SSVP? Why am I a Vincentian? I started as Executive Director at the Montréal Central Council. I was attracted to its the mission and values, which is resonate with my Catholic foundation. I was impressed with the fact that SSVP had 167 years of existence in Québec at the time. 167 years of serving our neighbours in need in many different ways. I discovered as I got to know SSVP is how the members and the volunteers were and are engaged and determined.

I have to admit that, as the Executive Director I often felt an ached; I could see that our members and volunteers were getting older and conferences were closing. The ache came from that less neighbours in need were being served. I still feel that ache. As we all know recruiting members is a real challenge everywhere in Canada. We need to find ways to do so. Some conferences could tell us their stories of success. How they adapted how they put process in place to attract and retain volunteers.

You may be asking why stay if I ache. Father Paul said something about this pillar that stayed with me: sometimes it is the ache that makes us get involve, because we want to find ways to keep the flame burning. Being in the SSVP is to find ways to adapt so we can make sure that we are helping as much as possible more our neighbours in need.

Once I retired, Jean-Noël called me to ask if I was interested to be on the National Board with Linda as VP of the Strategic Plan. I said yes because I hoped that I could help to keep the flame strong, more attractive to potential members, leaders and donors. As I am sitting on the National board, I felt a different ache. I realized that SSVP is a divided organization by our way to express our beliefs. Through our work at Strategic Planning committee, I saw the depth of the division: in some parts of the country the members and volunteers continue the work of serving our neighbours in need without the traditional support of the Church. They are doing it by adapting to the reality of the situation. In other parts of the country members and volunteers work hand in hand with the Church. I saw that seeing these difference sometimes creates tensions and frankly sometimes I ache and get angry because we undermine the commitment of each other and we forget that SSVP at its core is to serve the people in need. We are known for this, and we should be proud of what we do.

What came so clear through the survey and the listening sessions is that our members and volunteers no matter what, share a foundation of share values: compassion, non-discrimination, respect for dignity, and community engagement and collaboration.

As president, I will not try to convert one part of the organization to the beliefs of the others, even if I wanted to, I would not succeed and frankly I don't believe that it would be right thing to do.

I strongly believe that we need to focus on our values and our will to build strong and safe communities for everyone. That is the bridge that I intend to strengthen. SSVP is special because of the spiritual faith and of the depth of its values. Many nourish SSVP flame through their Catholic faith, other nourish it through the will to serve people in their community. We should see this as a strength.

2e Pillar: Disciple

For Father Paul the pillar of Disciple brought questions: Who do we serve? For whom are we volunteering? How do we make sure that what we do is what the people we are serving really need? I came to understand that being a Disciple in this pillar is to really listen and make choices based on what we hear, even if it disturbs us, which is not easy: because of our bias, because of our fears.

With the National Strategic Planification Committee it is what we did in the last 2 years. We listened to members and volunteers across Canada. I also know that many conferences and different councils have listened to the people they serve, they listen to their communities needs. Based on what they heard they organized different programs, created partnerships, look for different ways to recruit members.

Is the leadership listening to the membership? Are we listening to our donors, our partners, etc. Do we exclude potential members, partners and donors because we do not like what we hear?

As president, I will try to be a good Disciple, a good listener. I want to understand and clarify who SSVP serves. I want to build bridges between different ways to understand our organization and

its mission. As I mentioned earlier, we are a divided organization, and this is why we need to learn to be disciples and listen to each other and see how we can serve more and better.

For many members and volunteers being a Disciple is also to follow and be guided by the Catholic faith in their actions. It is important to nourish this because we are Catholic base organization, although I believe that we have to be open to potential members and volunteers we also have to honor and respect our foundation. It comes back for me to nourish our values and build our actions on them.

3rd pillar: Stewardship

Father Paul reminds us that we are not the owners of the SSVP we are stewards that acts on behalf of the people we serve. As members, volunteers even employees we have received the organization from Vincentians who were there before us, and we have to pass it on to the Vincentians who will receive it from us.

That is a responsibility: As president of SSVP I will be a steward and with the Board we will have SSVP and the people we serve at the heart of our decisions and actions. We have to make sure that we will be able to pass on to the future leaders a healthier SSVP at all levels.

We all know some leaders in conferences, councils that believe and act as if they were the owner; They forget that once they leave, the work should continue. Being a steward of the SSVP is also remembering that we are part of a larger entity that is guided by values, guidelines, rules. As president, it is to make sure that we remain in this larger entity and also make it possible to influence it as well.

In this pillar, I think of the Outcomes: Relation with values, Organizational structure, Leadership, Membership. It is where we build framework that helps conferences and councils to be part of a larger organization and also recognizes regional differences.

We are celebrating 180 years of compassion in action. We are still here because we listen, adapt, change. We need to remind ourselves that we are stewards, therefore we need to keep our values and faith alive and strong. So, the next generation will receive the help they need.

Every member and volunteer of SSVP is responsible for passing their conference, their council to the next Vincentians better as it was before.

4th pillar: Yearning

It took me a while to understand the deep meaning of this word since it is not that easy to translate. The closest I came to is aspiration du Coeur.

Father Paul reminded me that if we decide to get involved in an organization, we have to yearn something for this organization. We also have to yearn to something for ourselves in this organization.

SSVP is not an easy organization to navigate. It is a multi layer organization that can often make us focus on its structure instead of its mission.

I yearn for SSVP an organization that nourishes its values and spiritual journey. I yearn for SSVP to be there, if needed, for another 180 years. I yearn that we find ways to be attractive to volunteers as dedicated as you are, to partners and donors. I yearn that we are changing the social environment, so poverty is no longer an issue.

If you decide to honor me by voting for me as President, this is who I am and what I am bringing to this position.

Denise Ouellette