

The Vincentimes

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Home Visit – History and Spirituality

Home Visiting is the signature activity of the Society. We serve Christ in His poor; it is His house we enter.

Saint Vincent directed his fledgling groups to go out to people's homes. Vincentians serve according to his model. His words:

Go to the poor; you will find God.

You will find out that Charity is a heavy burden to carry, heavier than the kettle of soup and the full basket. But you will keep your gentleness and your smile. It is not enough to give soup and bread. This the rich can do. You are the servant of the poor, always smiling and good humoured.

It is your duty to prefer the service of the poor to everything else and to offer such service as quickly as possible. If a needy person requires... help during prayer time, do whatever is needed with peace of mind. Offer the deed to God as your prayer.

At a time when sisters lived in seclusion, Saint Louise de Marillac founded the Daughters of Charity with the purpose of offering assistance in the homes of people living with poverty. Unheard of!

Years later, one of these Daughters of Charity, Blessed Rosalie Rendu, sent members of her community to

bring food, clothing and other necessities into the homes of the poorest in Paris. She gave the same direction to the founding members of our Society, university students with no real knowledge of poverty. Sister Rosalie told them who to visit and



gave them advice about going to people's homes. She met with them after their visits to discuss and reflect on their experiences. One of her sisters wrote:

Humble in her authority, Sister Rosalie would correct us with great sensitivity and had the gift of consoling.

Our founders had good intentions to help the poor but one wonders if the fledgling Society would have continued and grown without Blessed Rosalie's gentle spiritual direction.

The practice of discussing Home Visits at conference meetings models what the founders did with their first spiritual advisor. Visiting was beneficial to Blessed Rosalie too. She said:

Never have I prayed so well as in the streets.

Blessed Frederic made personal visits to the homes of people living in extreme poverty for as long as his health permitted it. This was written not long after his death:

It (the Home Visit) was essentially a service of love. His manner toward the poor was considerate and deferential as to his equals. He invariably took off his hat on entering their poor abodes, greeting them with his courteous formula, "I am your servant." He never preached to them; after giving whatever he had to give he would sit and chat on any subject likely to cheer or interest them.

Thank God for the privilege of the Home Visit!

~ Denise Bondy

ONRC Spiritual Advisor

Home Visits: How it has affected me spiritually

Joining the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul four years ago was a life-changing event for me. A home visit was a new concept completely. I had not been aware of the extent of poverty where I live and SSVP provided a place where I could not only be a volunteer in the well known sense of the term, but I had the opportunity and, what I have now learned is, the privilege of stepping into peoples' lives and being something more, a hope giving presence. I remember my first ever visit. A man, mentally ill, friendly, lonely and isolated, with a dirty house, unopened bills piled on each stair, an unkempt kitchen and collections of items I later learned were the result of his hoarding tendency.

I remember my first visit to a mom new to SSVP. She was on the verge of tears, head in hands. It had taken her weeks if not months to gain the courage to call the church for help. Her house well kept, well furnished, her children (and small foster child) beautiful, and her in a state of desperation and almost hopelessness. Her situation had suddenly changed and she was unable to cope, a broken, violent marriage, an unjust financial arrangement, a lack of local family support and a feeling of shame and failure. As we stepped into Brenda's life, as Vincentians the Holy Spirit went with us. Of course He had led us there and we prayed for guidance before we entered, but the weight pressing on her shoulders visibly

lifted as we explained who we were and what we could offer in the way of assistance and support.

I have learned that God wants us to do this work. That we are His eyes, ears, mouth and hands. Eyes to

a guest. Many times I have missed these occurrences but when my eyes are open, I can see God's actions moving the pieces into place. Making sure the Vincentian scheduled for that visit is the one whose son is the same age as the son of the new mom; that the mom with a broken tooth can access the emergency dental appointment that has just opened up in the dentist's schedule; that the broken fridge can be replaced by an offer we never ever get, a new fridge donation; and the time that opens up when we think we are rushed and don't have time to spend, yet there is always enough time.

Has my spirituality been affected by home visits? Absolutely, it has opened my eyes in many more ways than I can count.



Image taken from www.faumc.org

observe and take note, ears to listen, mouth to comfort, hands to assist with immediate needs and to help navigate a mom to a better life, and arms to offer a loving hug. He allows us to step into lives and it is a gift.

I realize now that as we "share in the Eucharistic sacrifice offered for all", we do for the poor what He has done on the cross. Complete giving. When we step into the families' lives on a visit, we forget our discomfort, our worries, our presumptions, and we give ourselves, our compassion, our love, our acceptance, our time, our brainpower, our bandwidth, our connections and sometimes our expertise and resources. We focus on the family as they welcome us into their home as

~ Judith Nunn, President
Halton Particular Council

Home Visit Experience

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul asks us to serve anyone who is in need and to help in all possible ways. I have the opportunity to be a part of home visits. This allows me to have personal contact with individuals and families who are going through a difficult time.

Families, single Moms and Dads, the elderly and individuals of all ages open their homes to us and place their trust in us. We gently ask them to share their story so that we can best serve their needs. I know and feel the courage that is needed by each person to ask for help. Sometimes the kindest and most helpful act is just listening. By being there in their home, we are able to learn about their interests, concerns and families. The information they share with us about their everyday lives allows us to best decide how we can provide help.

We see relief on a Mom's face when we give her a food voucher. She will point out that this will allow her to make school lunches. Often there has been an unexpected expense, illness or change in life style that disrupts this family or individual.

It is comforting to me to know that a small child will have some food and perhaps a warm winter coat. We are often welcomed by small children who want to show us their favourite toy or their special pet. We leave with this small child waving and thanking us for the visit.

We sometimes visit homes where there is a language barrier. Most times, recently, this family has come from another country. The oldest child may be the interpret-

er. We see and feel their fear and struggles in this new city. This is an opportunity to help but most of all to welcome this family with a smile and words of encouragement.

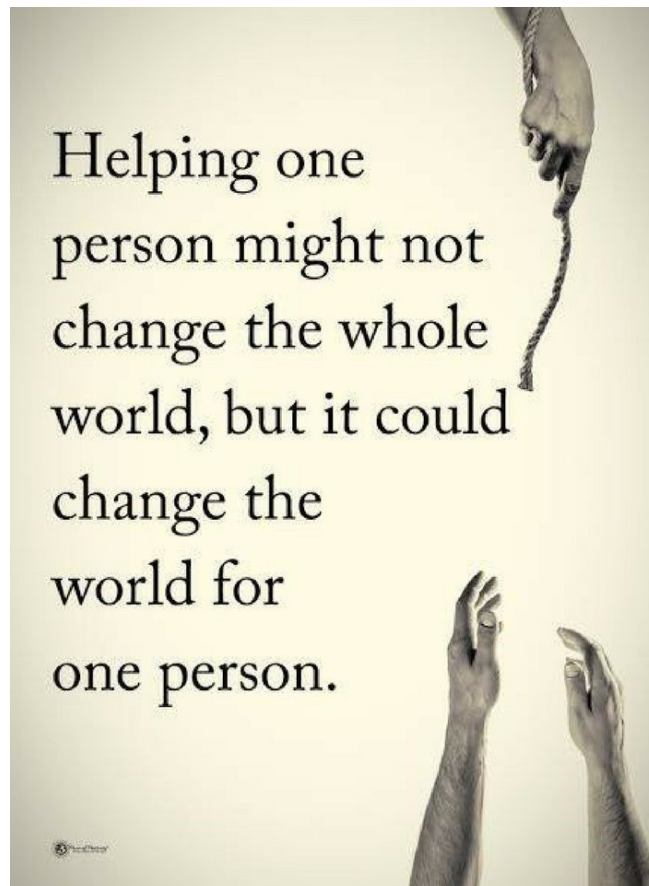
Home visits allow us to share information, offer suggestions as to where individuals can get help and offer encouragement and support. We share stories, hugs and sometimes tears. What seems to us as a small gesture of help, means a great deal to the person we are visiting. I know this because of the thanks and gratitude that is shown to us.

During our home visits, I have felt happiness and sadness. I feel happiness to know we have provided help to families. I feel sadness knowing that there are still many families with needs.

We are making a difference – one home visit at a time.

~ Cathy Holland

St. Justin's Conference, London



Not In My Backyard

All of us are aware of the poor in the world. The media has numbed our emotions to the plight of the poor in developing third world countries, the homeless living on the streets in big inner cities and the people affected by wars or political oppression. These images flash momentarily before us by way of a 30 second clip on TV or captured on a



Image taken from www.ctvnews.ca

headline in a newspaper or magazine article only to change the next day by the dramatization of some other individual's despair.

It is easy for us to say that these people are ...'Not in my backyard'. We live in a very prosperous country, province and city. My involvement with the Society of Saint Vincent De Paul has exposed me to the realities of what exists beyond the nice brick and mortar exteriors of homes and apartments within our community. I constantly remind myself not to judge people by their visual appearances.

I have been humbled many times by my ignorance of the depth and degree of hardship that hide behind closed doors. The definitions of poor and disadvantaged are redefined as I listen to people tell me their story of why they need assistance. Some of these stories include:

- Single mothers who have recently left an abusive situation with no personal belongings except the clothes on their back and their children. Two thirds of their welfare cheque covers rent, leaving little for food and

clothing.

- Refugees from a foreign country, fleeing for safety for their families, starting a new life, but challenged where the adult cannot speak English, many possessing work skills but face hurdles learning a new language.
- Adults who are learning disabled and lack basic life skills in money management and personal hygiene.
- Unemployed and Underemployed mature adults who lack work skills necessary in the 'new economy'.
- Mental illness has many faces, but unlike a physical disability, mental illness is not as visible. Depression, acute anxieties, loneliness are just a few illnesses that trap individuals in low self esteem environments, often struggling to elevate their self esteem.

In many of these situations, children are always helpless victims, trapped in impoverished situations not by their own creation. They bear the misfortune of their parent's circumstances. Fortunately, many parents are very loving, giving all they can emotionally to compensate for what they lack materially.

How does Saint Vincent de Paul serve our community?

Our Mission Statement states that 'we live the Gospel message by serving the poor with love, respect justice and joy'.

Visiting families in their home is the 'core value' our Society practices that distinguishes us from other support agencies.

I am often asked why we visit fami-

lies in their homes in lieu of families coming to the church for assistance. I respond by using the following analogy – My Home or Your Home.

Under My Home, the family in need visits the church. This situation arises generally because Vincentians state they are too busy in their personal life, so time is precious. Vincentians control the environment of the visit, eliminating Vincentian travel. In these scenarios the person in need is a "Guest" in the church home.

Under Your Home, we visit the family in their home. We are "Guests" in their home. In this environment, the difficult situations that the families experience now have a 'face' that cannot be appreciated if they were to obtain assistance at a church hall. A family can say they are struggling, but when you visually see a home with no furniture, untidy or difficult living environments, these images are now 'real', more than just words. Add to this, you often see personal family mementos that are the few items of pride that the family can share. You establish an immediate bond with the family.

Beyond the Home Visit

The real benefit in home visits are how we provide a level of dignity and respect that establish an



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'intimate' relationship of trust, openness and human connection.

This is what our Mission and Values call us to do. This is how we see Christ in others. This is how we are to have personal contact with the poor.

When we adopt these values, you will be rewarded with the gift of 'humility'. The difficulties in your personal life will no longer be troublesome. You will realize the many gifts we have and that we are part of God's larger family. We are called to share and support one another.

~ Phil Bondy

ONRC Vice President



Did you know ...

- ◇ 1 in 7 Canadians live in poverty**
- ◇ 1.2 million children in Canada live in low-income households*
- ◇ 14.5 million Canadian seniors over age 65 are living with low-incomes*
- ◇ 21% of single mothers in Canada raise their children while living in poverty (7% of single fathers raise their children in poverty)**
- ◇ Children with disabilities are twice as likely to live in households relying on social assistance**
- ◇ Food bank usage is up 28% compared to 2008
- ◇ 1 in 8 Canadian households struggle to put food on the table**
- ◇ Almost 1 in every 5 households experience serious housing affordability issues (spending over 50% of their low income on rent) which puts them at risk of homelessness**

Data Sources:

* = *Statistics Canada, 2016 census data*

** = *www.cwp-csp.ca*

**SOCIETY OF
SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL -
ONTARIO REGIONAL**

38-1502 Warbler Woods Walk
London, ON
N6K 0A7

Email: secretary.ssvp@ssvp.on.ca



Visit us on the web

www.ssvp.on.ca

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

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.

Upcoming Events

January 15, 2018 — Deadline for newsletter submissions (please note: we cannot guarantee all submissions will make the next issue, but will do our best to include in upcoming issues)

January 31, 2018 — Annual Reports due from Conferences. Pass report up to Particular Council.

February 15, 2018 — Deadline for newsletter submissions (please note: we cannot guarantee all submissions will make the next issue, but will do our best to include in upcoming issues)

February 28, 2018 — Annual Reports due from Particular Councils. Pass report up to Central Council or Regional.

March 28, 2018 — Annual Reports due from Central Councils. Pass report up to Regional.

April 2018 — Ontario Regional Council's General Members Meeting (aka the Spring Meeting), Hosted by the Toronto Central Council. For more information, please check your email and visit www.ssvp.on.ca

Notice of Passings

We would like to recognize and remember the following Vincentians who have passed.
They blessed so many with their lives.

June 29, 2017—Margaret Harrison,
St. Theresa, Sault Ste. Marie

Oct. 14, 2017—Florence Homeniuk,
St. Mary, Brant Particular Council

October 17, 2017 – Joan Huskisson,
St. Anne, Peterborough Particular
Council