



**“Inspirations from our Founders and Patrons”**

## **Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Honours a “work” of our Patron**

The letter-writing skills of St. Vincent de Paul:



In today's world, handwritten letters are few and far between. However, in the time of St. Vincent de Paul (1581 – 1660) in the mid 1600's, it was the only way to communicate to someone far away. The letters of correspondence written to and by St Vincent de Paul have been preserved for us. They include writings to St Louise de Marillac (1591 – 1660). These words of St. Vincent de Paul so clearly capture the essence of his vocation and ministry that parts of his letters are read every year on the occasion of his feast day on September 27. He tried to explain to his people working with the poor that the poor, when viewed with eyes of faith, take the place of Christ and so give us the opportunity to love and serve Jesus. Charity, he said, is greater than any rule or pious exercise.

In one letter he says “It is our 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 medicine or other help during prayer time, do whatever has to be done with peace of mind. Offer the deed to God as your prayer. Do not become upset or feel guilty because you interrupted your prayer to serve the poor. God is not neglected if you leave him for such service. One of God's works is merely interrupted so that another can be carried out. So, when you leave prayer to serve some poor person, remember that this very service is performed for God. Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity. Since she is a noble mistress, we must do whatever she commands. With renewed devotion, then, we must serve the poor, especially outcasts and beggars. They have been given to us as our masters and patrons.”

To St. Louise he writes, “Relieve your mind of all that is troubling you; God will take care of it. You cannot become involved in this, without saddening (so to speak) the heart of God, because He sees that you are not honoring Him enough by holy confidence. Put your trust in Him, I beg you, and your heart's desire will be fulfilled. Once again, I repeat, cast aside all those mistrustful thoughts which you sometimes allow to invade your mind. And why would your soul not be full of confidence, since you are, by His mercy, the dear daughter of Our Lord ?” His words were practical in guiding his people through their day to day struggles. They were words of encouragement. They were words of love that showed them God's love and his own concern for them. He was mild in his way of acting, understanding the weaknesses of others. So, be encouraged by the words he used to address St. Louise herself. “With God's help.” said St. Vincent, “ you will continue to succeed in your leadership and in your duties, because Our Lord's work is accomplished not so much by the multitude of workers as by the fidelity of the small number whom He calls.” I believe St. Vincent was much like St. Paul the Apostle in his writings; always encouraging, correcting and telling others how much God loved them. May St. Vincent continue to intercede for us in our work.

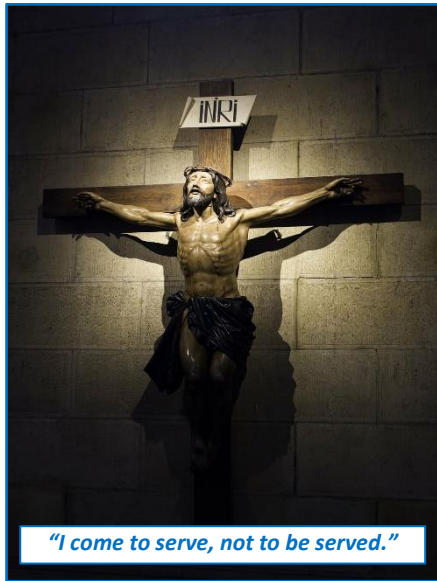
***Deacon John Girolami, ONRC Spiritual Advisor***

## **“From the President’s Corner”**

### President’s Message

Greetings Sister and Brother Vincentians,

The term “*servant leader*” is becoming a common phrase when the topic of leadership is discussed. What is a servant leader and does servant leadership have a home within our Society? The scholars at DePaul University in Chicago have given a lot of thought to the meaning of servant leadership. The concept of “servant leadership” was defined by Robert K. Greenleaf in an essay he published in 1970.



Greenleaf said, “The servant-leader is servant first... it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.” A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid”, the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. St. Vincent de Paul excelled in the process of empowerment. He listened to others’ ideas and sought their advice. Consider the founding of the Daughters of Charity. St. Louise de Marillac and St. Vincent de Paul were co-founders of this organization. Vincent provided the tools that were needed by St. Louise and collaborators in achieving the Vincentian mission. He encouraged participative relationships as a means of serving people in need. Pope Francis is also a servant-leader role model. He visits prison inmates and washes the feet

of people living on the margins. He chooses to be part of, rather than separated from, those he serves. As Vincentians, we do not seek to “fix” but rather to be in solidarity. This requires asking the questions, “What do you need? How can I be of service?” before taking action. We therefore lend ourselves to others that are calling out to us whenever we make those home visits. Their acceptance of us in reaching out to them becomes a way of seeking and developing mutual and meaningful relationships. Who are your examples of servant-leaders in your conferences and councils? While all servants may not wish to be leaders, we should inspire those aspiring servants, that we see, to become leaders.

On another note, our 2024 Annual General Assembly takes place in Windsor on the weekend of April 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. The “meet and greet” starts on Friday at 6:00 p.m. Workshops and plenary sessions start at 8:00 a.m. on the 27<sup>th</sup> with registration. All of our Vincentians are welcome to attend. Hotel info is here: Best Western Plus, 277 Riverside Drive, Windsor. Reservations can be made by telephone only. Call hotel directly: 519-973-5555. **Quote block booking code 2404SSVPY Room rate is \$149 per night.** For AGA registration, please email: [ann@ssvp.on.ca](mailto:ann@ssvp.on.ca).

*Ann Massel, President, Ontario Regional Council*

**“Make it a practice to judge persons and things in the most favorable light at all times and under all circumstances”. – Saint Vincent de Paul**

## **“Milestones in our History” (Individual)**

### **An Interview with Clermont Fortin, current Chair of National Twinning . By Guido Kelly**

**1. How long have you been a Vincentian? and how much have you enjoyed this aspect of Vincentian work?** I participated in a “guinolée” in December 1983 with members of the Conférence Jésus-Marie-Joseph d’Orléans. I really enjoyed this SSVP sponsored annual event to help those in need locally, and the joy and fraternity demonstrated by the hundreds of participants. I became a member in 1984 and remain involved in the Society to this date. I enjoy most being with people who freely offer their time and resources, Vincentians, who share the same values and commitment to the marginalized, and fidelity to the Church teachings.



**Clermont Fortin**

**2. Since being a Vincentian is a vocation, who or what motivated you to join the Society?** As a practicing Catholic, I believe it was necessary to take the required actions to reinforce my beliefs in helping the less fortunate. So, together with the other Vincentians with whom I fraternized in the previous December, I decided that this was the way for me to make that difference in the life of others, even if it may not be much. I accepted this vocation which has become a lifetime commitment for me.

**3. As Vincentians, we serve with "Love, Respect, Justice and Joy". Which of these motivates you the most? Why?** – Respect and Justice are the two service elements that motivate me the most. For me, “Respect” is the stimulant that promotes the art of listening with empathy to the personal stories of persons/families seeking help; this leads us to respect their dignity by understanding their plight, a non-judgemental approach. “Justice” is going further than charity. I am motivated by this aspect of our mission to correct injustices of all types, to support people on the road to equal opportunities and self-accomplishment.

**4. What leadership positions have you held with your Conference or Council? Of which are you most proud? Why?** I was elected President of the Conseil Particulier St. Paul, (Ottawa) in 1988, then later became the President, Ottawa Central Council. In 1997, at the invitation of Sister Ellen Schryburt, then National President, I worked at establishing the National Emergency Relief Program. I was National Vice-President under two mandates. I assumed the position of Chair of the National Twinning Committee in June 2013, which ends in March 2024. I was happy to serve in all those positions. As a servant leader, in collaboration with my peers, I felt devoted with the task and called to alleviate poverty and combat injustices at all levels of the SSVP structure.

**5. Drawing from your vast experiences over the years, what aspect continues to motivate you in your Vincentian work?** What motivated me the most, has been the Twinning program over the last 10 years. During this period, I was involved in setting up countless twinning partnerships and projects. It is very heartwarming when so many Conferences and Councils in Canada are involved in this “Special Work” so dear to the Society. This is an extension of the local mission, by creating a network of friendships and assistance to the most deprived of the world as we have been inspired to do by our founder, Frederic Ozanam.

**6. What advice do you wish to share with “new” as well as “not so new” Vincentians as they respond to the wide-ranging calls for their service?** My advice, to all Vincentians, is that we learn to trust the Divine Providence. Keep aiming to do more, whether by our current practices or by creating new ways to help those in need. Together we can do more, continue to reach out to help others as by so doing, we create more happiness and a better life amongst the needy, both at the local level as well as in countries “designated” to Canada. God is with us, let us do more with confidence.

***Hold your eyes on God and leave the doing to him. That is all the doing that you have to worry about. - St. Jane Frances de Chantal***

## St. Peter’s Cathedral Conference, London Celebrates 160 plus years of SSVP Service

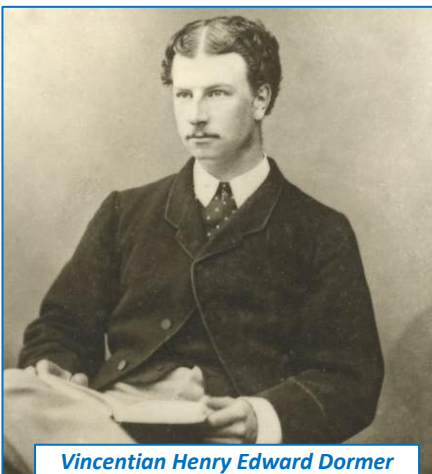
*“Help honours when, to the bread that nourishes, it adds the visit which consoles, the advice that enlightens, the friendly shaking of the hand that lifts up sinking courage; when it treats the poor man with respect, not only as an equal but as a superior, since he is suffering that which perhaps we would not be able to bear ourselves; since he is among us the messenger of God sent to put our charity and trust to the test, and to save us by our works.” - Frederic Ozanam, October 21, 1848.*



*St. Peter’s Cathedral, London*

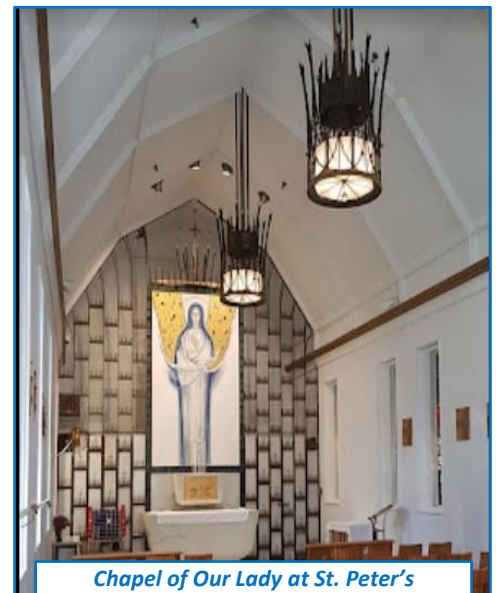
The first Catholic Church built in London in 1834 was called St. Lawrence Church, dedicated to St. Lawrence the Martyr. The wooden structure burned down twice - in 1845, and after it was rebuilt, again in 1850. The present cathedral, built by Bishop Walsh, was dedicated to St. Peter on June 28, 1885. “Our Lady of London” Conference was aggregated in August 1863. Our Conference has been continuously active for over 160 years in our dedication to the poor of London. The conference predates our present cathedral and is now more commonly referred to as St. Peter’s Cathedral Conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Our Conference members adhere to the words of our founder, Frederic Ozanam, quoted above, as we continue to reach out to the poor. In the early days of the parish, hand-written announcements to be read before or after mass were entered in simple notebooks. Here is an example from 1933: *“Last Sunday you contributed \$40.65 to the St. Vincent de Paul Society. During the month*

*of November, the St. Vincent de Paul Society will ask you for clothing for the poor. All suits, dresses, overcoats, underwear and shoes will be most acceptable. Save them all for the poor”.* Early on, membership in the conference was restricted to male members. In the 1950's, a female auxiliary of the SSVP was formed and became an all-female conference of St. Jude in 1967.



*Vincentian Henry Edward Dormer*

In 1975, they merged to become one conference, which today, counts 25 members with 6 as auxiliary members. We cover the downtown core area of London and do curbside visits with limitations. We raise over \$60,000 each year and make about 800 “home visits” per year. We give out food vouchers and cards. We help about 200 families each Christmas with gift cards \$90 - \$150 range value relative to the number of persons in the “family”. We partner with the CWL and KOC to host a “winter lunch” each January and invite those we help to the well attended event. Some



*Chapel of Our Lady at St. Peter’s*

leave with “take home” bags. We do appreciate the support of our parishioners, CWL and KOC. One of our early Vincentians was Sir Henry Edward Dormer (1844-1866). He was a British officer stationed in London and a member of the parish. He died of typhus at the age of 22, which he contracted while nursing the poor. He is in the early stages of beatification and is called a “Servant of God”.

For further info, please view: <https://www.hermangoodden.ca/blog/the-saint-who-lived-among-us>

*Sheila Craig, President, St. Peter’s Cathedral Conference, London*

# Saint Patrick Conference, Burlington

## Celebrates

### 40 plus years of its Formation

As the City of Burlington expanded to the east past Appleby Line, Bishop Ryan, Bishop of Hamilton assigned the formation of the Parish of Saint Patrick's community, encompassing the area between Appleby Line and Burloak Drive south of the QEW. The first mass was held in the local Catholic elementary school within the parish boundaries named Ascension on June 13, 1969. Father Stephen Stinson oversaw the construction of our new church building which was dedicated on May 20, 1974. Parish community groups began various activities as we continued to grow. As such, in 1984 our Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Conference was formed and 40 years later, we are very well established and supported by our congregation as we reach out to the less fortunate, within our parish, that require extra assistance. We receive a lot of support from our Pastor, Fr. Pinto. St Patrick's and Ascension Elementary Schools, both of which are in our parish boundaries, help keep our food pantry stocked via the lively food drives sparked by a little friendly competition as to which class would bring in most donations. We love working with the kids as they get involved with not only donating the food items, but the older students visit our church hall and help sort the goods. When called, our SSSVP



*St. Patrick Church, Burlington*

volunteers make home visits providing food gift cards and groceries from our food pantry. We also run a Christmas program helping many families in our immediate area. Bread and sweets are dropped off weekly thanks to our partnership with Cobs Bakery. These fresh donated treats are shared with The Shifra House (a maternity residence and shelter home), two



*Trish Harrington stocking the pantry.*

community hubs and a local low income community. We promote and support the Ozanam Fund, which helps students in our area with continuing education through scholarships to the tune of \$10,000. We love to hear their success stories. We made contributions towards RESPs for 3 children, to help start their education savings. We provide support for the “ROCK” - The Reach Out Center For Kids - by providing healthy snacks for their after school program. We do a “wellness telephone program” to keep in touch with our neighbours in need. We sponsor school lunches for 23 students in our elementary schools. Our back to school backpack program provided 36 children with backpacks at the beginning of this school year. We are also “twinned” with San Rafael Conference in Trinidad and Tobago. We are grateful to our wonderful congregation for their financial support with generous and consistent donations. Their “giving” feeds the enthusiasm of our Conference members and we are

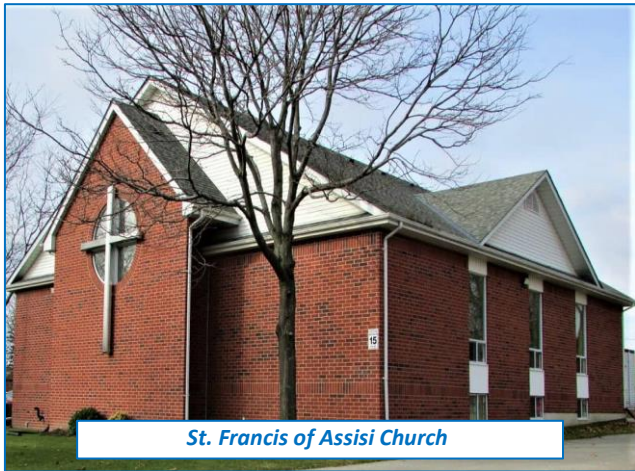


*(L. to R.): Vincentians Sarah Gilpin, Diane Galvez, Lynn McKee and Shirley Robinson beside the statue of St. Patrick.*

encouraged to maintain the “outreach” to our neighbors in need.  
*Mike Kirby, President, Saint Patrick Conference, Burlington*

## St. Francis of Assisi Conference, Newcastle Celebrates 40 years of SSVP Service

St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church, Newcastle, was built in 1978 to serve the east area of the Municipality of Clarington and is part of the Diocese of Peterborough. We are committed to sharing the message given to us by Jesus Christ and offering help to everyone through prayer, fellowship and worship. Our Conference started in January 1984. St. Francis of Assisi, Newcastle continues to be an active and enthusiastic conference comprised of seventeen (17)



*St. Francis of Assisi Church*

members. Our main mission is the operation of our food pantry which serves the needy in our community. Members take turns to be “on call” at the pantry. Clients are invited to visit the pantry once a month to access non-perishables and toiletries that are in stock. Pantry visits are also a great time to engage in fellowship with our friends. We also offer them food vouchers from one of our local grocery stores thereby giving them the opportunity to purchase fresh fruit, vegetables and meat products. Due to a strong group effort of our Vincentians each year, we continue to have a very successful Christmas Hamper Program each year. Thanks to the generosity of our community, we usually distribute over 25 hampers on an annual basis. These hampers consist of a variety of Christmas treats and gift cards. Because of this, the people we serve are better able to

experience the joy and miracle of the Christmas season. The parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi prove to be steadfast supporters of SSVP as they greatly contribute to the program. Due to the small size of our congregation, we work well with the other outreach groups and especially with the Knights of Columbus Council at our parish. Each year, throughout the Lenten season, the KOC runs a food drive called “40 Cans for Lent”. Parishioners donate non-perishable goods which will then be used for distribution to our clients in need. St. Francis of Assisi, Newcastle had been twinned with Camino de Amor Conference in Guatemala. This twinning has now ended. We are also twinned with St. Ignatius, Cayman



*KOC Drive re “40 Cans for Lent”.*

Islands but the money transfers are now on hold. Also, we have been recently twinned with St. Luke Conference, in the Commonwealth of Dominica. With this exciting news, an exchange of emails soon followed, and we shared with



*The altar at St. Francis of Assisi*

each other about the work being done in each of our conferences. It was very inspiring to learn of the great work being done at St. Luke, Dominica. They have been assisting their people with food, clothing, home repair, medical assistance, and helping children with school fees. We are already looking forward to the next correspondence! We wish to say a huge “Thank You” to the members of our congregation for their most generous support as we help those in need. It is indeed a blessing to work in solidarity with those in need through prayer, financial assistance and friendship.

*Jane Lacey, Twinning Coordinator, St. Francis of Assisi Conference, Newcastle.*



## **BRANT PARTICULAR COUNCIL**

### **Forging Housing Champions in SSVP Brant**

Like many communities across Canada, Brantford is experiencing a housing crisis. Called to serve in “all possible ways”, local Vincentians have launched an initiative to create Housing Champions in accordance with the SSVP National Housing Plan. Last spring SSVP Brant Particular Council created a Housing Champions Advisory Committee. For its first major event, the committee organized a Formation Day on November 4 for all SSVP Brant volunteers with the purpose of increasing the organization’s capacity to respond to housing related issues. The day was a rousing success and was attended by about 60 conference and store Vincentians. With opening remarks, members of the Committee informed their fellow Vincentians of groundwork they have undertaken, including development of a belief statement to guide their work and key actions to continue that work with the wider Vincentian group.

#### Belief statement:

We, of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Particular Council of Brant (SSVP Brant), believe safe, secure, and affordable housing for all is a human right leading to a dignified life and sustainable communities. Further, we believe we can become agents of positive change with regard to our own work, so that we are an effective part of the housing solution. (Consistent with The National Housing Strategy Act, 2019 and SSVP Canada National Action Plan, 2021).

Key actions to support those experiencing housing insecurity include:

- LISTEN to those we serve who are struggling with this issue.
- EDUCATE ourselves, each other and those in our community about local realities and challenges.
- ADVOCATE with those in positions of responsibility to make a positive difference.
- CREATE solutions including strategies for assisting those we serve and partnerships with other local groups striving to address this issue.

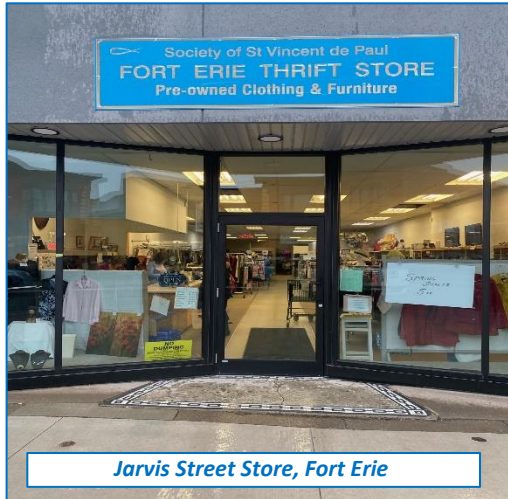
A key component of the day was focused on increasing awareness among the attendees. Based on their research into the local realities and challenges related to housing stability, the committee tapped representatives of local organizations who serve this need to broaden the knowledge of this issue and to explain their roles and initiatives. The City of Brantford was well represented by Ward 5 Councillor Mandy Samwell, CAO Brian Hutchings, Manager of Housing Programs Katie Maas and Jamie Bagni, Administrative Coordinator of Housing Programs. Acknowledging the unique needs of specialized communities within Brantford & Brant County, the presenters included Tye Anthony, Public Educator for Brantford Native Housing, and Shatha Qaisi, settlement worker for YMCA Immigrant Settlement Services. After hearing from these presenters and posing thoughtful and incisive questions to them, the volunteers set to work. In groups (each of the five local conferences (branches) and various Store departments), they planned actions to enhance SSVP Brant’s service to those struggling with housing instability - including eviction, search for affordable housing, transition from homelessness to supportive housing. As a result of Formation Day 2023, the way forward for SSVP Brant is somewhat clearer but there is much work to be done. SSVP Brant Particular Council President Rob Campbell observed “thanks to our guest speakers and dedicated volunteers, we have improved our ability to assist our neighbours who are experiencing housing insecurity. We look forward to our Housing Champions Committee to continue leading us as we strive to serve our friends in need with love, respect, justice and joy.

***Pat Lenz, Housing Champions Committee member***

## **“Clothing the Naked” (Store related activities)**

### **Fort Erie SSVP Thrift Store celebrates SIXTY-FIVE (65) YEARS**

Our Fort Erie store was first opened in 1960 which makes 2024 our 65<sup>th</sup> year of operations. We were located in an old building on Garrison Road then relocated to Gilmore Street before settling into our



*Jarvis Street Store, Fort Erie*

present location in the downtown area on Jarvis Street. We leased this unit starting in August 1992. Our store floor area is approximately 3600 square feet and consists of two (2) large rooms and there is a basement which we use for storage. We stock the two sales floor rooms to capacity, one with clothing and household items, such as dishware, Knik-Knacks, and books/records, while the other is stocked with furniture and appliances, as the saying goes, “we make use of every inch of floor space” so that our customers have as much choice of furniture and appliances to choose from when they shop. We track the length of time that some items

stay unpurchased on the floor. We then advertise our monthly sale, “cleanout/everything must go”. Our customers respond well to these sales and most months, we accomplish our goal of selling these items. We have a truck which is used for the free pickup of donations. More donations are also dropped off on assigned days. We employ four (4) full time staff who are supported by a small group of volunteers. We are blessed with our staff who have been with us for a period of five (5) to ten (10) years. Our volunteers help with stocking, sorting, cleaning



*Clothing racks at the store*



*Furniture display at the store*

and the like as required. Our staff and volunteers all enjoy their contribution to the success of our store. Some days are full of challenges, but the camaraderie that our group has built as a team among themselves and with customers helps ride the “storm” of those days. Personally, I have been employed at the store for the last 22 years and I enjoy the ride. We feel privileged when at times, we get a chance to give merchandise to those who just cannot afford to buy. We meet new people, customers and friends on a continual basis. This gives us a chance to share a lot of stories as we reach out to help others. We

collaborate with other local groups, Casa El Norte, COPE, Community Living, and Strong Fort Erie Neighbourhoods, in helping with building “community” as we tend to those who need assistance and depend on our St. Vincent de Paul Store for their purchase of clothing and furniture. We appreciate the opportunity to serve our customers and are grateful to all our donors for their generosity. Kudos to our staff and volunteers for their dedication. *Marge Graham, Store Manager, Fort Erie SSVP Stores*



## **“Our Youth in Action”**

# **Saint Louise de Marillac Youth Conference, London**

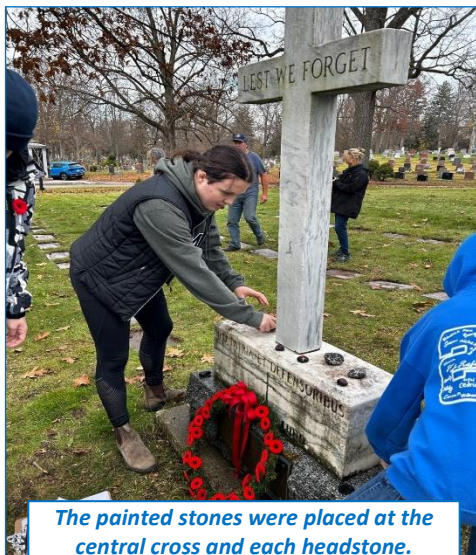
Our SSVP Youth Conference members partake in making 100 bagged lunches the night before P.A.days and bring them out to the St. Joe’s Café to offer our friends after the midday meal has been eaten. This can guarantee a little bit of sustenance for the evening if they do not have enough money for an evening meal. First and foremost, our youth want to ensure the meal we offer is nutritious and filled with good



quality foods. Juice boxes made from fruit, veggies and fresh fruit are included for a balanced meal. Some dairy products, the cheese is at least half an ounce in weight. Freshly baked muffins are readied for the “handout” bag on the day of the event by our Youth. Cheese is cut into cubes, cucumbers and cherry tomatoes, and sandwiches are made. The youth team assembles the bagged lunches in a factory fashion, assemble line style. Each youth assigned an area to prepare the food item. This event gives our team a chance to build a relationship with each other as well. These Bagged Lunch events offer a time for all of us to get to know each other, our interests, how school is going, bonding and laughter shared by our friends and

teammates! We often finish up early then play games and just enjoy each other’s company. Our youth look forward to these sessions and thoroughly enjoy themselves.

Another activity this fall involving our youth was the cleaning of the Veterans “Last Post” gravestones. This year we added a special “touch” as our youth painted up some memorial stones which were



placed at the headstones. We started by removing leaves and grass from around each, so that the stones and the names on each were totally visible. After we finished the headstones, we cleaned



off the Cross in the centre of the Last Post site. We then placed the memorial wreath to which was added new poppies. After we placed the wreath, we placed one of our painted Memorial Stones on each headstone. We also said a prayer for each ‘vet’ named on the stone, ending with “Lord, hear our prayer”. This continued until each veteran was honoured. It was absolutely beautiful to hear all the names of our veterans who are laid to rest at the Last Post in Woodlawn Cemetery, London, ON. The Last Post Fund’s mission is to ensure that no Veteran is denied

a dignified funeral and burial, as well as a military gravestone. This is thru Veterans Affairs Canada Program which provides funeral, burial and grave marking benefits for eligible Canadian and Allied Veterans.

***The SSVP Saint Louise de Marillac Youth Conference, London.***

***Charity gives life to all virtues. – St. Catherine of Siena***

## **“The Gains from North of Sixty”**

### **NORTH to CORAL HARBOUR**

After the sea container was carefully packed “to the rafters” with 6,500 kg of non-perishable items that had been donated by many Hamilton and Hamilton West Conferences and local businesses, on



*Food being readied for loading the container bound for Coral Harbour*

September 6, 2023, the container was hoisted on a truck bound for Montreal with its final destination being Coral Harbour (Salliq) in Nunavut. Upon arrival in Montreal, the container was loaded on a ship for its 6 – 8 week voyage to Coral Harbour. On arrival, the cargo is unloaded onto a barge which can negotiate the low water levels near the shore. Using a container forklift, the load is carried 8 miles to a location in the community proximal to St. Joseph Catholic Church. The church has the necessary heated space to store the contents that would otherwise freeze, and it is easier to transfer by hand the 14,000 pounds of boxed food. Coral Harbour stays on Eastern Standard Time all year round and measures are preferred in miles and pounds not metric. I had a longing to meet the residents of Coral Harbour and to be there when the container arrived. So, in early November, I trekked to Coral Harbour via three airlines over a two day

period. After landing, my contacts in Coral Harbour, Lizzie and Marty, met me and drove me to the church residence where I stayed for a week. To my surprise, I ate raw, frozen, thinly cleaved caribou meat, raw Baluga whale, arctic char, and dried caribou meat...all very tasty and nutritious! Evening meals were served with the adults, children and grands all gathered together. Group board games sometimes followed the meal. After dinner, Lizzie served ice cream and made coffee via a Keurig unit. I marveled at the old infused with the new. I experienced and learned much. The school in Coral is very large, accommodating early education to grade 12. Grades 1-4 are taught by Inuk teachers and grades 5-12 by teachers from the south. “School is not mandatory. A child’s attendance is dependent on the parents”. Parents I met have taught their daughters great sewing skills to create beautiful clothes, coats, and boots, some from dried animal skins that best shield from the wind and the cold. Young men have been taught to hunt and repair boats and vehicles. Marty’s 22-year-old son, who is unemployed, has a role to hunt and supply his 3 sisters’ families and his parents with meat for the winter. In Coral, only 25% of residents are employed while 75% require social assistance. Prices in grocery stores are unaffordable to many. Those that can pay are the very few Inuk that have government contracts and the skilled trades people recruited from the south. Seals, walruses, and bears have difficulty finding places on the ice, due to “warming”, to rest, hunt, mate, and give birth. Our efforts bring reconciliation and the trust that we commit to extend a helping hand. I spent most of my visit learning and returned with fond memories of those I met in Coral who shared their home, their food, and their stories with me. I cherished their kindness and look forward to another visit.



*Unloading the container from the barge after arrival at Coral Harbour.*

*Maria Scattolon, Chair, North of Sixty Committee, Hamilton Particular Council*

## Feeding the Hungry in Burlington

### at our “Food Pantry”

### by St. Raphael Conference

A number of our parishioners with the common mindset of helping the less fortunate within our parish boundaries got together and held our first meeting in January, 1996 giving birth to our very own Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Conference at Saint Raphael. This meeting was held in January, 1996. The group wanted to make St. Raphael ***“a light in the darkness in our community to help our neighbours in need”***. An idea was born that we start a pantry and in late 1996, this came to fruition. We allowed “out of bounds” persons to visit. The pantry evolved from delivering food boxes to our present day space where families from all over Halton may visit once a month to choose non-perishable food, paper products and hygiene items. We open every Monday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 12 noon with 2 volunteers on duty. Our pastor at the time, Friar Joe Connick was responsible for giving us space as we started up. Later on, Friar Maurice gave us our present larger space. We also have access to an area which we use for sorting. Each year, we welcome approx. 200 families to



*Our pantry shelves are continuously stocked with donations.*

our pantry. The families only need to provide their name, address, phone number and the number in the family. Depending on the size of the family, they are given a container that they can fill. The size of the container is based on the size of the family. Our volunteers on duty enjoy the rapport with the families that visit the pantry. As such, there are countless stories that are shared during these visits. We wish to acknowledge all those who support our pantry, and includes the following, our parishioners who bring in items as they attend Sunday mass, St. Raphael and St. Paul Schools that operate two (2) food drives every year, the Knights of Columbus who give us a monetary donation and this year did a drive by drop off of food on a Saturday, CWL who also help us with a monetary donation, Boomerang Card Group help with a monetary donation, our very supportive priests and also our SSVF volunteers who help with the stocking of shelves and helping when our friends visit. Also, Deckers Card Group(Bridge & Euchre) ensures that we are stocked the 1st Thursday of every month with items that are “low stock”. When our families visit the pantry or we visit their homes, we always ***“smile”*** as ***“smiles”*** count more than you think, and we remind ourselves that it only takes one person to make a difference.

*Margaret LaFontaine, President, St. Raphael Conference*



*Volunteers Mary Alice McKim and Sylvia Castellano sorting donations.*

**“Social Justice Gains” (Highlighting one of these areas)**



**PUBLIC POLICY DIALOGUE & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

**Prison Ministry / Restorative Justice**

There is likely no other issue under our social justice efforts which needs more support and action than prison ministry/restorative justice. This can be a difficult topic as the mention of prison ministry suggests visiting prison inmates. At times, once prison inmates and parolees become the “topic” of conversation, a lot of our Vincentians “shut down”. The Crucifixion actually teaches us about prisoners, redemption and forgiveness. As Jesus and the two “immoral” men were being crucified at the same time, one rebuked Jesus while the other defended Jesus. As his heart and mind transformed, that man, Dismas, realized that Jesus was a man of love, forgiveness and power. Though ashamed, he decided to risk a request of Jesus to remember him when he went to His kingdom. Jesus responded with much assurance: “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”.(Luke 23:43). God forgave all his wrongs and immediately and lovingly accepted him. He is now known as St. Dismas, the patron saint of prisoners, reformed thieves and undertakers. The questions for us then become, “do I wish to follow Jesus’ example of reaching out to prisoners?”, “do I wish to become involved with making prison visits?” , “do I wish to be involved with halfway house residents?” If your answer to any of the questions is “yes” or “maybe”, we can help by providing relevant information about the nearest prison and contacts within the prison ministry system. Being part of a volunteer visitation program can be rewarding for anyone who becomes involved. Why not discuss this option at your next conference meeting? The Windsor Essex prison ministry is one example of a successful visitation program. Residents of halfway homes can simply use your friendship as they prepare to re-enter society. The prison release kit program offered in Hamilton is a prime example of how we can offer some help to inmates facing re-entry into society. Through prison ministry, we may also provide basic items some inmates need upon release such as clothing and toiletries. Collaborating with other organizations and supporting their efforts in this area. Advocacy for criminal justice reform is also an issue SSVP could be involved in. There are a number of systemic changes that could be part of our advocacy efforts. Our ONRC efforts include prison ministry/restorative justice committee zoom meetings to build up our Restorative Justice Committee. If you are currently involved in prison ministry or are interested in getting involved or are simply looking to learn more, you are most welcome to join our meetings. Please use email to Jim at [ssvpjp@gmail.com](mailto:ssvpjp@gmail.com).

**PRAYER:** *Dear God, help me to understand the depths of your love for me.*

*Jim Paddon, Chair,  
Public Policy Dialogue & Development Committee  
ONRC Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP)*

**God is love, and all God’s operations proceed from love. - St. Lawrence of Brindisi**

## “Sharing our Wealth” (TWINNING)

### St. Dominic / St. Andrew Conference in Oakville, ON. celebrates its “twin”, St. Joseph Conference, Spanish Town, Jamaica, W.I.

In 2017, our conference of Saint Dominic / Saint Andrew’s was thrilled when we were informed that we had been awarded a twinning partnership with the Saint Joseph conference in Spanish Town, Jamaica. Spanish Town is not far



from the capital, Kingston, at a distance of 20 kilometres to the west. Their conference consists of 20 members and is similar in size to our own conference in Oakville. Their members meet once a month, on Sunday mornings after Mass. In spite of meagre resources, Saint Joseph conference operates a soup kitchen twice a month, serving approximately seventy (70) neighbours in need. Conference members deliver packages of food, personal care items and clothing to shut-ins and visit local Children’s Homes as well as making visits to Homes for the Elderly. They also provide funds for school supplies and assist with medication expenses for those in need. From the very start of our twinning arrangement, both conferences have formed a close bond, and we correspond with each other via email several times a year. Our twin was so happy with our “twinning” they put their joy into action by making a plaque of “Christian Friendship” celebrating our “twinning” and mailed this plaque to us. (See photo on the left). It was their very touching way of highlighting our twinning and thanking us for helping them

serve their neighbours in need. A few years ago, one of their members baked and sent us a delicious “Black Cake” - a traditional Jamaican rum-soaked fruit cake which we enjoyed at our Christmas meeting. Over the years, our two conferences have shared the joys, sorrows and challenges of our ministry. We share our stories and learn from one another. We find that we even



**Setting up for their Christmas “giveaways”.**

handle very similar complaints regarding weather, ours because of cold and theirs because of heat! Sadly, in July,

2023, we received the news that the President of Saint Joseph Conference had passed away after experiencing a number of health issues. She will surely be missed by everyone and both conferences will continue to be inspired by her strong commitment to our cause. A new President has recently been elected. We look forward to continuing our twinning partnership, with its opportunities to share our experiences and offer encouragement in times of difficulty. Indeed, we have learned that twinning is a very enriching road to travel as it has enabled us to gain incredible insight into another community which is foreign to us yet



**Some members of our twin St. Joseph Conference in Spanish Town, Jamaica**

allows us to celebrate the many commonalities of our Vincentian ministry as envisioned by Frederic Ozanam.

*Rita Hotchkiss, Twinning Rep., St. Dominic / St. Andrew Conference, Oakville, ON*

## *“NOT to be FORGOTTEN” and “Wrap-up”*



*Lest we forget our brothers and sisters who served His people, please keep them in your prayers....*

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### UPCOMING DATES TO CIRCLE ON YOUR CALENDAR

April 26 – 27, 2024: ONRC AGA, WINDSOR(Workshops and Guest speakers) – check [ssvp.on.ca](http://ssvp.on.ca) for info.

April 23 – Birthdate of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Born in 1813

April 24 - Birthdate of St. Vincent de Paul, Born in 1581

June 19 – 22: National AGA in Calgary. - check [www.ssvp.ca](http://www.ssvp.ca) for info

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### ONRC – SEEKING YOUR HELP

Our Regional Council is seeking your help/assistance. **The position of ONRC Treasurer needs to be filled.** And looking for a **“webmaster-in-training”**. Webmaster John will train you before he retires.(E-mail is below)

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**COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE:** This Committee has revised the format of the *Vincentimes*. The object is to be more inclusive in reporting the many SSVP happenings across our Region. The stories in this edition originated from Brantford, Burlington, Fort Erie, London, Newcastle, North of Sixty (Nunavut), Oakville and Ottawa as we attempt to bring our Vincentians together as a family, which is one of our VALUES. HAPPY READING! This edition is a late publication of the November issue due to a couple of delays. PLEASE crank up the enthusiasm and get your Conference included by putting your pen to paper. You may submit your stories for inclusion in our *Vincentimes* to Shelley at [shelleyssvp@gmail.com](mailto:shelleyssvp@gmail.com)

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## SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL

**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 our Society 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.

**VISIT our website:** [www.ssvp.on.ca](http://www.ssvp.on.ca)

**Email us at:** [info@ssvp.on.ca](mailto:info@ssvp.on.ca)

