

The Vincentimes

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Friends are like Flowers

*Friends are like flowers,
beautiful flowers.
Friends are like flowers
in the garden of life.
~ Carey Landry*

If you had any contact with Catholic schools and Catholic school children back in the 1970s you probably remember the song 'Friends are like Flowers' by Carey Landry. Now that I have reminded you of it, the ear-worm that is that little ditty will probably stay with you for at least a few days. Forgive me.

The sentiment of that children's song holds true. Friends do enrich our lives. When we are truly in need of a friend, that person can be a life saver.

*Are you a daisy? Are you a rose?
Are you a dandelion?
You can be what you are,
I'll be what I am.
We will be friends
in the garden of life.*

Friends add colour to what might otherwise be a drab world. Nothing brightens a stressful day like the face of a friend. A friend doesn't have to look like me or act the way I do. A friend simply has to be there. And a friend will be there.

A priest who I consider to be an excellent homilist spoke about friends at Sunday mass recently. He had parishioners laughing as he told tales about exploits with his bud-

dies in their young years then skillfully turned his stories about old friends into a message about our 'best' old friends, Jesus and the saints.

As I thought about that homily and the anniversary of the first meeting of Blessed Frederic and his companions, in April 1833, it came to me that we do have some 'best' old Vincentian friends. Sometimes we



A Vincentian Garden of Life

don't know those friends well enough. Perhaps we don't allow them to be our models and our strength because we haven't taken the time to get to know them. Maybe you can ask yourself some questions:

Do I know who attended the first meeting? Who was the first president? (Hint: It wasn't Blessed Frederic.) Or who was the first

Spiritual Advisor?

Have I looked into the Society in Canada? What do I know about Dr. Painchaud? Or George Manley Muir? (I know that George was born in Amherstburg, Ontario where I am a member today.)

More specifically, what do I know about my own conference and its history? Whether you belong to a conference that has existed for a very long time or one that is relatively new, there is much to learn from those old friends who founded our conferences, from their successes and their struggles.

***This is my commandment:
Love one another
as I have loved you.
There is no greater love
than this:
To lay down one's life
for one's friends.
~ John 15: 12, 13***

I know that I am a better Vincentian because of the stories of those who came before me. I can serve Christ in His poor and I can be a friend to those who might think they have no friends, because of the examples set by my 'best' old Vincentian friends. All are flowers in my Vincentian garden of life.

Blessings to all,
~ Denise Bondy, incoming chair of
ONRC Spirituality Committee

National AGA in Hamilton!

Back in June 2011 at the 40th AGA of our great Society, the hosting of the 44th AGA was awarded to the Hamilton Particular Council. The first Conference in Hamilton was started in 1865 and 150 years later in 2015, our Council and Conferences are throwing a huge party and inviting all our Vincentian brothers and sisters to "Touchdown in Hamilton" to help us celebrate this most significant milestone. We wish to assure you that each delegate will have nothing but a grand time while here in Hamilton.

The theme, "Extend a Hand to Our Neighbours in Need", is a modern day derivative of the command by Moses to the Israelites found in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy 15:11 and emphasizes once more that calling or vocation that all Vincentians have answered. This brings to mind the lyrics from a song, by Diana Ross of "The Supremes", that invites all people to "Reach out and touch Somebody's hand, Make this world a better place if you can", which is something that we do by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

We invite you to get to Hamilton in time to take in one of the three tours that we will be offering during the afternoon on Wednesday, June

24th. The first tour will be a bus trip to Niagara Falls (one of the wonders of the world), along with a visit to a winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake for a tour and a taste of the "fruit of the vine" (you may purchase one or two souvenirs there), and if time permits a short stop at a chocolate factory. The second tour will be a Museum Tour of two of Hamilton's National Historic Sites, Whitehern House and Dundurn Castle as well as a tour of the Cathedral Basilica of Christ the King. The third tour will be a visit to the Good Shepherd facilities in downtown Hamilton. When registering for the Conference please indicate your interest in the tours so we may properly prepare. Following the Regional meetings that evening, we will join with our brothers and sisters from the Province of Quebec to celebrate the Feast of St. John the Baptist.

We have a number of workshops set for you and these encompass Spirituality, Systemic Change, Social Justice, Causes of Poverty, some Vincentian History, Society work in the North, the Stores and Twinning (reps from the Caribbean and Peru are expected to join us). Most workshops are repeated at different times to ensure that each delegate gets an opportunity to attend his/her workshop of choice. The Open-

ing Ceremonies will take place at the Royal Botanical Gardens pavilion on Thursday 25th, on Friday 26th we will host a BBQ dinner at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum where we will get to tour the museum before dining in a setting surrounded by vintage planes. Dependent on weather conditions, five people will get an opportunity to take a twenty minute flight in the Hamilton skies in one of the vintage planes. (Tickets for this raffle will be available at the hospitality table). The closing Mass on Saturday will be celebrated at the Cathedral Basilica of Christ the King by a number of Bishops and Priests. The Knights of Columbus will also honour us with their presence. Following the Commissioning Ceremony, the Closing Banquet will be held at the Hamilton Convention Centre.

The members of our Organizing Committee are all very enthusiastic and are anxiously awaiting your arrival to join in our celebration of 150 years of Vincentian service in Hamilton. We also have numerous volunteers that will help you enjoy your attendance at the SSVP AGA2015 as well as your stay in Hamilton. We do hope to see many of you in June.

Guido Kelly, Chair, Organizing Committee, SSVP AGA2015

Upcoming Dates

May 30, 2015 — Social Justice Workshop, Burlington. For more information, please email Jim Paddon, jpsvvp@hotmail.ca or Sarah Davidson, sarah.ssvp@bell.net

June 24-28, 2015 — National AGA in Hamilton, ON. For more information, or to register, please visit <http://ssvp.on.ca/rc/newsdetails.php?item=56>

July 15, 2015 — Deadline for newsletter submissions (please note: we cannot guarantee all submissions will make the next issue, but will do our best to include in up-

coming issues)

September 19, 2015 — Ontario Regional Council AGA Meeting, Guelph. More details to be announced.

Homelessness

An article in the January 11th Toronto Star by Frieda Nagel caught my attention for several reasons. Frieda talks about the elderly, shopping-cart-toting man she bought a coffee for and talked to while waiting for the bus. His, and her, concern was where would he spend this cold night. Frieda ended the letter with this statement;

I read once that a society can be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable, I wonder how we will be judged? Yes how will we be judged as a society and as individuals? We should ask ourselves this question.

We read of homeless people freezing to death on the street at night. It is mind boggling to understand how we can let this happen. Yet every winter we hear the same story.

Why are people on the street, why are they homeless, why are they hungry? So many reasons but these problems still exist. Did the person give up hope, was there mental illness? Who knows the answer? But do the reasons matter? The only important fact is that this exists and we have an obligation as Christians, individuals and just members of the human race to do what we can to alleviate this. We are our brother's keeper

What can we do? Maybe we might

start by advocating for more shelters, higher Social Service payments, more support for mental illness. Advocacy is most important if things are to change. Talk to your councillor, your MPP, your MP, tell them the person's story. Maybe, just by stopping and talking to the individual and by inviting them to join you for a meal you can brighten their day and let them know someone cares. Forget that they are dirty and in rags. Look deeper and see the person, look for the face of Christ in the person we will befriend. Remember, they are someone's brother, sister or parent. If we believe as we, as Christians, were taught, that we are all born equal in the eyes of the Lord and we are loved equally, it will be easy to accept this stranger and treat them as an equal. Often we will hear some amazing stories.

While advocacy is very important, the immediate need is also important. What can you do? The cup of coffee or meal will help. Having Tim Horton or Subway gift cards in your pocket are a great solution. At least they can get something to warm them up. Hey a \$10.00 Subway card gets a 12 in sub and two drinks. The 10.00 Tim card gets a bowl of Chili and coffee. Do this openly so others will see it and possibly do the same. Good actions are

contagious.

I was in a hotel north of Toronto a few weeks ago. It was a cold night and I was talking to the desk clerk when a middle aged man came in. He was unshaven and in old clothes that weren't warm enough and looked like a homeless person. He asked the desk clerk if he could stay inside for a few minutes to get warmed up. She glanced at me, probably wondering if I, as a guest, would approve. I nodded and she said yes. I gave him a Tim Horton's card and the desk clerk said; That was nice of you. I replied that it was nice of her to let him stay. I hoped my actions would soften her heart and make it easier for her to say yes next time.

As I lay in my warm bed that night I thought, couldn't I have done more? If he were a relation or a friend I would have been able to afford it. Why not him?

I could have taken him to a store and gotten some warm clothes and perhaps some shaving and other supplies and something to put them in. Maybe even a hotel room for the night and he could leave the next day cleaned up and ready for a fresh start.

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Notice of Passings

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

Jan. 28, 2015: Donald McGaffee, St Vincent de Paul, Windsor

Feb. 7, 2015: Phil Dutton, St Vincent de Paul, Windsor

Feb. 8, 2015: William Holmes, Mary Immaculate, London

Feb. 22, 2015: Kevin Crozier, St John Vianney, Barrie

May 12, 2015: Deacon Bern Rollings, London Particular Council

**SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT
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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.

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His knowing that he wasn't alone in the world and that someone cared might have been all he needed to get out of the spot he is in. It was a missed opportunity for me. As Christians, if we live our faith, we know we will never be short of what we have given. If we are willing to do the work, we know the Lord will provide as He has.

We can advocate in many other ways. A few years ago I was sitting in a Tim Horton's in Bathurst, New Brunswick. Through the window I saw a raggedly dressed man fish in the outside garbage bin, come up with a half bottle of juice. He kept fishing in the garbage, found another bottle with some in it and poured one into the other and put it in his pocket. When I finished eating I went out but he was nowhere in sight. Another missed opportunity. The thought that came to mind was why was he hungry with an open Tim Hor-

ton's? Would it be possible for a Tim Horton's or another similar place be able to give the person a simple meal at a cost of perhaps 5 or 6.00 a person? If this happened 20 times in a month it would only be \$100.00. Could the store afford it, OR could a Saint Vincent DePaul conference or another food bank support this cost. It is an interesting thought for someone who wanted to advocate to the coffee shop or restaurant owner. We might go a step further and ask the owner to forget the person sleeping in the corner booth on a cold night. Maybe just bring him or her a coffee.

We might have a winter survival kit in the car. It might have a Hat, Gloves, Scarf and Tim Horton or Subway card.

Years ago we did something like this only we had bags for men and bags for women. 250 bags in all. The bags were quite full and had a value of about \$40.00 each. We had some great donors that made this

possible. The woman's had small bottles of Tommy Boy perfume and the men's had shaving soap.. Maybe it is time to start that again.

We are so fortunate when we have the opportunity and resources to help our fellow man.

With all being said we have to recognize that there are so many good people that work hard to provide shelter, food and clothing to so many of our marginalized neighbours in need. We owe them a debt of thanks and our gratitude for living their faith.

~ William Graham