



## Confeder@tioNews

News from the Society around the world...

N° 8 – 31 July 2007

### *It's summer in the Northern hemisphere!*

Holiday time has come for many families throughout the world: but they remain an inaccessible dream for far too many people who just cannot afford them. Aware of the importance of this time of year, and the happiness a few days of real holiday can give away from the daily grind for people in difficulty and especially for children, Vincentians around the world organise recreational opportunities for those they help throughout the rest of the year. Share a bit of happiness!

#### **Holidays for children...**

Sports or cultural days, holiday camps, are offered in many Vincentian countries.



*Olympiad 2007 SSVP New York*

Every year for the past 32 years, the New York conferences provide around 400 children aged between 6 and 12 years from the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx with a week's camping in the country, together with a little bit of formation, but above all with fun activities such as orienteering and Olympic-style games, on land or water, far away from the violence back home. In Ireland, holiday centres welcome over 10,000 people a year. Two of these centres, open between May and September, and run entirely by volunteers, provide 100 places for children.

The SVP in England and Wales also offers a range of options for holidays. In 2005-2006, 1800 children took part in summer camps, while 195 families (770 people) were able to take holidays in caravans owned by the Society.

There are many other countries in which this kind of work goes on, and these camps are active in most of the so-called « rich » Western countries: Belgium for example, France or Australia, where Buddies Days provide activities for the children of poor families.

Some countries with more modest resources also manage to organise similar activities, and their efforts should of course be highlighted. In the Ukraine, the Society offers around 35 children a year the opportunity to go on holiday by the Black Sea, in the Crimea. This also happens in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as Romania, and our brothers and sisters in Egypt and the Lebanon make tremendous efforts to offer holidays every summer to 450 and 400 children respectively.



*Czech SSVP*

#### **... and for Vincentians!**

But Vincentians also deserve holidays, and in many countries the Society arranges summer camps particularly for young people.



*Camp Vincent – England & Wales*

Camp Vincent in England, Campo Ozanam in Italy or Vinnies Youth Camp in Australia... hundreds of young Vincentians meet for workshops, liturgy, social work, spiritual reflection and of course fun, recreation or sporting activities, ... a fine reward for these young people, who for the rest of the year give their time and their love to those most disadvantaged among us, as the charism of our Society requires.

Confédération Internationale de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul – Conseil Général

6, rue de Londres – 75009 Paris – France

Tel. : - + 33 - 1 53 45 87 53 Fax : + 33 - 1 42 61 72 56

[cgi.information@ozanet.org](mailto:cgi.information@ozanet.org) – <http://www.ozanet.org>

Responsable : Erich Schmitz - Rédaction : Bruno Fabre



## Saint Vincent Seized Me By The Hand When I Was Young!

*Our International Spiritual Adviser meets Saint Vincent de Paul...*

My first meeting with Saint Vincent de Paul goes back a long way. I was four or five years old and we lived in Quebec, on the rue Bigaouette, near the chapel of Patro Laval. My mother liked to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament there, for a few minutes, and she took me with her. Two things stand out in my childhood memory: the huge statue of Saint Vincent de Paul and the behaviour of the Father Superior there. The statue attracted my attention first of all, because this old man, with rather a stern face, was holding an infant in his arms, while with his other arm he sheltered a small boy of about my own age. I felt affection for this Monsieur Vincent. While my mum prayed silently, I suddenly saw an old priest come in, a Vincentian father. He had removed his soutane, and his wide, black braces were falling off his white shirt. He wore full breeches, fastened at the knee, long stockings and a pair of worn but clean shoes. He walked slowly, stooped over a pot of hot, soapy water that he carried in one hand, with a mop in the other, and he confused my established image of a priest. He began to wash the floor at the front left hand side of the chapel. My mum whispered to me: « that is another Vincent de Paul ».

On 19 July 1947, while I was still only nine years old, I took part in the magnificent feast of St Vincent, which brought together over a thousand children from the Patros, led by the Vincentian Fathers. The Patro St-Vincent was considered the mother house, because that was where the first sons of Jean-Léon Le Prevost were based when they arrived in Canada, at the explicit request of the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Québec. That was where I first heard the story of the life of Saint Vincent de Paul.



*Father Yvon Laroche celebrating mass in the headquarters' Chapel*

In the spring of the year I was eleven, on a Sunday morning after my father had attended the St. Vincent de Paul conference meeting in the Sacred Heart parish, he took me by the hand and we went together up the Plains of Abraham, to the Patro, since the Church of St Vincent de Paul in Québec was on fire. In its ruins the statue of the saint, who so kindly invited Quebec's citizens to care for the poor, was swept away. I was so sad!

When I was fifteen, a friend of mine, Raymond Bonneau, invited me to join the St-Émile conference in Patro Laval. It had around twenty young members.

It was there I first heard the Rule of the Society being read. Our spiritual adviser, Brother Maheux, nourished our faith with the spirituality of Saint Vincent. At Christmas, the president sent me and two other members to take a hamper to a very poor family. When we came back, we shared with the conference our emotion on seeing the children dance around the hamper. As rather thoughtless adolescents we also said how surprised we were to see the mother bring out a camera to take a picture of the scene. We said something like: "Poor people shouldn't buy things like that...". But Brother Maheux told us straight: « When you come to the conference, you don't judge the poor, you love them. Saint Vincent taught us to see them with the eyes of Jesus. That isn't what you have done ». We learned a sharp lesson there.

As the years went by, a strong desire filled me, to become a Religious within this family, founded by the first President of the St-Sulpice conference in Paris, Jean-Léon Le Prevost. I have now lived that life for 48 years, and I still sing: « *I am a little brother of Saint Vincent de Paul, I have nothing here on earth, I accept alms; it's a hidden life, doing nothing tra..la..la, I have given it to God in this family. Consecrated to the little ones, to the poor, to the workers, there is no assurance that we can always shine, but our hearts are joyful because they are given in true charity and simplicity*».

Yvon Laroche, sv



## *Did you know... ?*

The donations to Council General, from Councils, Conferences, SVP members and others, are spent entirely on the cause for which they have been given. They are therefore allocated to « funds » (disaster fund, Tsunami fund, Kosovo fund, etc.).

Of these funds, the **solidarity fund** is especially important, because it allows us to finance projects for countries or causes for which the Confederation has no money available. Unfortunately, this fund is very low at the moment. Sending your gifts to the Solidarity fund will allow the CGI to finance these « forgotten » projects, while assuring the donors that every penny given will go to the poor!

The second meeting of the Africa Commission will take place in Nairobi, Kenya, from 21 to 24 September 2007, with all members present, to finalise the projects already presented by the countries, as well as to look at funding forecasts.

Mr. Thomas Tan, Coordinator of the Asia 1 group, had the idea of distributing a manual, similar to the International Rule, during his visits to the countries in his group, but including basic texts such as the Twinnage manual and the VinPaz manual, as well as a small selection of prayers. This manual will soon be available in all the official languages of the Confederation! Check for it shortly on ozanet.org

### *Help us support the Society*

#### *Dernière minute...*

##### *Graves inondations*

After England and Mali, Burkina Faso has just been affected by violent rainstorms and floods...

Flooding, cold, heat waves, the climate throughout the world is claiming countless victims and damage this year!

**Vincentians need your generous help to come to their aid!**

You can send your cheques to the Confederation's head office, or make bank transfers to:

Banque CIC- Paris Bac  
2 Bd Raspail  
75007 Paris, FRANCE

Account n°. FR76 3006 6100 4100 0105 8120 129

In the name of: Confédération Internationale -  
Société de St Vincent de Paul

### **Budapest: Centre North Europe Group 3 meeting**

30 delegates from Eastern European countries met in Budapest from 26 to 30 July.



*Family picture*

The Coordinator, Erwin Tigla (Romania), initiated this event, with financial help from Renovarbis, a German organisation for the Church in countries of the former Soviet bloc.

The delegates, who represented around 200 Conferences and over 3000 members, gave their reports on their Vincentian work in conditions of great poverty for the people in their countries: regular visits to families, help to children and old people, all given with courage and effectiveness

If they own houses or other premises, Vincentians invite anyone who so wishes to come and spend time with them, where the members help with whatever is needed, offering those who come some recreation and relaxation to bring joy into often very sad lives. In some countries, it is often orphans who really need this love, which can in some small way make up for the loss of their families.

In Slovakia, the Conferences have built a house with the help of poor unemployed people, who now live there and produce fruit, vegetables and meat.

Communications within the Society are fairly difficult, because of the multitude of languages used within the group. Meetings like this one, attended by representatives of the Confederation's International Council General, (Vice-President General, Michael. Thio, Vice-President for Structure, Brian. O'Reilly, Secretary General, Erich. Schmitz and the two correspondents to the CTT, Marie-Noëlle Desbrosses and Ulrike Mattfeld) are thus very important.



## Mali – Togo – Senegal : a Mission to expand the Society!

The Society is present in most African countries. There are still areas that are difficult for Christians to access, like Mali where Islam is the dominant religion (96 %). Despite this obstacle, the Society of St Vincent de Paul succeeded in establishing itself there in 2002. This is an interesting foundation, because it shows what can happen when the first members of the Society in a country receive Vincentian formation. This is what happened in August 2003 at Sévaré (Mopti).

This « seminar » helped to solidify the first foundations, with a Central Council being set up in Bandiagara to supervise, coordinate and develop the Society's activities. Alongside the growth of the SSVP in Mali, the Society's position in a neighbouring country, Senegal, which only has two conferences, also needed a visit to reinvigorate the members and the Vincentian project. As for Togo, pastures new for the SSVP, this too needed a visit. An embryonic conference was surviving as best it could in the north of the country, in Kara; and a group of young people were based in Lomé, full of enthusiasm but needing support and recognition.



*The Conference in Goudomp (Senegal)*

The « Togo – Mali – Sénégal » mission was therefore organised, supported by Council General, to respond to these different situations. It took place between 14 and 29 April 2007, led by O. Béthoux (member of the Africa Commission and the Technical Commission responsible for expansion), together with Maurice Konkobo (Africa 1 group 1 coordinator) then in Togo by Constant Togbe, National President of SSVP Bénin (Togo), and in Mali by Henri Togo, representing the Central Council of Mopti. Meetings were organised in each country with local Conferences, leaders of movements, priests and religious.

On the agenda: exchanging experiences, problems found, training and conferences about the Society, speaking at Sunday masses.

**This itinerant « village to village » formation**, wherever conferences are found, reaches the Vincentian members who are least able to receive formation any other way. Another advantage of this kind of mobile training is that we meet the SVP members where they live. We were sometimes able to stay with them, sharing their daily lives. There is nothing better able to teach the reality of life, and raise awareness of how the commitment of our African brothers and sisters is a great witness of lived service, in often very difficult material conditions.

The training we have given, not in any academic way, however, is based on a document called « conference member's guide », which although not perfect, at least is available.

During our meetings we stressed the fact that the work of Blessed Ozanam cannot be reduced to mere philanthropy, useful though that is. We also aim to develop the spiritual and ecclesial dimension of this Catholic lay association.

The meeting with young people in Lomé concerns us. Some conferences can bring together Catholics and evangelical Christians. The challenge is to live the ecumenical dimension without betraying the Catholic nature of our Society: **faithfulness and openness**.

A « mission » of 3000 km from Bénin to Dakar via Burkina. This was a short but hectic mission lasting two weeks, with a few days' rest in Ségou waiting for a meeting with the diocesan bishop. The mission team consisted of a Burkinabé, a Malian and a Frenchman. In short, we brought to the mission our own riches and temperaments, enabling us to understand all the more that we still bear the message of Blessed Ozanam for today. We have sown the seed. The harvest is not our concern.

This itinerant work, visiting conferences in the most inaccessible places, for meeting, listening, sharing and forming is essential to the Society. It is in contact with reality on the ground, the lived experience of our brothers and sisters in the most remote, not to say forgotten places, that we deepen our understanding of the message of Ozanam at the crossroads of this cultural diversity.

Without the desire to go beyond what is known, both geographically and intellectually, our Vincentian practice will inevitably fade away. Our brothers and sisters all around the world have their own wealth to share with us. We have to see the **expansion of the SSVP as essential to our common journey**.