



Friends of St Vincent de Paul

Issue 22 | Spring 2018



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Meeting our members
in India

Cardinal Vincent Nichols shares
his views on loneliness

Sweet treats in
Beaconsfield

Dear Friends,

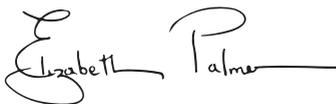
On 24th March we celebrated Oscar Romero's feast day, it was a special celebration given the fact that on 7th March Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to Blessed Oscar Romero meaning that he will be canonised. Although they lived in different times the lives of both Blessed Oscar Romero and St Vincent were marked by their dedication to the poor.

Blessed Oscar Romero was once asked to explain the phrase "option for the poor" which comes from Catholic Social Teaching. He replied...

"I offer you this by way of example. A building is on fire and you're watching it burn, standing and wondering if everyone is safe. Then someone tells you that your mother and your sister are inside that building. Your attitude changes completely. You're frantic; your mother and sister are burning and you'd do anything to rescue them even at the cost of getting charred. That's what it means to be truly committed. If we look at poverty from the outside, as if we're looking at a fire, that's not to opt for the poor, no matter how concerned we may be. We should get inside as if our own mother and sister were burning. Indeed it's Christ who is there, hungry and suffering."

Oscar Romero made the ultimate sacrifice and was murdered for his passion for justice for the poor. Vincent lived a relatively long life, but dedicated himself to the service of the poor, eschewing the wealth and riches he originally sought as a young man.

Few can emulate such self-sacrifice but the St Vincent de Paul Society enables a lay vocation of service to the poor, accessible to all. We seek to "opt for the poor" through our service and supporters, bringing those who are often forgotten to the forefront.



Elizabeth Palmer, CEO



SVP Shop in Brighouse

– St Vincent's Helping Locally

On 16th November 2017 the Bishop of Leeds, Marcus Stock made an official visit to the latest SVP shop to open in West Yorkshire. He did so in response to a request from Marie Atherton, Leeds Central Council President to formally open and bless the shop which opened its doors earlier in the year.



Bishop Marcus cutting the ribbon on the Brighouse Doors

Bishop Marcus is a great supporter of the SVP and was delighted to accommodate Marie's request. On arrival at the shop he chatted to Marie, members of staff, customers and SVP members and quickly became at ease in the shop. During the visit introductions and thanks were made for the formal opening then there was a short service and blessing.

This shop opening was made possible when much loved and fondly remembered SVP member Bernard Preston died and left SVP Leeds Central Council a large gift in his will. Bernard was a great supporter of the SVP Special Works and would be honoured to know that his legacy is helping our Society support disadvantaged people in Leeds. Bishop Marcus presented a Plaque to Susie Gandy, the Shop Manager, for display in the shop and to commemorate Bernard.

A great deal of hard work was undertaken in decorating and furnishing, sourcing and preparing the stock in readiness for the shop opening in April 2017. This is a great testament to the hard working team of staff and volunteers who have laboured long and hard, fixing leaks, cleaning walls, windows and floors and then unpacking and preparing for display all the clothing and household items.

St Vincent's in Brighouse has quickly become established on the charity shop circuit in the town and has gained a reputation for supplying good quality items at affordable prices, friendly welcomes and opportunities for volunteers to join the team.

Sevenoaks goes Sausages!

The St Thomas of Canterbury SVP Conference in Sevenoaks love a good sausage roll!

Members decided they would share their passion for these tasty winter treats, by holding a sausage roll sale at their church.

In total the sale made £283.56 profit which will go to the people of South Sudan and support vital work in our baby feeding centres. This has been a very successful

way of raising money over the last four years and the Conference wanted to share their idea with other SVP groups or supporters who may be inspired to do something similar.

The idea is to “keep it simple”. Members set up a stand in the church porch selling one main fresh product: “sausage rolls”. There was a combination of meat or vegetarian priced at £1 each. That’s as complicated as it gets. Parishioners now get excited when they see the Conference’s announcement in the newsletter reminding them of the sale. Many came back for seconds on the day.



HAM uses its Mind

In February Holy Apostles and Martyrs (HAM) SVP invited the local branch of MIND to come and give a training session on Mental Health Awareness.



Fifteen members, who had all joined the last Conference since the last session in 2013, attended the day, which focused on what mental health problems are, the stigma attached to them and strategies for keeping yourself in good mental health. There was plenty to learn and discuss and everyone felt they had acquired useful knowledge and skills to help in our work.

Parish Pancakes!

SVP members at St. Teresa's Parish church, Beaconsfield are busy running Coffee mornings each Tuesday.

On Shrove Tuesday they hosted a pancake day for all members of the parish.

All donations were used to fund education of nurses in India. The event was well attended and over £300 was raised. Some of the children on the Confirmation course attended and helped out with serving, clearing & washing up, help that was much appreciated!



Refugee Collection

The SVP at St Thomas' RC Church Sevenoaks organised their second appeal in September 2017 for clothes, sleeping bags and blankets for the refugees of northern France.



Conference President, Phil Kerton, collected the bags on behalf of Seeking Sanctuary a charity organising assistance for refugees through faith communities.

He took the donations straight to Calais where they were immediately distributed and appreciatively received amidst many heartfelt thanks.

'The situation in Calais is harder than it has ever been' wrote the one of the volunteers. There are fewer donations and volunteers now but still approximately 800 exiles in Calais and almost 1,000 nearby.

Tower House at Christmas

During Christmas 2017 Dr Luke Fernandez and Sargent Major Monty Mike Mason (pictured) were part of the celebrations that saw over 50 older people come for Christmas dinner at Tower House support centre in Brighton. Both members and staff were given glowing feedback about our services at this time of year in a recent survey.

Tower House goes from strength to strength as the service starts to scale up. In December our wonderful volunteers got the kitchen fully up and running and are now ready to serve more food three days a week. In February we started our new “Healing Music” sessions and on Valentine’s Day we had a Jing massage service coming in to offer free sessions to all people who come to the centre. In March we were proud to announce the start of a new dementia café funded by the National Lottery and are also looking for funding to start Yoga and Zumba sessions.

“The primary aim of St Vincent’s Tower House is to combat the poverty of loneliness experienced by older people, as well as give even more support to carers”



CSP Manager Thomas Gillespie, Dr Luke Fernandez and Sargent Major Monty Mike Mason at the Centre

The primary aim of St Vincent’s Tower House is to combat the poverty of loneliness experienced by older people, as well as give even more support to carers. We are certainly on course to achieve this objective and are already linking in with Local Authority commissioners of services and the CCG health leads to ensure we meet the varying needs of the local people.

If you would like further information about what we are doing in Brighton and Hove at St Vincent’s Tower House please contact our National Office.

Partnerships in India



In 1960 Pope John XXIII urged the Society to look outward and support the poor overseas as well as domestically, thus the concept of Twinnage was born. Conferences in the UK are twinned with one overseas.

Each Conference prays for each other at their regular Conference meetings, exchange letters, Christmas and Easter cards, the UK Conference provides £30 per quarter to a Conference enabling them to expand their work for the poorest people in their communities.

From 6th – 24th February 2018 three of our National Office and Twinnage managers travelled to India, a country with 55 million Catholics and 7,200 SVP Conferences, in order to learn more about the operation of the Society in India from our twinned Conferences and observe how they live out the Vincentian Mission.

Staff covered most of India, from Assam in the north to Kerala in the south east and visited with more than eight Central Councils, over twenty Conferences and several projects including disabled children’s homes, care homes and Vincentian schools.

Newly appointed Twinnage Officer Sebastian Muir was blown away by the vast amount of work undertaken by SVP India, especially in light of the fact many people in the North, East and rural areas face religious discrimination. He said “I came away with a deep sense of humility having witnessed so much inspiring action by ordinary humble people.

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The Vincentian Society in India is full of energy and growth, rising to the many challenges the country faces in an increasingly suspicious and in some cases hostile environment”.

The people helped by Conferences typically have no permanent work; they are daily workers who earn between £25 and £70 per month max, out of which they have to meet all expenses – rent, tax, food, clothing, utilities, fuel and electricity (if available).

It leaves little over for any emergency medical needs or schooling which is vital as it enables children to get better paid and more stable jobs. Conferences use funds they have raised themselves and funds from the UK to provide food, clothing, medical and school fees for as many as five ‘adopted’ families.

Key though is the moral and spiritual support; they really appreciate that somebody cares.



Children from one of our Vincentian schools

Christianity continues to grow rapidly in India, over 100 new Conferences were formed in the last year by SVP India and there are now over 80,000 members. Their spiritual devotion and practical action are stand out examples of Vincentian attitude. At the moment 42% of India’s Conferences have UK “twins” and we have plans to increase this to 55% over the next two years.

The visit to India showed us that Twinnage is more than just Conference to Conference support it enables a whole range of other activities and is vital in maintaining a bond of Vincentian spirit between our all countries where we have Twinnage. We remain inspired by our Indian brothers and sisters’ work and will continue working together to build an even stronger community.

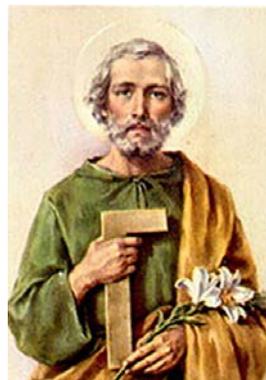
If you would like more information on our Twinnage projects please call our National Office on **0207 703 3030** or visit svp.org.uk/twinnage-and-overseas-aid



One of SVP India’s happy beneficiaries, Radhanath flanked by Twinnage Officer Sebastian Muir (left) and former Twinnage Officer Terry Brown

Messengers of Faith

– Saint Joseph



Joseph lived as a simple carpenter happily engaged to Mary until she returned from visiting relatives three months pregnant with a child that could not be his.

Mary tried to explain the child was conceived of the Holy Spirit however this would be difficult for anyone to believe and Joseph made plans to divorce Mary, although quietly because he was a “righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame” - Matthew 1:19.

Shortly after Mary arrived back home an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said “Do not be afraid to take your wife Mary home, for what has been conceived in her is by Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” - Matthew 1:20, 21.

The angel’s message made everything clear for Joseph and he accepted and understood the importance of the child and his role as his corporeal father.

Without delay he took Mary to his home and they married. Once Jesus was born he remained obedient to God by bringing Mary and Jesus to Bethlehem and caring for them over a number of years through quiet faith and courage.

The Bible does not make much mention of Joseph however it describes him as a “just” man, a highly valued quality. When the Bible speaks of God “justifying” someone, it means that God transforms a person so that the individual shares somehow in God’s own holiness. Joseph’s holiness is demonstrated through his complete openness to all God asked of him and the giving of himself wholly to God.

There is a lot we can learn from the character of Joseph, he obeyed the Lord unquestionably because his faith and love for the Lord propelled him to do. He was unconcerned with fanfare or accolades and his happiness came from the knowledge he was serving in the Lord’s mission.

Joseph is regarded as the patron saint of workers, in 1870 he was declared patron of the universal church by Pope Pius IX, and in 1955 Pope Pius XII established May 1st as the “Feast of St. Joseph the Worker” to counter the Communists’ May Day.

“Joseph’s holiness is demonstrated through his complete openness to all God asked of him”



SVP Summer Camp

As the weather warms up many of you will be thinking about summer activities for the kids. For families experiencing poverty school holiday activities can be difficult to arrange due to financial constraint.

We provide camps for boys and girls at seven sites, mainly for children who experience various forms of disadvantage, taking referrals from teachers, community support workers and SVP Conferences,

places are offered at a reasonable price and in some cases paid for by Conferences.

As well as a chance to have fun and make new friends the camps offer children a sense of belonging that is often absent from their lives. Many enjoy it so much they return as volunteers in the future!

Our Membership Administration Assistant, Rebecca Montgomery, gives her account of her first stint as a Camp Volunteer.

My first time at St John Bosco Camp:

Insights by Rebecca Montgomery



As a seasoned scout camper I thought I had some idea of what to expect at Camp, however, the combination of 97 girl campers and 35 Sisters and Brothers makes up for an entirely different structure.

Camp activities included rock climbing, a 60ft inflatable obstacle course, laser tag, a glowstick party, football zorbing, entertaining science lessons from Professor Kaos and visits to a nearby swimming pool. Each year an educational aspect is added, and this year it was 'Horrible History!' We excavated coins in a sandpit, moulded our own fossils and played "feel for it", which involved sticking our hands in various tubs of baked beans, glacier cherries and sweetcorn to find gold coins.

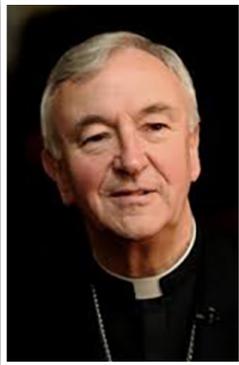
The annual Bosco fair also took place with around 20 different stalls with various games and activities, and a talent show held on the last evening where each tent presented an act from singing, gymnastics, dancing, poems or pieces of art. Despite the minor disaster of many tents flooding after a torrential amount of rain, the campers loved it. To them it was another exciting story to tell their friends and family, not to mention who else can say they have had a sleepover of 40 girls in one huge tent!

Let's not forget that whilst not all children who attend are Catholic, this is a Catholic Camp where Catholic morals are integrated into the daily life. There is a full Mass each day led by various visiting priests and prayers are said at every meal. On the first day, every camper produces a prayer hand which is arranged into a reef and presented to the priest and, on the last day, a reflection corner is set up so the girls can discuss what they have enjoyed most and the things they have learned from one another.

For many girls on camp this is the first holiday they will have this year, for some the only holiday during their childhood, and also their first time camping; it is a chance to create memories and form lasting friendships. A number of the girls couldn't wait to come back next year, much like the Brothers and Sisters, many of whom are returning campers. It goes to show that once you're a part of Bosco Camp there's no turning back!

"For many girls on camp this is the first holiday they will have this year, for some the only holiday during their childhood"

Loneliness – a human problem we can all help to conquer



In a highly reflective interview SVP Patron Cardinal Vincent Nichols tells our Senior Media and Communication Officer Anita Boniface about his thoughts on loneliness.

“I think loneliness is at its essence a sense of being left out, of being excluded”, he responds.

The Cardinal feels loneliness has profound effect on the lives of many people in this country, especially older people. “I do think that there is a crisis of loneliness especially amongst the elderly,” he says. “They may live alone, so they are alone. But their personal experiences are one of being forgotten, left out, omitted, and abandoned.”

These sensitive and personal experiences of being ‘left out’ and ‘forgotten’ make loneliness a difficult subject to broach; the condition is often hidden and pushed aside in conversations.

“If we really want to tackle the problem of loneliness we must never forget the role that every single person can play”

With greater numbers of people now known to feel isolated and ‘forgotten’, the government has recently appointed MP Tracey Crouch as the UK’s first Minister for Loneliness. The rising epidemic of loneliness is often linked to government funding cuts but the Cardinal feels the causes are “complex” citing “financial, political and managerial” reasons.

“The strongest point I wish to make is that everyone has neighbours. If we really want to tackle the problem of loneliness we must never forget the role that every single person can play. We should never simply reduce the problem of loneliness to an official problem. It is a human problem and we all have a part to play in breaking it,” he says.

The Cardinal is a strong advocate of charities that offer friendship and emotional support to people often living on their own. He believes the work of our members is a “process of rebuilding a network of friendship in the life of an older person” and describes this friendship building as “the counterpoint of loneliness”.



While older people are often left isolated and feel abandoned following deaths of family members and friends, there are other groups in society who are left isolated and lonely because of the prejudice and fear with which they are perceived.

The Cardinal believes that these people, among who are refugees and asylum seekers, need to be brought into the public consciousness as potential friends to be welcomed and supported in society.

They are our 'new neighbours' and should be treated with neighbourly love. As the Gospels remind us and as Pope Francis echoes: "we are never to lose sight of the dignity of the person, so that each asylum seeker is seen not just part of a number, but as an individual with a story" he says.

By reaching out to people living on the margins of society such those experiencing homelessness, enduring mental illness, seeking asylum, and living alone without family, we will call them in from the peripheries, and help them integrate more fully into society. In doing so we can help fight loneliness, and develop more enriching relationships, for everyone.

"We should never simply reduce the problem of loneliness to an official problem. It is a human problem and we all have a part to play in breaking it"

Loneliness is my distress



Visiting people dealing with loneliness and isolation is at the core of our work; Conference President Barry Kirby gives his account of visitation with a local man named Tom.

Tom Smart lives alone in Wavertree, Liverpool. A local SVP connected with Tom, following a call

we received from his district nurse who asked if the SVP could help Tom by visiting him. This all came about as just previous to this call; I and a member of my Walton Vale SVP had made a brief presentation to a large meeting of NHS staff with the aim of promoting the SVP and what we do and our aim to reach out to those in need and particularly those who are lonely.

On our first meeting with Tom we quickly realised that Tom had limited mobility and depended on his electric scooter to get about. Almost his first words were “I am lonely”. He told us that he spent hours and hours on his own - despite the brief visits from carers and other residents in the sheltered accommodation where he lived in his small flat.

“His gratitude to us for visiting him was so joyous that he really lifted us and gave us the fortitude and motivation to carry on”

In all my time with the SVP I have never witnessed anyone who thanked us in such a heartfelt manner. His gratitude to us for visiting him was so joyous that he really lifted us and gave us the fortitude and motivation to carry on and give even to more to help those in need.

Tom does not live in the Walton Vale area of Liverpool and so we contacted the nearest SVP Conference who now also visit Tom.

Just before the SVP started visits, Tom had, on his own, decided to do something about his loneliness and had started attending afternoon classes at a nearby centre. The subject he choose was ‘creative writing’. Uniquely he started to write his projects in a unique poetic style – here is an example...

“My scooter on the landing overnight it is charging without which I could not shop and housebound would be my lot.”

I assist him by typing up his work and also help him to do research for his projects.

He was so appreciative of our visits I asked him to write something about the SVP and I was touched when I read his poem. How often does anyone say

Thank God for the SVP?

The SVP

By Tom Smart

Barry from the SVP
was a name given to me
To him I said,
loneliness is my distress

An old, old Society
guided by the love of God
Weekly visits they do proud

And from the start it was plain to see
A good man had been sent to me

Interest in my hobby showed
how my confidence has grown
From the interest, he has shown

Barry is now my friend which
I'm sure will always be
Thank God for the SVP

New Friend appeal

Invite one of your Friends
to become our Friend

SVP FRIEND APPLICATION FORM:

Please ensure all sections are filled out and the form signed before returning it to us.

1. YOUR DETAILS

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other

Full Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Email

2. I WISH TO MAKE A DONATION BY DIRECT DEBIT

Frequency (please tick) Monthly Yearly

Amount

Commencement date (1st/15th) / /

Branch Sort Code

Account Number

3. GIFT AID MY DONATION

The SVP can boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate.

Yes, I would like the St Vincent de Paul Society to claim Gift Aid on the direct debit detailed on this form. I am a UK tax-payer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signature

Date / /

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DATA PROTECTION STATEMENT

Your personal details will be used to process your donation and will not be passed on to any third party except for the sole purpose of facilitating this payment. From time to time we may wish to contact you to update you on our work and activities.

Please indicate your preferred method of contact:

Email Post Phone

I would like to receive:

Friends Newsletter
 Information about SVP or SVP events
 Information about leaving a gift to the SVP in my Will.

A Final Word from our

National SVP President

Dear Friends,

Since I became National President in November 2017 I have been very busy getting acquainted with such a varied and exciting role.



Inspired by attending the Vincentian Family 400th Anniversary Symposium in Rome in October 2017, and filled with the joy of the Vincentian charism and community, I began the privileged task of appointing a new Board of Trustees and addressing the stewardship of the Society for the next five years. The motivation to do so is easy; there is so much need, both material and emotional, all around us. In St Vincent's words "What must be done? "The call to serve those in need is as great today as it was in Vincent's time.

Our mission to combat loneliness and isolation is also shared with the Government who have shown concern for the rise in numbers of people affected by isolation. The Prime Minister has recently appointed one of her ministers to lead on issues connected to loneliness, implementing one of the main recommendations of the Jo Cox Commission; she stated 'For far too many people, loneliness is the sad reality of modern life.'

Over 80,000 beneficiaries were visited by our members last year and many more were made welcome at our projects and support centres. Last month we held Trustee training at our Tower House project. The Trustees

were delighted to be able to talk to staff and volunteers about the fantastic work being done at the centre for isolated elderly people. I am also very much looking forward to visiting the newly opened Vinnies Cafe at Blackfriars in Newcastle where a new drop-in lunch service has been launched. Vinnies is providing free hot meals to people in need in the area and a place where those who are lonely can come and feel welcomed. This is another example of SVP members, staff and volunteers working together to combat what was described by the Jo Cox Commission as "the giant evil of our time".

There are still times in my busy life when I experience feelings of loneliness and I can only imagine how it must feel for those whose normal state of being is isolation. Although to some it may seem a small act I know the great difference a visit from our members or a welcome at our projects can make to someone who sees no one else that day or even that week.

Helen O'Shea, National President

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter by email as a PDF attachment, please let us know by contacting: info@svp.org.uk

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