

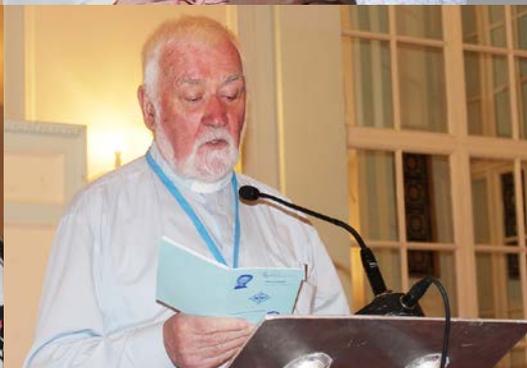


Vincentian Concern

St Vincent de Paul Society (England and Wales)
Charity Registration No: 1053992 • Registered in England & Wales No: 3174679



ISSUE 54 Autumn 2017 95p



REFLECTIONS ON WELCOMING THE STRANGER





Finding our own vocation



The Communications Committee has identified members, the clergy and the Catholic population as the most important people to address. I would like to think that through VC, our new website and regular email bulletins communication with members has improved. Regular features in the Catholic Press and Awareness Month are raising our profile with Catholics, but are we succeeding with our clergy?

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It starts with the hierarchy. We send our annual report to all our Bishops and many acknowledge receipt and are complimentary about our achievements in increasing membership and our work with young people. But are we well known by our priests? Many priests know little about the Society. On hearing of our works, one priest commented that the SVP should learn the difference between secrecy and confidentiality.

Undoubtedly there is room for improvement. One initiative has been to talk to seminarians. During one such talk to the Venerable English College in Rome, the 30 or so students were most attentive with positive questions like "when I am in a parish, how do I start a Conference?" They even made a generous donation from their small charity fund.

In mid-July, I attended the ordination of one of those students in St Anne's Cathedral, Leeds. Fr Elliott Wright was ordained by Bishop Marcus Stock in the presence of over 60 clergy. I am sure you will join me in wishing Fr Elliott a long priesthood with many blessings and joys. It was indeed a joyful occasion for all concerned and during his homily Bishop Marcus talked about the responsibility of the clergy to support one another, especially through difficult times. From the Gospel reading (Matthew 10:24-38), he reminded us not to fear our responsibility to proclaim the Gospel in our daily lives and not to let the enormity of the task discourage us from doing our best. He reminded priests to support and encourage one another on the way. His words apply to us in our Vincentian vocation. We should be even more supportive to our fellow members, especially those few who take positions of responsibility.

In that respect I would like to thank those who have supported me during my five year term including many clergy and members of the Vincentian family. I have had great support from those who have served as Board members. We have not always agreed on everything, but one does not appoint Trustees because they share all your opinions. I sincerely thank all those members who have served on the Board (including Fr Paul and Fr Fergus who have served as spiritual advisers) under my presidency and likewise all those who have served on National Council and its many committees. You must look back in pride on what has been achieved. I would also like to thank our staff, most notably our CEO Elizabeth Palmer (and deputy - Kate Nightingale who stepped in for a year during Elizabeth's adoption leave in 2013). I always look forward to walking into Larcom Street and our various other premises, and feeling welcomed and recognising the great work they achieve.

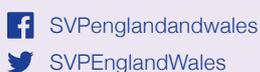
To our members, benefactors and those we seek to serve, thank you for your support. I have met many great people and been inspired by them and what they do. Coming from different viewpoints we cannot always agree on everything, but most of our communication has been thoughtful and Vincentian in nature. We do have a wonderful Society, a true family.

My final word must go to my successor Helen O'Shea, our 19th National President. Helen has been a great Board member and I know will go on to be a great President. I am sure you will join me in praying for her and especially to the Holy Spirit to guide and energise her to move the Society forward, to proclaim the Good News in all that it does and spread the love that Jesus Christ has commanded.

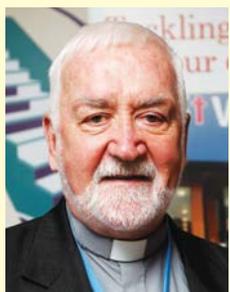
God bless, yours in St Vincent and Blessed Frédéric

Adrian Abel, National President

Keep in touch with us:



Scan to visit our website or go to: www.svp.org.uk



Our Lady and the EU

At a time when Great Britain is in turmoil around Brexit and already beginning to negotiate it's final withdrawal from the European Union, it may be interesting to consider

another angle on the matter – the place of Our Lady in the EU. We go back to the familiar flag, twelve golden stars in a circle on a background of deep blue. Where did it come from, what is its meaning?

Most flags carry deep symbolic meaning: The Union Jack combines the crosses of Saints George, Patrick and Andrew – the symbols of the patron saints of England, Ireland and Scotland. Similarly, the flag of the USA with its cluster of stars, one for each state, proclaims a union of differences. What then of the European Flag. Has it a symbolic meaning too?

It dates back to the early 1950's before there was a European Union, just a small European Economic Community, with just six members. Arsène Heitz, a French draughtsman, born in Strasbourg, who worked at the Council of Europe, is regarded as its creator. Heitz worked in the postal service of the Council of Europe while a contest was held for the best design of a new flag. He submitted 21 of the 101 designs that were received. He is a devout Catholic and was inspired by the twelve-star halo of the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven of the Book of Revelation, and also attested to by St Catherine Labouré in the Apparitions of Our Lady in 1830 – which gave us the Medal of the Immaculate Conception – the Miraculous Medal.

It is often said that when Catholic workers were building the motorways of Britain they buried Miraculous Medals in the foundations, to bring a blessing on all who travelled on them.



It is also sometimes said that when some buildings were under construction for organisations which were opposed to the Catholic way, Miraculous Medals were also slipped into their foundations so that one day those for whom the building was being prepared would be converted and cease their opposition to the Catholic Church.

So maybe too the Miraculous Medal, and the intercession of Our Lady are hidden in the foundations of the European Union. What surprises lie ahead for all of Europe, by the intercession of Our Lady – already over 50 years of peace in Europe? Perhaps the next miracle will be an end to the gulf of separation between rich and poor.

Paul C Roche CM.

A message from Fr Paul taken from his presentation about the Vincentian Charism during the SVP's National Meeting 2017

"In St Paul's letter to the Corinthians St Paul lists gifts.

There is a diversity; a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit.

There is a diversity of ministries, but the Lord is always the same.

There is a diversity of works, but the same Lord works in all.

The Spirit reveals his presence in each one with a gift, which is also a service.

A gift from God is not for one's own glorification, but always to be used in the service of others.

The gift of charism has been given to St Vincent de Paul. There's many ways of living the Gospel but St Vincent had one particular way.

And you can take it from Matthew Chapter 25: I was hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, a prisoner and you cared for me. And as you did it for one of these the least of my brothers, you did it for me

So the gift of service given to St Vincent de Paul is very specific. It is to welcome the stranger."



Members' Info

Awareness Month in your parish



The St Vincent de Paul Society



Welcomes the stranger

As this issue of the VC goes to press, Awareness Month 2017 is underway - look out for the full-page advert in the 8th September edition of the Catholic Herald.

This year's theme, "Welcome the Stranger" is supported by four colourful and high impact A4 posters highlighting homelessness, grief, loneliness and hunger, together with ideas on how to promote the week in your parish. A final, A3 poster brings the theme together under the statement "The Society of St Vincent de Paul Welcomes the Stranger".

If you have not yet displayed the posters in your parish, it may not be too late!

Fundraising Regulation Update

Fundraising Preference Service launched 6th July 2017

Too much pressure to give?



Do you want charities to stop contacting you or someone you care about, but don't know where to start?

This new service allows members of the public to choose to stop email, telephone, addressed post and text messages from any selected charity.

Following receipt of a request, the Regulator contacts the individual to confirm that it has been received and passed on to the charity and will inform them that it may take up to 28 days for the request to become effective.



By using the Fundraising Preference Service, you will be able to stop these charity communications:

- Addressed letters
- Text messages
- Emails
- Telephone calls



FUNDRAISING PREFERENCE SERVICE

Call us on 0300 3033 517

CONTROL YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

You can also complete a request and find out more via the Fundraising Preference Service website: www.fundraisingpreference.org.uk

Calls cost no more than calls to geographic (01 and 02) numbers and must be included in inclusive minutes and discount schemes in the same way. Calls from landlines are typically charged up to 10p per minute; calls from mobiles typically cost between 3p and 40p per minute. Calls from landlines and mobiles are included in free call packages.

If an individual continues to receive communications from a charity more than 28 days after submitting a request, this may constitute a breach of the Code of Fundraising Practice and the Regulator may take further action.

The SVP has already received and actioned several requests. Where there is a clear link with the National Office, the Fundraising team will ensure no further contact is made with the individual. Where there is no evidence of a link, the local District Council President and Conference President will be informed, so that they can take the appropriate action.

Health & Safety when visiting

There are a number of things that can happen to Conference members and volunteers when they are visiting those who are sick, elderly and / or lonely. In the first of the articles on this subject we are going to concentrate on:

- Slips, trips and falls and
- Violent and aggressive behaviour

The practical measures you can take will vary in different situations and this article can't provide specific guidance on reducing the risks but will help you to think about how to manage the risks.

Slips, trips and falls

These can have a serious impact on the lives of persons visiting and those being visited. They account for around half of all the major injuries each year. Many factors can cause slips, trips and falls and include: flooring type • footwear • levels of lighting contrast between floors • obstructions or other trip hazards.

When carrying out your visits the factors to consider include:

- Slippery or wet surfaces in kitchens, bathrooms, main entrances, etc where slip resistant flooring would be expected
- Obstructions, both temporary and permanent e.g. trolleys, cables, items not stored away
- Trip hazards, uneven surfaces and changes of level e.g. unmarked ramps or steps
- Lack of handrails e.g. along corridors, in stairwells or at doorways
- Poor levels of lighting
- Poor contrast between adjacent objects, particularly between furniture and flooring e.g. dark furniture on dark floors
- Whether footwear is suitable for the type of tasks being carried out on the premises.

Violent or aggressive behaviour

Conference members and volunteers should not accept incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour as a normal part of visiting. Violent and aggressive incidents are the third biggest cause of injuries reported to the Health and Safety Executive from the health and social care sector. It is vitally important that all visiting is carried out in pairs in order to prevent or reduce aggressive behaviour.

The Health and Safety Executive defines work-related violence as 'Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.' In this case 'work' relates to carrying out visits.

Examples of violent and aggressive behaviour could include:

- A visitor bitten by a person with learning disabilities in the course of visiting that person
- An irate relative who considers that the person being visited has not been properly treated and verbally abuses the visitor.
- A visitor providing refreshments is hit by a confused elderly person.

What is the risk?

The main risk is verbal abuse or physical assault of SVP members when visiting those in need, especially the most vulnerable.

Who is at risk?

Conference members and volunteers are all at potential risk. Incidents arise primarily because the visit involves contact with a wide range of people in circumstances which may be difficult. People who you are visiting and their relatives may be anxious and worried; some may be predisposed towards violence.

Conference members and volunteers involved in the following activities are at increased risk of violence and aggressive behaviour:

- visiting alone;
- handling valuables or medication;
- visiting people who are emotionally or mentally unstable;
- visiting people who are under the influence of drink or drugs;
- visiting people under stress.

It is important to consider how you are going to deal with any signs of violence or aggressive behaviour.

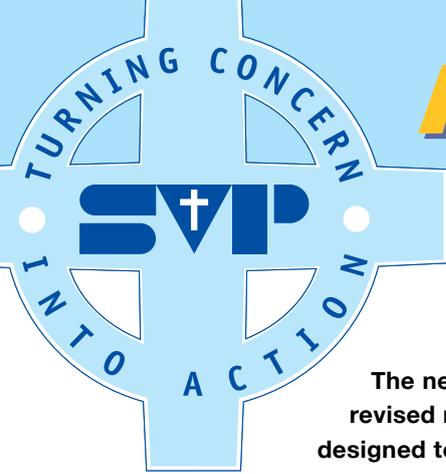
Remember...

If someone's behaviour is perceived to be unduly tense, agitated, boisterous, withdrawn or provocative, you should withdraw from the visit immediately. If you suspect an individual is under the influence of drugs, alcohol or other substance, you should withdraw from the visit immediately.

Unfortunately, whilst the first priority is to remove yourself from risk, on rare occasions a situation can escalate too fast in which case:

- **Do not touch the person**
- **Try to put a barrier between you and the aggressive person**
- **Summon help if you can**
- **Adopt a non-threatening posture and attitude**
- **Use non-confrontational and non-threatening language**
- **Speak softly and reassuringly**
- **Never turn away from a potentially violent person, back out instead.**

All incidents should be reported to SVP National Office. If you have any questions relating to Health & Safety contact Matthew Stockton at National Office.



Members' Info

New Members' Area

The new SVP website has a revised members' area that is designed to enable members to find information more easily and so help

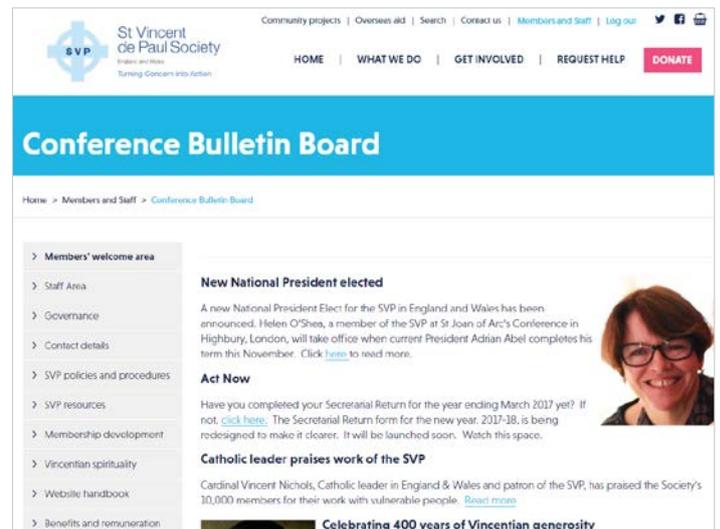
them with their work in their Conferences and Councils. Three sections in particular have received attention:

SVP Policies and Procedures

All policies, procedures and related forms can now be found in one central location which includes a search facility based on a document's title. We are still loading some material to this section so if there is a particular document that you need but cannot find, please let us know. The website's "contact us" facility can be used for this.

Membership Development

This has been revamped to include 3 aspects concerning membership: recruitment, training (knowledge and skills) and a new feature called the Forum. The recruitment section contains downloadable resources such as posters, suggested lectern addresses and frequently asked questions. In the Forum we encourage members to write in with questions or comments that may be of interest to other SVP members, and our membership manager will post these together with replies to any questions. Fact Sheets that give useful information about being part of the SVP can also be found in the Forum.



SVP Resources

All the resources such as leaflets, books and booklets for Conference use can now be viewed and ordered directly from the website. We are using a shopping cart and checkout process together with a payment facility. Once an order is completed, a member of staff is notified and the order is prepared and dispatched.

We will endeavour to continually improve the site so if you have any comments please let us know.

SVP's Office Move

On 22nd September National Office will be moving!



Although we have not been here in Larcom Street long, the area around Elephant and Castle has been undergoing significant regeneration and our landlord has proposed to increase our rent beyond our means.

Over recent months we have been considering various options, including shared accommodation with other Catholic charities.

I am delighted to report that CAFOD, whose offices are quite close to our existing offices, have kindly invited us to be based in Romero House alongside their staff and also the staff from CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network). We will of course still have costs associated with using the shared office space but we will be able to reduce costs in other areas, as we will be able to benefit from some shared services.

It makes sense for two national Catholic charities dealing with the alleviation of poverty, overseas and in England and Wales respectively, to come together in this way. The new address for correspondence will be:

**SVP, Romero House
55 Westminster Bridge Rd
London, SE1 7JB**

The telephone number will remain the same:

020 7703 3030

Special Dementia Workshop for SVP Members

The SVP is organising a special Dementia Workshop for members. Taking place on Wednesday 1st November, the event will be led by Ben Bano, an experienced dementia trainer and Director of the 'Welcome Me as I Am Project'.

The session will explore the potential role of SVP members in creating a friendly and inclusive environment for people with dementia and how we can understand and meet their needs, alongside those of their caregivers.

The workshop will cover topics including:

- The dementia-friendly communities initiative
- Becoming a dementia-friendly champion and a dementia friend
- Types of dementia and diagnosis
- Using the new Dementia Toolkit, produced in conjunction with CSAN
- 'See me rather than dementia' – a person-centred approach
- Communication skills for SVP visitors as dementia advances
- The role of a Conference in developing an inclusive and welcoming environment for people with dementia and their loved ones

- 'Hearing my story' an introduction to life story work
- Understanding and meeting the needs of caregivers
- Our Conference as a Dementia-Friendly Conference
- A person-centred perspective to working with people with dementia and their families.

The event will take place between **10.30am and 4pm on Wednesday 1st November at St Aloysius Church Hall, 20 Phoenix Road, London NW1 1TS** - a short walk from Euston, Kings Cross and St Pancras rail stations, as well as Warren Street, Euston Square and Kings Cross St Pancras Tube stations.

Tickets are £11 per person including tea, coffee and lunch. Costs can be reclaimed from your Conference. Please note that there are a limited number of tickets available on a first-come-first-served basis, so book soon. For more information email membership@svp.org.uk

SVP Banking Update

Following the continued speculation in the Co-operative Bank and the Board's decision to move funds in excess of £500 in each account to our Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) account to safeguard our funds we have been reviewing the options for the Society's future banking arrangements.

Following a robust tender process NatWest Bank have been selected by the Board of Trustees to replace the Co-operative Bank in providing banking services to the Society. We expect to be able to write to all Treasurers in September with additional details and timescales for the transfer.

We hope to have all the new accounts opened and in use by the end of March 2018, with a plan to close all our Co-op accounts by the end of September 2018.

As a result of the recent decision to change banks the Board of Trustees have decided to continue with the current arrangements of excess funds being held in our CAF account until our new accounts with NatWest

are set up, at which point all funds held will be returned to Conferences in full.

NatWest will be able to provide banking for the Society at a similar cost to the Co-operative Bank whilst being able to provide significant service improvements, both in terms of how we manage our accounts on a global basis from National Office and for individual account holders.

In particular NatWest have specially developed tools which will enable much easier and quicker management of the account opening and signatory management process, both of which have proven particularly difficult for the Co-op to deal with effectively over the last year.

We thank Treasurers for their continued patience during this difficult time, the need to monitor the levels of funds closely across so many accounts has put significant strain on the finance team. There is now a full finance team in Bradford and we anticipate that normal levels of service should be returned in the near future.



Conference Spotlight

SVP in the Lakes

Holy Trinity and St George Conference, Kendal is at the southern gateway of the English Lake District. There has been an SVP Conference here since 1978 in this tourist town in a comparatively affluent area. Parishioners give generous financial support and we regularly publicise our activities to keep them informed.



We are fortunate we have many people willing to do something active for the parish. It is wonderful to be part of this active faith community even if it means competition for recruiting members.

Eucharistic Ministers, Readers, Music Group, House Groups, Children's Liturgy & Sacramental Preparation, Faith & Justice, Overseas Aid, Social Group, Fair Trade, Pro-Life, Prayer Group, Christian Meditation, Cenacolo Support Group who run the weekly meeting for those with addictions etc. However, most of our Conference members are usually involved in at least one of these other groups.

So why join the SVP? My short answer is because it is different. Our Conference provides ongoing visiting and befriending. We know where the hidden poverty lies, providing furniture and household items for people housed in unfurnished flats. We know how those on State Pensions or Benefits struggle to survive, helping with food or household bills from time to time. Our policy is to work alongside other parish groups in addition to our Conference work, e.g. helping distribute Pro-Life Newspapers, holding White Flower Collection boxes, befriending Cenacolo Community members or doing a Sponsored Walk for the Overseas Aid Group – when I inadvertently recruited my first new Conference member. We need to be perceived as an important part of parish life.

As our church is in the town centre, people come to the presbytery asking for help. They are usually given a railway or bus ticket from the SVP if just passing through and offered other help. Others benefit from our arrangement with a local Bed and Breakfast or are taken to South Lakeland Council and presented as homeless. We also have our share of those who spin

fascinating yarns, use different names every time they turn up, even a previously convicted con man. SVP life is never boring!

December 2015's floods were covered in Vincentian Concern. Our Parish, alongside other Kendal churches, opened its doors to flood victims. Meals, shelter, befriending, advice and practical support were given for 5 days each week between ourselves and other churches until people gradually returned to their homes. While numbers attending inevitably reduced over time, we found an underlying need for befriending and a role for alleviating social isolation. Members now help to run a Thursday Afternoon Club in the Parish Centre each week to help meet that need.

Our Kendal Churches Together Project is Manna House where SVP members and parishioners are involved. It has a twice weekly Drop In, with a hot meal, advice, befriending and food bank. From December to February it provides a Winter Night Shelter held in various church halls. Our Parish Centre hosts the Fridays and Saturdays over 3 months providing an evening meal, befriending, warmth, shelter and breakfast.

The benefits of these projects have been:

- Reaching out and helping people we would not normally have met.
- Closer relationships between the SVP Conference and the parish.
- Greater “bonding” and friendship in our parish community. You often don't get to know other parishioners well if you don't socialise or join a parish group. Working alongside other people in these sessions has helped us to get to know each other in ways we would never have otherwise.
- The same has applied to our relationships with the wider Christian Community.
- People now know a lot more about the practical work of the SVP and how we can add value to the lives of others. It has certainly helped to put us “on the map”.

*Raymond Daley
President, Holy Trinity and St George Conference, Kendal*

National Meeting

Our Autumn 2017 Vincentian Concern and Welcoming the Stranger

This Autumn edition of Vincentian Concern has been put together in place of the Spring edition, and to celebrate the Vincentian charism of Welcoming the Stranger, the theme and title of the SVP's National Meeting which took place in June this year.

In the following pages we summarise some of the excellent talks and presentations delivered throughout the two day event. We hope that for those of you who weren't able to join us and even for those of you who did, this will provide an accurate, informative and inspiring low-down of some ideas you can hopefully take with you into the world. We plan to post some of the talks and transcriptions, together with photographs of the meeting, on svp.org.uk soon. But in the meantime, here's a brief introduction to the first principle of welcoming the stranger, delivered by Fr Paul Roche, Spiritual Adviser to the SVP, about acknowledging and addressing the stranger in ourselves.

"It's a danger to ourselves if we don't address the strangeness in ourselves. The strange aspect of my own character: my prejudice, my arrogance, my way of behaving. All of these I need to address otherwise I won't be able to relate to people as brother and sister. I will relate to them as the person who is

coming in far above them and feeding the ducks in the park. Compassion is to witness and suffer with somebody. Not just to feel anger at injustice, but to enter into the condition of those who you have come to serve.

The care for others is not only always about material care. People aren't just bodies, they're persons, and we bring with us a personal, emotional and spiritual assistance as well. To do this you have to address the stranger in yourself. To befriend people is vital. We can't solve everyone's problems, but we can befriend them.

Very simply you can say Jesus loved people into Heaven. He healed many people, he forgave people, he blessed people, he gave families back a member who had died. But after Jesus died there were still a huge number of problems. In Chapter 13 of John's Gospel, we are told about Jesus taking a basin and washing the feet of his disciples. He says if I am your lord and master, I have given you an example of what you must do for each other.

We must be the ones who come after Jesus, the ones to whom he has given his spirit, and not just wash their feet, but befriend them and serve them."

CCLA Support at SVP National Meeting



Celia Waring

This year's National Meeting was kindly supported by CCLA, one of the largest fund managers of charitable, religious and public service organisations in the UK. Celia Waring attended the event on behalf of the company and spoke to SVP Senior Media and Communications Officer Anita.

What attracted CCLA to support the SVP National Meeting?

As we only work with churches, charities and local authorities, CCLA's mission is to support the charity and not for profit sector and their vitally important work. A meeting like this is an important occasion because it brings together SVP members and staff from around the country to share experience, learn from each other, grow and develop. So when the SVP asked if we might partner the Society on this major event in some way, we were happy to help. I have enjoyed coming to Liverpool to be part of it and I have learned a lot about the SVP's work through meeting members and attending the presentations.

How did your Catholic education contribute to your career path choices?

At school we were always encouraged to think about the importance of service and our responsibility towards our brothers and sisters around the world, especially the poorest and most marginalised, and that has remained with me.

So after a brief period in advertising, I moved to CAFOD and worked with their corporate supporters. It was great to work with a charity where my values and their mission completely aligned. I then joined The Legatum Institute, a charity think-tank which seeks to address social challenges through policy development. Later, joining CCLA enabled me to stay close to the charity ethos because although it is a commercial business, its investors and shareholders are not for profit so our success as a business and their work link together in a kind of virtuous circle. A priest once told me that wealth creation can be a valuable activity, when assets are well stewarded. You can achieve great things with your wealth by investing in companies that create employment, provide worthwhile services and help strengthen local communities.





Welcome the Stranger

Welcoming the S

Monsignor Malachy Keegan is parish priest at Our Lady Help of Christians chaplaincy for all faiths. He addressed the National Meeting on the s



Monsignor Malachy Keegan

"We should strive to keep our hearts open to the sufferings and wretchedness of other people and pray continually that God may grant us that spirit of compassion, which is truly the spirit of God." These are the words of St Vincent de Paul. The Vincentian spirit is to be alongside those who are struggling, in difficulty and neglected.

I'd like to talk to you about the group of people I love and I am honoured to be among, but these people, like all of us, are frail, weak and sometimes imperfect in some terrible ways, but they share our common weakness. I'd like to encourage you not just to share in their weakness but to share with them in other ways too, to be in solidarity with them. I have learned so much from people in prison, such as how to be vulnerable, open and ready to receive the salvation and love that God offers me.

Getting to know people in prison in all their humility and brokenness is a wonderful opportunity. On the outside, you see something, someone and they can be daunting and promising, but inside, there is a human being with feelings. Somebody's mother, somebody's son, somebody's father, a real person. I think the SVP is ideally placed to be alongside people, providing them with an experience of God's love. We need to be

in solidarity with them but we need to ask as well, why prisons? What are they meant to achieve? Are there other ways of helping people to change?

Today, we have more prisons than ever, longer sentences. They are overcrowded, poor conditions. Arguments for locking people up are often said with the tone of smooth rationality, untouched by human emotion and feeling. It echoes that prisoners are a nuisance, an encumbrance. So, we developed a scheme of national rejection of them. We don't want them with us, they're not like the rest of us. They don't deserve to be in our community. So we expel them. They are bad people and we are good people. Well, my experience in prison was that I wanted to be like those bad people in prison because they are so open to God and his love.

“ Prison is a brutal, awful experience but wonderful things can happen there and do, when people are given an opportunity to change and to experience love; God. ”

Our prisons are full of people who feel ugly and unloved, - unhuman. And the only way they are going to be turned back into human beings is if you and I, metaphorically kiss them and are alongside them and love them. Because that's the way God will convince them they are worthy of love.

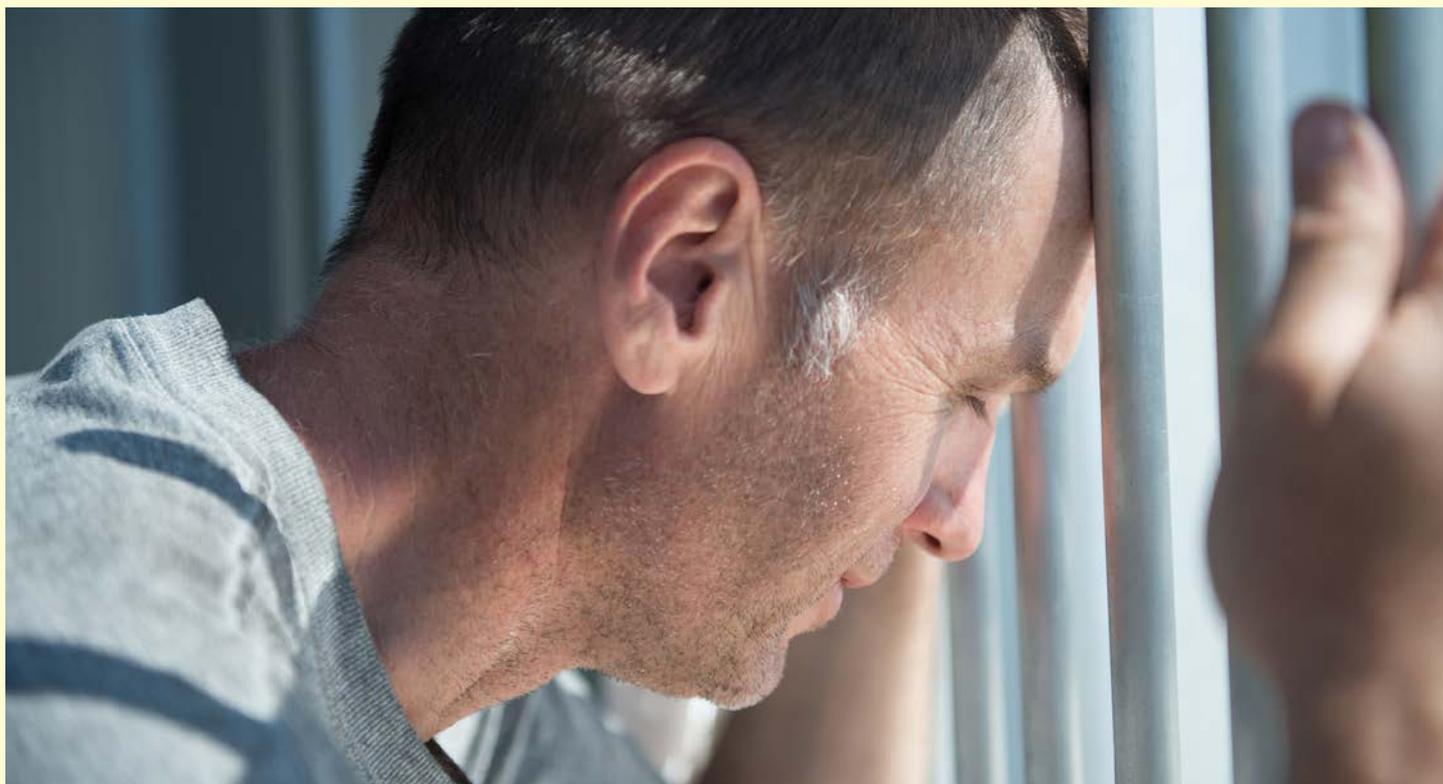
My job has been to recruit, appoint and oversee chaplains that were working in the prisons. In the London area, I had to do that for all faiths for a while, and then I became the Catholic Bishops' Prisons Advisor focusing on providing Catholic chaplains. I've always felt that the people who make the best chaplains are those who are not there to help prisoners. Does that sound strange? They see themselves as being with people in prison, being alongside them, being in solidarity with them, knowing that we are the same, really. There is not much difference between us and that's certainly how I feel; how I felt.

Prisons have become warehouses for human beings, for our social problems that we can't solve and I think there is a solution. It's a very simple one, and a very human one. When I was working in Brixton, they asked me to work with serious offenders, because of my background: I am a psychotherapist.

Welcome the Stranger

Stranger on the Street

Christians in West Byfleet, and is employed by the Home Office to promote prison. On the subject of welcoming the stranger in prison, here are some extracts from his talk.



I was helping to run a sex offender treatment programme for people who committed paedophilia, rape and those terrible things.

Through my work I've come to this conclusion, not just about people who have done very serious things, and other crimes, but people who are unhappy generally. The only way to really solve all this is for somebody to come along and show them that there is another (better?) way to act towards them. Now that can take time and it takes patience, generosity and risk, but that is the only way.

The only solution, I think, is for you and I to be alongside our sisters and brothers in prison and when they leave. Indeed I'd like to propose to you a way in which the St Vincent de Paul Society in England and Wales can be pioneers in helping people in our prisons and when they leave. To help them discover their dignity, value and worth; to change and to even discover the Lord and his love. As I have said, the way to do that is to be with them and I'd love to work out with you a way in which we can do that. If we had little units of people, maybe four or five people who could form a little circle around an individual when they leave prison and invite that person to come and be with us in

what we're doing, in our normal day-to-day lives somehow and to do that in a loving, gentle, compassionate and tender way. Over a period of time, that can, I think, be very, very healing.

You see, I think kindness is irresistible. This has to be done wisely because people have weaknesses, but it can be done. If you've put up all kinds of barriers that are established or rooted in you for years and years, because that's the way that you have managed to survive, then it'll take time, maybe a long time for those barriers to disintegrate. Even then maybe they will only partially disintegrate. But through you and your tenderness you can convince people that they are still the children of God.

All of us need that sense of community. Our Catholic Social Teaching is so strong on these things. It talks about the life and the dignity of every human person, including people in prison. There is a call to family and community participation; we hear all this in our social teaching, the option for the poor and the vulnerable, solidarity.

What good we could do just to be alongside people and let God do the rest?"



Welcome the Stranger

The Strange

“We make people destitute in order to make them give up. It is a deliberate and intentional act of exclusion designed to push them out - the complete opposite of welcoming the stranger.”



Sarah Teather

Sarah Teather served as MP for the constituency of Brent and was Children’s Minister from 2010 to 2012 during the coalition government. Since January 2016 she has been Director of Jesuit Refugee Services, an international Catholic charity working in 50 countries. Sarah addressed the National Meeting on the subject “Welcoming the Stranger Seeking Sanctuary”. The following is based on edited highlights of her address.

"An estimated sixty five million people around the world are now considered to be displaced from their homes. As most have been forced to move within their own country and have not crossed a border, they are neither registered nor counted as refugees. The poorest countries take the most. Last year, Uganda alone welcomed 500,000 from South Sudan and took more in two weeks than the 30,000 asylum applicants Britain took in a year.

People mostly move because they fear for their safety in the face of war and conflict, human rights abuses and forced conscription. They often move within their country with the intention of being able to return home one day. When this proves impossible, in desperation they cross a border to seek a new life in a new country, to find work, provide education for their children and maybe regain some kind of normality in their family life.

People who seek asylum in the UK have a very difficult time. If your case is considered uncomplicated, you may get an answer

quickly from the Home Office, but that period is still going to be very hard. You will be dispersed to a location possibly hundreds of miles from where you know people and with no choice over where you live. It may be quite a poor community, where people already feel alienated, don't believe they have a lot to offer and the last thing they need is more people turning up on their doorstep.

You might imagine our country would have a fair system, with access to good quality legal advice, but that is neither the experience of asylum seekers nor of those who work with them. If you don't speak English, you will not be offered much help and you will have a tiny amount of money. If you come from a hot country, you will not have enough to buy winter clothes. You will probably be moved more than once, with little notice and your children will have to move school - but you won't be able to afford to replace the school uniform. The Home Office system for making decisions is often arbitrary and difficult to navigate. The people making decisions are poorly trained, often young, sometimes gap year students who are making decisions that are life and death for people. There are incentives written into the system – a recent press article showed how civil servants are given vouchers if they manage to get an appeal turned down. There is a culture of disbelief, particularly if you flee your country because you are gay, a victim of sexual assault or have changed your religion. While you are liable to detention at any point, you are at high risk if your application is rejected and you may be detained while you try to prepare a fresh application. If recognised as a refugee, you will immediately become destitute because during the three months between one set of benefits ending and another kicking in, you will have nothing. This is not accidental or caused by austerity measures or incompetence but is a deliberate and intentional act of exclusion, a tool of policy designed to push claimants out - the complete opposite of welcoming the stranger. The prime minister describes how she is deliberately trying to create a hostile environment, to put people off coming and try to force them to give up their claim to remain. The truth is we make people destitute in order to make them give up.

To be destitute means you have nothing of your own. You have no money for food or housing, to phone your family, take public transport to see your doctor or solicitor or for any kind of emergency. You are totally dependent on charity and the goodwill of friends, church, community - maybe items provided by your local SVP Conference.

Welcome the Stranger

r seeking Asylum



Our mission at the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is to walk alongside people no matter what, and no matter how difficult or hopeless their situation. We want to affirm that God is present even in the most tragic moments of human history. So we must be there, with and alongside people, to share in their helplessness and offer what practical help we can. We have to trust that in our accompaniment of people we will find God already there, labouring ahead of us, already doing something in the person's life. We run a day centre, distribute the Vinnie Packs you give us, make hot meals and provide toiletry packs.

We try to create a safe space of community where people feel welcome, make friends with staff and volunteers and with each other. When you give people space to be themselves you often unleash generosity and things you were not expecting. That kind of community is what sustains people and is so healing. Pope Francis says that to welcome the stranger is to welcome God.

“ We live in a world which assumes asylum seekers are coming to take things from us but that narrative misses the richness they bring; the God of abundance who comes to us in poverty. ”

In the SVP you know all about walking with people and getting to know them, forming relationships and getting behind the prejudice. When we befriend people we see what they like, what their hobbies are, what makes them laugh, what music they listen to, what their hopes and dreams are. We don't want to put them on a pedestal but rather see them as a people, who are our equal, with something to teach us. We are then blessed with a gift. You start to see that even when people are stripped of everything, they still desperately want to give something back in service. The SVP's work, with its focus on practical help, chimes very closely with what we do at JRS, so I'm sure your experience of visiting people is also not just one of service but of wonder and personal transformation.

In the Christian story, the stranger is often portrayed as the hand of God; not a threat, subject of pity or drainer of resources but a gift and a donor of gifts; not a harbinger of scarcity but a sacrament of abundance. The early Christians are propelled outwards from Pentecost as exiles and missionaries, to every corner of the globe. We are a pilgrim people, travelling together onwards towards the kingdom of God. Migration, dislocation, displacement and rejection are all central to our story. Through our work, the JRS and the SVP together bring hope, friendship and humanity to our brothers and sisters whose situation is not of their making but can seem so desperate it threatens to overwhelm them."



Welcome the Stranger

The Strang

Bertrand Ousset is a former SVP National President of France and is o and development. Bertrand spoke at our National Meeting about uni



Bertrand Ousset

Setting the background, Bertrand described how some twenty years ago, and even in more recent times, Conferences in France have taken a discriminatory attitude to different types of migrants.

“They sometimes took a legalistic view of migrants according to the policies of the public authorities. They also saw the work of other organisations as competing with the SVP, and practised compassionate but one-sided service to them,” Bertrand explained.

Nonetheless, the Society’s National Council was encouraged by more dynamic Conferences while listening more closely to the changes in French society to gradually adopt four main lines of approach.

Non-discrimination

Non-discrimination must apply to all categories of stranger. Up until then, the authorities had categorised foreigners as Roma, refugees, people without documents, asylum seekers and people of no fixed abode. This categorisation and legal status impacted on the right to various forms of state support and also led to police harassment followed by deportation and escorting to a border, even detention.

So, Bertrand said “State policy allowed discrimination against different kinds of strangers and migrants, giving them different rights.”

However, Bertrand pointed out that the SVP responded by forbidding any discrimination in the distribution of aid on the basis of nationality, ethnicity or other categorisation that followed from government policy. “That is very important and this principle is shared by the main charitable organisations in France who are working in the same direction.”

An official manual was created by the SVP, giving the main guidelines of how to proceed with helping the stranger, and how to work with them.

A network approach

Given the extent of the migratory phenomenon across Europe, it became apparent that the various charitable organisations were offering different responses according to their local and national resources, as well as to their own specific ethos. While charities like Caritas helped with housing, SVP Conferences provided personal support, welcome for the families, administrative help, food distribution, literacy support and a welcome to people in need.

Bertrand said:

“ Nowadays, partnerships have been developed in this field forming part of the culture of the Conferences who are cooperating with Caritas, Secours Catholique, Secours Islamique, Salvation Army and some others, and also with parishes. ”

Collaborating with other charitable organisations

The aim was to encourage the public authorities to change their policies and adopt new practices. The idea is that we work with other charitable organisations to ask and even to force the state and the local communities to do what they are supposed to do yet often fail to do.

Welcome the Stranger

er on the Street

currently on the board of Council General with the responsibility for international aid
versal approaches to welcoming the stranger that are being employed in France.

We try to make them be consistent with the law, consistent with the rights of the people in question, by bringing together a group of organisations to plead for change, to avoid discrimination and not to use punitive legal provisions.

In other cases, the Society has backed legal action, to force the state or local authorities to put services in place and to adapt their services to the needs of migrants.

Bertrand went on to say "Historically the Society didn't want to be involved in political issues, such as attending tribunals or asking government to be consistent in human rights. This is something that has changed due to the efforts of the Society and other organisations. This is a new way of proceeding for the Society and Conferences."

A more Vincentian ideal

We are developing specifically Vincentian courses of action and in this respect we don't have a monopoly. The aim is to help those we support by encouraging them to link with the Society and our actions in making them active participants, not just beneficiaries. This is not only related to migrants but to all people with whom we have a relationship. This is a process of capacity building, of empowerment, to which the National Council is committed and is one which many Conferences have now adopted. This approach is not only addressed to the stranger but to all of us. This approach forms a return to the fundamentals of the Society, supported by the exhortation of Pope Francis, "Let us allow ourselves to be evangelized by the poor." This is a very strong message from the Pope, which we consider to be at the core of our Vincentian commitment.

Thus, one of the main ideas we are trying to stress in all our activities, especially while helping migrants, is that the main poverty of our time is social isolation. It is combined with every kind of poverty, making many kinds of difficulties much greater. It is a major poverty.

So, I consider that the Society has a special responsibility on this issue, because our vocation is to establish personal relations that go beyond mere giving. It is not just a one-way process, but involves those we come across and try to help. Establishing this two way personal relationship is the best way to fight social isolation. It also establishes a social link that brings all people in need closer to the Society's members. There are many different needs, such as the need for housing and many different kinds of



poverty, but the huge and greatest poverty is social isolation. We have developed many ways of distributing help and sometimes it is the distribution that becomes the focus, but it's not the focus. We are trying to change the emphasis from having tons of food to distribute, to enabling this distribution to establish a mutual relationship. To repeat, there certainly are needs, but the greatest need is social isolation.

Bertrand concluded by saying: "Distribution of aid should provide us with the opportunity to establish this relationship. We then need to maintain that relationship, making it even deeper. This is an important change that should bring us back to our roots, but many Conferences have put too much stress on the quantity of the work that they've done rather than of the quality of the relationship with those they help. This is the main message I want to share."

“ It is our relationship with those suffering poverty, not the unilateral giving of material help, which is the core of the Society. Any giving must lead to the empowerment of the poor. ”



Welcome the Stranger

Mobilise against the blight of food poverty

Food poverty is on the increase and SVP members should mobilise against it, Winston Waller told delegates at the Society's National Meeting in Liverpool in June.

Winston, who is the SVP representative in Feeding Britain, a cross parliamentary group, chaired by Frank Field MP, committed to reducing Food Poverty, as well as being President of the SVP's Southwark Central Council, pointed out that 4 million adults in Britain regularly struggle to put food on the table.

For people experiencing food poverty, symptoms can include parents going without food to ensure children are fed, children being given cheap junk food to eat, reliance on free school dinners to feed the children – something that stops during the summer months, of course – and, during the winter months, people having to choose between heating or eating.

“And ultimately, those experiencing food poverty have to turn to family, neighbours and foodbanks for handouts.”

But why is food poverty such a big problem when unemployed people receive benefits? He is quick to stress that 60% of people living in poverty have jobs.

“Some 27% of foodbank referrals are from working people on low incomes – people such as nurses,” he said. “In addition there are those on zero-hours contracts and those working as part of the so-called ‘gig economy’ where they have lots of small, low-paid, part-time jobs that have made the problems worse.”



But what about all those benefits, whether for low-paid workers or the unemployed? Winston's response is to point out that 26% of people turning to foodbanks for help are doing so because they've experienced delays to their benefit payments.

There are many reasons for this: in a year, more than 90,000 people wait longer than 16 days to receive their first benefit payment, or sometimes the delay comes when they are being transferred from one benefit to another.

In addition, other crises can lead people into food poverty – mental health issues, for example, or family breakup.

What can the SVP do?

“Plenty,” said Winston. “Collect food in your parish for the local foodbank and become a referring agency authorised to issue foodbank vouchers. Consider setting up your own foodbank and support people with benefit problems – keep them warm and fed – and write to or phone your MP and ask her or him to help get the problems put right.”

He also urged: “Keep detailed records of cases suffering from benefit delays, errors and sanctions – we need case histories to show up the problems and gaps so that faults can be corrected. “There is no silver bullet to solve the problems of food poverty,” he added, “but we can all help.”

Winston Waller has written a new SVP Fact Sheet on Food Poverty. It can be downloaded along with all the other Fact Sheets in the series from the Forum page of the SVP website or call National Office on 0207 703 3030.

Welcome the Stranger

Finding the person within...



Dementia is a massive issue in the UK – there are currently at least 850,000 people living with the disease, and that number will reach a million by 2025, according to Vicky Hill, Development Worker for the SVP's new Embrace project in Brighton.

Speaking at the National Meeting in Liverpool in June, Vicky said the secret to successful care of people with dementia was to be “person-centred”.

She explained: “Each of us has an inner spirit that needs to be kept strong, and sometimes we need help to do this. Having hope and purpose is critical for every human.”

In other words, she said, we need to find “the person within”. Vicky pointed out that dementia is a physical, terminal disease of the brain – not a natural part of ageing. One in six people aged over 80 has dementia, but also 40,000 people under 65 – and the incidence among younger people is increasing.

The term dementia is an umbrella word for a whole range of diseases – Alzheimer's, vascular dementia and Pick's disease, for example, as well as secondary dementias associated with other diseases like Parkinson's or Huntington's.

She stressed: “Dementia is unique to every person.”

As people's memories decline the person-centred approach is crucial to help them maintain their identity and sense of self.

“How do you express yourself? With your hairstyle, your clothes, your perfume or cologne, in what you say?” Vicky asked. “How would you feel if these tools were removed from you?”

“How do you occupy yourself? With sports, reading, TV, church, your social life, looking after your home? Who would you be without meaningful activity? Think about people sitting in care homes unable to move, with no occupation.”

Vicky quoted the poet Maya Angelou who said: “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Feelings mattered most, Vicky said. “Think what is behind the words ‘I want to go home’, or ‘I have to pick up my children’, or ‘They're trying to poison me’. All expressions common to someone with dementia yet they all have anxiety at their heart – it's the anxiety that needs addressing.”

This means that person-centred care for people with dementia has to be sound, has to take account of feelings and has to be heartfelt, Vicky concluded.



Welcome the Stranger

Why we need to



Ann Harris

However, the big question is how to attract and then keep those new members, she told delegates on the first day of the SVP National Meeting in Liverpool in June.

Ann, who as well as being a member of the Board of Trustees is also a Conference President at Wimborne in Dorset, revealed that she had visited many different Conferences around the country thanks to the nature of her work with the Society.

"I can say with certainty that we have a huge variety within our family of 1,000 Conferences," she said. "From the dynamic to the moribund, the proactive to the reactive, and the flourishing to the withering, we have huge breadth, and people like me are often out and about trying to help the withering to flourish and sometimes we're lucky and sometimes we're not."

She explained that the essential element in a flourishing Conference was attracting new people, but they had to be cherished and nourished in order that they're retained. "If we don't do that we will lose them. They will come, they'll be interested and they'll go."

She pointed out that offering people a chance to put their faith into action was the main factor in attracting new members. "It gives us a conduit, through which we can live our faith – not talk about it, live it."

She said that, in the six years she'd been in her own Conference, they had increased membership from three people to 27. "It's a massive change in the nature of our Conference and the common strand is the opportunity to live our faith."

New members are the life blood of the St Vincent de Paul Society, according to Ann Harris, SVP Vice President. They enable it to flourish, helping it change with the times and reach out to more people in need.

But what is the secret to the substantial growth in members at her Conference?

Top of the list, according to Ann, has been the annual appeal – closely followed by Danish pastries!

She stressed that having an appeal every year, not just occasionally, was vitally important. "What happens is you go back time and again, and you approach it slightly differently each time... you can work on it a little bit and at the end you can reel them in.

"But I do tend to find that food helps a bit, so Danish pastries at the follow-up meeting are my recommendation!"

She said that there were three key motivations in attracting new members:

- Emphasize giving time rather than money – "so it's about our commitment to action."
- Family and professional duties come first. "No one should feel ashamed of saying I'm sorry I can't do that today – because we have other duties and the beauty of having a big team is that if you can't do it, someone else can."
- The visibility of the SVP is important.

Sometimes I go to do an appeal in a church and there's no evidence of the SVP anywhere. There's nothing on the notice board... there isn't anything to tell me that the SVP is existing there. The more visible you are the more people you get in. There's a sort of critical mass of around 10. When you get to about 10 you can start to really do stuff and make a bit of noise. Under 10 it's a lot more tricky."

Once the new members are recruited, what happens then? "We've got to keep them," Ann pointed out, "and we've got to make them feel as enthusiastic as we feel about being there. A lot of that comes down to the meetings. I talk to people who tell me they are put off by the meetings or they're enthused by the meetings. It's about making people feel at ease in the initial stage.

"Things like pairing the new member up with an experienced member so they're not sitting there thinking 'what should I do?'. Familiarising them with the structure of the meeting before they get there, and preparing them for issues of confidentiality.

Welcome the Stranger

nurture new members

Little things that make a person feel they're beginning to belong before they get there."

Ann suggested making sure there was a sense of hospitality at the meeting and also some fun and laughter. "I think if you don't laugh, whatever you're doing can feel a bit dour," she said.

"Then I think it's about friendship, isn't it? Our friendship is based on a mutual purpose and love for one another that binds us together. So welcoming new members in and ensuring that they stay, is about opening that circle of friendship – it's about opening our arms to embrace them and to allow them to become part of our group."

But when new members join, there are DBS's and other procedures to be completed before they can become active, and they can sometimes feel it's holding them back.

"But that stuff's really important and it's essential that they begin to understand the Society before they go out into the field, so to speak," she stressed. "They need to understand about the spiritual elements of the Society. Our work is practical but our foundation is spiritual and this is why our new induction programme that we've just written is called Faith in Action because that's what it's about; it's about putting our faith in action. It emphasises the spiritual nature of our Society and how it sits comfortably with Catholic social teaching."

Then, as new members become active, it's important they have the opportunity to contribute ideas, Ann said. "There's nothing more depressing than joining a group and you suggest an idea you think is great and they say 'oh we tried that before and it didn't work'."

But Ann went further, recommending that Conferences should embrace a concept called 'shared leadership'.



Some of our SVP Members

“ I believe sharing the leadership of the Conference keeps it thriving. I think it's vital to the satisfaction of individuals and to the succession of planning in the Conference.

New members come along with life experiences that are different, and they can contribute so much to what we're doing.

So we agree to fluidity of role. ”

She explained: "I'm Conference President but I have a number of other people who are very happy to lead meetings. When I'm up in London doing something – training or something – I don't have to worry, all I have to do is send an email around and I have a volunteer to lead the meeting or I have someone who is willing to act as secretary if the secretary is not there.

"And we've got 12 different members who are leading on different projects... The whole process has really been about letting go and letting people get on with doing it their way; not my way, their way, and accepting that they do it well and sometimes better than I would do it."

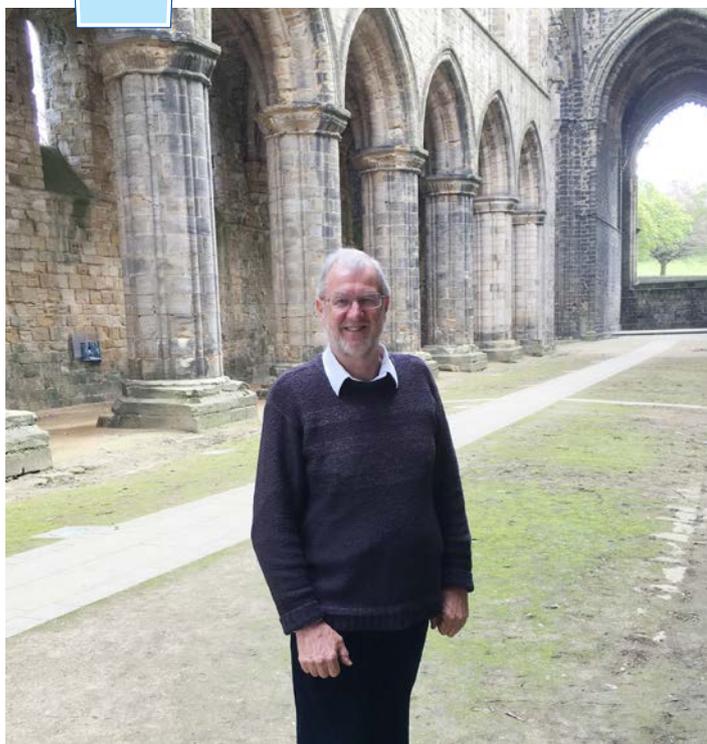
However, despite these ideas that might seem relatively radical, Ann stressed that in other respects, Conferences should continue to work in the way they've always done.

"We meet and pray as one Conference with the prayers enshrined in Vincentian spirituality, and it's from that base of prayer and reflection that we organise our visits and agree our projects," she added. "That vital prayer and reflection remains exactly the same."



Welcome the Stranger

John Battle on Hope in Hard times



John Battle says that stories store power. Using stories - made up of memories, impressions, things heard, witnessed, learnt from our Conference work of visiting, can help influence people in power such as MPs, who John says, feel more insecure in their positions - than ever before.

This is a rare time. A time when political power is teetering from side to side. There is a sway, and in this sway it is possible to lean on politicians, of whom John was once one himself not so long ago, and share our expertise as members and staff of the SVP to persuade MPs to challenge and be accountable for, the suffering that so many people in this country, and abroad, are enduring.

In power, he says "my job was a bit like a shuttle or a weaving loom. You had to be sharp at both ends, listening to the people, and going down to London to distil from their stories the challenges to the laws and budgets MPs made which effected these people."

He continues: "One of the things I've learnt in recent days with the election result is that I have never known MPs of all parties

feeling as insecure as they do today. And that's a good thing. And what's more is that they feel more compelled to listen to the people who elected them to represent them. So my view would be, now is the time to make representations to our representatives."

John continues: "How do we eradicate poverty now in society? I would suggest perhaps through advocacy and that we do more as Conferences together with others to lobby in an advocacy way. Meet with your MP now and ask some questions. Ask them if they understand the issues. Tell them that although they may be more interested in other matters, you want them to be interested in poverty, and you're going to ask that MP to meet you in three months' time to say what they've done about it. And then in another three months' time - not in surgery, but in a special meeting."

To do this effectively we need to tell the stories of the people we help. Our stories too if necessary. John relates this to the words of St Vincent who said in one of his writings that little stories are 'morsels of hope' - from those that we meet and listen to'.

"In both listening to, and then being messengers of those we encounter and help, we can bring them hope" John says, "and translate that hope into action by lobbying and advocating on their behalf to people who represent us in parliament."

John speaks too of the role of young people in doing this. He refers back to the period of the election campaign when he appealed to young constituents to tell their stories and share their perspectives with others not only through social media, text messages, and on line, but through face to face, verbal conversations by knocking on doors. "The response was amazing. The young people enjoyed the conversations, they found it helped them."

John continues: "Now imagine if in our Conferences we encouraged more young people to join and participate in visits. It might do something to actually personally repair something in the generation gap that's developing within our society." This, in itself is a story. A narrative of hope.

"The Vincentian spirituality tells us to love those in need and to seek to remove the causes of poverty and deprivation. The Rule is concerned not only with relieving need, but also with redressing situations which cause it. Indeed, it's a disservice to the cause of Christ if we fail to use any means at our command to wipe out those conditions in society that lead to human need." Remember: the stories of people suffering and of our helping them are knitted into a narrative that actually challenges laws and budgets which essentially either suppress and injure or support and liberate. We are part of that story. So let's tell it well.

Welcome the Stranger

Feedback from the National Meeting 2017

Looking back at our SVP national meeting that took place in Liverpool on 23rd and 24th June, it was a bustling, lively and immensely popular event which received some great feedback. Here are comments from some of you who attended...

"Wonderful to hear details of the difference the projects make to people's lives."

"Thank you for a very good conference. Not my first - but definitely the best."

"Two days of the most articulate speakers, each with a refreshing approach to the Vincentian concerns. Informative and thought provoking and with many suggestions that we may adapt to our own specific conference."

"Opened my eyes. Changed some of my views. Inspirational."

"Inspiring but also troubling - why has government policy become so anti-refugee / asylum seeker?"

"An excellent talk straight from the heart, pointing out that refugees are a benefit to this country."

"Humbling information - started to see the SVP in the bigger picture."

"Great speech - like the idea of promoting the helped to become helpers."

"Gave a way our charities could work together to effect the law."

"We have been challenged. It is up to us. Wonderfully inspirational."

"A most powerful and painful challenge. We need, in my view, more one hour a week Vincentians, who won't attend meeting but will embrace the Vincentian charism in ways like this."

"Gave me plenty of ideas and ways to help the beneficiaries we visit in our Care Homes."

"An amazing opportunity to meet, share and be touched by other members' energy. So much information and so much food for thought."

"Very 'hands on' and invaluable - great information about CS projects and the vital role they play in extending SVP awareness."

"Powerful to hear people's personal stories - has a great impact."

"A breath of fresh air. Practical advice on how to get a conference moving!"

"Amazing what has been achieved, the Society is alive and well. Thank God."

"This was my first time at a National Conference and as a reasonably new SVP member, I was unsure as to what to expect. What I was met with, was an overwhelming sense of being part of one big Family. It didn't matter that I knew only a few people, I left having made some new friends that I will look forward to meeting up with again at the next one! It was a very spiritual weekend - almost like a retreat. There was time for prayer and reflection. Some of the speakers challenged my own ideas and this was positive. It was a time for education and to re-evaluate some of my previous thinking. I developed a sense of the 'bigger picture' and what the SVP is achieving on a far wider level in combination with our own Conferences locally. I will continue to put my Faith into practice, then roll on 2019!"

"First time I have been present at an annual review - extremely informative."



Welcome the Stranger

Meet our New SVP



President elect, Helen O'Shea (left) with Lucia Zambojova, Young Vincentian Administrative Assistant

Helen O'Shea is to be the 19th National President of the SVP when she takes up the mantle from Adrian Abel in November. Helen will be our first female National President. Here she speaks to Anita Boniface about her journey so far...

Please describe your journey with the SVP

There was an SVP group in my parish of St Patrick's, Grangetown in Cardiff so I had known of the organisation as a child. Then my mother became a member of a Conference in Treorchy so I had further exposure to the SVP as a teenager.

I myself became a member after listening to a lectern appeal by members in my local parish in North London. I was really moved by it, and heard the call. Although I didn't have much free time with young children, I felt moved to do something more than come to Mass. I wanted to be part of something offering support and practical help to people in need.

Eventually I became Conference treasurer as I could do it from home, then I had more free time and became Conference President. Later, when I had more free time I volunteered to help National office, and have been helping with funding bids and fundraising ever since.

Being immersed in National office gave me another transformative perspective. Up until that point I was working mainly in the local community of the parish, doing local fundraising, using money to help people locally. I wasn't aware of the history, mission, vision, Community Support Projects, or international work of Twinnage until I joined National office as a volunteer.

What are the merits of having had a number of different roles with the SVP?

Being a member gives me the absolute certainty that what the SVP does is really worthwhile. I know that from my own experience. I also understand what happens at National office, why it's so necessary and what everyone is trying to achieve. I understand where resources are slim and that this needs to be addressed.

Being a Board member has been interesting and challenging. Everyone is trying to do what's best for the SVP and people we help. Sometimes there are difficult decisions to be made and I go into the role of National President with my eyes wide open.

What does it mean to you to be the first female National President of SVP England and Wales?

I am a feminist and I think it's great to have women in key positions, just as it's good to have men in key positions. There are an awful lot of women in our Conferences who do SVP work all the time. I think women are playing a larger role in the Church already generally, and I think this reflects that. So it's a good representation of where we are.

Are there any particular skills, experience and outlook that come with being a woman that will add to SVP?

I do think that sometimes women can look at things in a slightly different way. It's good to have a balance. It's good to have diversity and to have different sexes, ages, backgrounds looking at things - it's really healthy. I probably look at things in a different way to how my husband looks at things.

Welcome the Stranger

SVP National President

How has your Catholic faith, and love of God, guided you and perhaps led you to your current position?

My faith is something that was given to me as a gift, but which I have had to work at sometimes and which I still have to work at. And I like everyone else, have struggles when things seem very difficult. But I do work at it, and it is an integral part of who I am. I try to see things as being part of God's plan, and also try to embrace the Gospel message of caring for others, and seeing Christ in everyone around you. It is not always easy to achieve in practice but it is what SVP members everywhere try to do.

I wouldn't be here without that, without any doubt. It is definitely that relationship that has forged this path. It's through many communications with God and through trying to see things as being part of God's plan, while also the living out of the Gospel message of caring for others and seeing Christ in everyone around you. It is not always easy to achieve in practice, but it is something I work at and I think that has probably led me on the path that I am now on.

“ It is important to get involved and to find the level that you are comfortable with. And your gender should be no barrier to what you can achieve and what you can achieve for others. ”

Do you think the calling to the Vincentian vocation is unique to each member or is it common and universal to everyone who comes to the SVP?

Both. As an individual you get the calling and you act on it. But you also have affinity with those in need, you want to do what you can to help people. That is common throughout Vincentianism. And there is something hugely uplifting about being part of a bigger organisation, with the same roots, the same ethos. Everyone working towards the same aim, inspired by St Vincent de Paul.

Individually, I think people take different things from the vocation. For me it's the message of the shared and innate dignity and respect that should be brought with you whenever you visit someone. I'm also struck by the need to organise. It's not just about charity, it's about organised charity. Speaking to people in power, influencing people both individually and collectively.

Do you think that for some people there may be a call within a call. A vocation within the Vincentian vocation? The call for members to use their individual skills and experience to take on more official roles perhaps, as you have?

That certainly happened to me. I was called to the SVP and then other callings came.

I think it is important to listen to those callings, and see what you can offer. Everyone can bring something to the SVP, and officer and leadership roles are important. If someone can see themselves in that role then I would encourage them to have the courage to do it, to follow that call. You may think there is someone else better equipped / qualified.

But in the end you will have a tap on the shoulder or a moment when you have to say to yourself, 'Maybe this is the moment I have to listen to a higher authority.' Why are you expecting other people to do it for you when you believe in what the SVP does? Rather, think about how best you could be doing what you can to help other people most.

How do you think your vocations as mother and wife enhance your mission at SVP?

I think family life equips you for the outside world. It's not always smooth. People have problems and difficulties at different times, including myself and we all have times we need someone to listen to us. We all need support at times.

And what would you consider the priorities of the SVP?

I think the priorities must be to find ways of being relevant in the modern world, yet maintaining the history and the mission that has always been the absolute core of SVP work. We are one body with a mission, guided by our history, guided by our faith. But there are many different ways we can act that out including finding the hidden poor - prisoners and asylum seekers for example. It's about the work, but also nurturing the sense of unity.

How might your approach to leadership of the SVP vary or build on previous approaches?

I would like to translate my own enthusiasm for the work that the SVP does onto the broader picture if at all possible.



Community Support Projects

New Community Shop off to a flying start!

At the end of April, we opened a new Community Shop on Marton Road, Middlesbrough. The shop is already off to a flying start with sales going very well and lots of regular customers who can't stay away! Shop Manager, Angela Wilson, brings with her a wealth of experience, including managing a busy Greggs store and managing pubs for many years in London and the South East.

Area Manager, Steve Milburn, is amazed at how much support we've already had from local parishes and SVP members, and feels that Angela is a perfect fit. Steve says; "I've been really impressed at how quickly Angela has got to grips with everything. As well as having a real eye for good display, her big smile and bubbly personality is just what we need to attract customers and volunteers. She is a good listener and understands the importance of giving her time to those who need someone to talk to".

The shop sells clothing, bric-a-brac, toys, children's equipment, books, DVDs, textiles and lots more. Good, clean donations are always needed to keep the shop well stocked and we're always on the lookout for more volunteers.



Belle Vue shop in Middlesbrough, with Shop Manager, Angela Wilson (second from right), SVP Local Oversight Group member, Margaret Clark (centre) and volunteers Emily, Nicole and James

If you'd like to help and have a couple of hours spare, we'd love to hear from you! Angela can be contacted at the shop on **01642 821816**.

Tower House Older Persons CSP to open in September



Tower House older persons community support project will be officially opened by Bishop Richard Moth on 19th September 2017.

Over the next two months the team will be working hard to ensure the building and services are ready for launch and that we meet all quality standards required by Brighton and Hove Council. We have recently received funding to employ a project co-ordinator thanks to the work of our national office fundraising

team. Thomas Gillespie, Regional Head of CSP in the South East, is leading on mobilising this project.

It is an exciting time for team and local SVP member lead, Peter Cropp, and we look forward to delivering a new service in this vibrant part of the Society. This new initiative will support parish communities in reaching older people who may be isolated in Brighton and Hove. Our focus will be on providing holistic co-produced activities that benefit a wide spectrum of individual need. We will be starting with lunches but as we scale up we will also be looking to offer advice on a range of issues, carers support, a café and health visits from the likes of chiropody and occupational therapy.

In the short term we are looking for more volunteers and charitable donations from people who are committed to supporting older people to live fulfilling lives. This includes the need for a new mini-bus. If you are interested in getting involved or would like more information, please contact Thomas Gillespie at thomasg@svp.org.uk or call **07880 385 490**.

Community Support Projects

New SVP Shop brings hope to Hove

The new Hove shop was officially opened by Bishop Richard Moth of Arundel and Brighton diocese on 21st June 2017. Two blocks from the sea front and situated next door to St Peters Church and Costa Coffee the shop is our second retail outlet in this area.

We have already formed a partnership with Off the Fence homeless charity nearby to create opportunities for volunteer posts and we are inundated with volunteers and donations. Our shop manager is positive this shop will be commercially successful as it is in a high street and will boost our income to support community projects such as Tower House for older people going forward.



Bishop Richard Moth conducted a blessing of the new Hove shop

Legacy leads to new SVP shop in Brighouse



A new shop has opened in Brighouse, West Yorkshire, thanks to a legacy kindly left to the SVP last year. Annette Haigh and Susie Gandy were tasked with finding a suitable location for the new shop in the Calderdale area, to both benefit the local community and make money to support our important work.

With previous knowledge of the Brighouse area, Susie says "I knew it would be a fantastic place to have one of our shops, it is a really community based area with an SVP church – St Joseph's – just around the corner". Huge thanks to everyone who worked really hard to get the shop up and running in the space of just a few weeks, since which the shop has gone from strength to strength. In June, Brighouse held its famous annual 1940s weekend which the shop joined in with, staff dressing up and decorating the window in 40s style. It was a hugely successful weekend in which the shop took just over £1200 in 2 days!

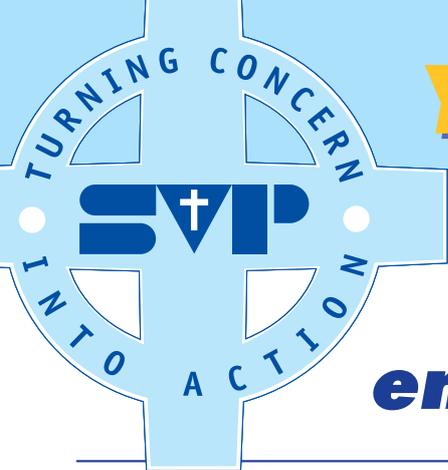
Blackfriars roof repairs ongoing

Work on Blackfriars roof in Newcastle started in April 2017 with an expected completion date of early August. Consistent heavy rain has made the work hard for the contractors but there is still confidence that it will be completed on time and within budget.

The work, which sees the whole of the roof re-covered, plus substantial repointing work of the adjoining St. Vincent's Supported Accommodation, will cost nearly £300,000. Tyne Central Council has so far raised around 50% of the required figure and is still hoping for donations from the wider Society to assist with the remainder. A big thank you to all those Conferences who have donated so far! We provide accommodation and support for 21 homeless people and around 900 people a week use our community centre.



Once the repairs are complete, we look forward to knowing that we can continue this work with a secure roof over our heads and can put away the mops and buckets!



Young Vincentians

Young Vincentians engagement in 2018 Synod!

The Holy Father has established in October 2018 the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: "Youth, faith and vocational discernment".

This is momentous for young people in the Church as it is the first time in the whole of the Church's history that young people have been the focus of the Church's discussions at global level.

This Synod follows on from the Synod assemblies on the family as well as the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. It aims to find the best ways of accompanying young people in their journey through life, to reach spiritual maturity through the process of discernment, and to discover and realise God's plan for their lives in the fullness of the Body that is the Catholic Church.

The Young Vincentians team roll out an initiative every year to accompany the regular spiritual resources that are offered as part of becoming a Young Vincentians group. We are devising PowerPoint presentations and A5 booklets as part of an initiative that expands and has our young people engage with the 2018 Synod. These resources will be made available to all our Mini Vinnies, Youth SVP, B-Attitude and 1833 groups.

Through this initiative, we would hope to see:

- Potential that Parishes might engage with the Synod through Young Vincentians, providing a strong influencing factor for them to start up groups, and engage in the Society.
- Young people participating directly in the inquiry stage through 2 surveys: one issued by the Vatican, and one issued by Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW).
- Bishops receiving a letter from Council General (CG) in each Diocese by mid-May explaining how SVP envisions all their Young Vincentians engaging in the Synod together with them as our shepherds.
- Supplementary Resources to be rolled out throughout the year, with a plan communicated to Parishes and Schools from September 2017 onwards.

And the above potential resources/ideas would include exploring:

- The importance of faith, young people, and discernment in today's culture.
- Understanding more about the Councils of the Church and how decisions are made (not for the little ones).
- Engagement with the discussions of the Synod via local Bishops.
- What is vocational discernment? What REALLY is it? Why do it? How do we do it? What are the pre-requisites for a fruitful discernment?



- The spiritual life – the life-journey of a Vincentian.
- How to pray for a discernment and identifying which spirits produce which effects when we make decisions (for the older ones).
- Emphasis on a deeper understanding of the Vincentian Vocation.
- What is the difference between 'personal faith' and 'the faith of the Church'. Practical activities needed for making this manifest.
- Diocesan events supported by or even organised by Young Vincentian volunteers.
- What young people bring to works of charity.

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Young Vincentians



St. Joseph's Mini Vinnies in Wetherby!

Mini Vinnies accomplish amazing things during the autumn term. Here's what St. Joseph's Mini Vinnies in Wetherby were up to this time last year...



We have a group of 14 Mini Vinnies from Years 4, 5 and 6. Our Mini Vinnies had an extremely busy autumn term! In September, they went to St Anne's Cathedral in Leeds for the Mini Vinnies Commissioning Service, officiated by Bishop Marcus Stock. They were very interested to see the Cathedral, and to walk through the door of Mercy, which was explained by the Bishop during the Mass. He focussed his homily on the responsibility of Mini Vinnies to 'see' those in need, 'think' of what they can do to help, and to 'do' it! They also enjoyed taking some fun selfies on the minibus!

Meet our Mascot to the Mini Vinnies!



Mini Vinnies at Our Lady & St. Kenelm Primary, in Halesowen, have their own little mascot to support them in their mission.

Miracle baby was saved by surgeons who fitted him with a 'hand-made heart' is our own little 'Mini Vinnie'. Little Vinnie Holliday was born with half a heart and

had a life-saving operation at Birmingham Children's Hospital. He was diagnosed with Hypoplastic left heart syndrome (HLHS) while still in the womb and needed open-heart surgery just 24 hours after being delivered. Surgeons at Birmingham Children's Hospital 'rewired' his heart to construct a new aorta - to allow the right side of his heart to pump blood round the body.

Vinnie is now 7 months old and his parents have agreed for him to be our own little mascot. On his visit to school, the Presidents, Izzy and Sophie, from Y5, presented him with his Mini Vinnie badge, certificate, pledge card and prayer card.

His cousin attends Our Lady and St. Kenelm's primary school and is a member of the Mini Vinnies Group. Baby Vincent's uncle is also a school governor and member of the parish's adult SVP Group acting as School Liaison Officer. Baby Vincent has been adopted as the Mini Vinnies "Mascot" and is proving to be an inspiring choice.



Society News

Homelessness awareness at new Mini Vinnie group



A new Mini Vinnie group has been set up at Our Lady of the Wayside Catholic Primary School in Solihull. With the enthusiastic support of their Head teacher, Mr Ben Taylor, the group have already taken part in a couple of activities and are now planning a homelessness awareness evening.

The children have found it hard to imagine what it would be like not to have a warm bed to sleep in at night, so came up with the idea to create their own shelters on the school field, made out of cardboard boxes and tarpaulin, which they will sleep in with at least one friend or parent. If the weather is wet or cold, they will move into school and use the classrooms. After the event, the children plan to write an article about their experience which will be published in both the Diocesan and local press.

A big Vinnie thumbs up!



A new Mini Vinnie group has been established at Our Lady & St Kenelm Primary School in Halesowen, in the West Midlands. A special assembly was held on 4th May to launch the group which is being led by Head teacher Christine Finnegan.

Mini Vinnies attend SVP Eucharistic Celebration

Three pupils from St Wilfred's RC Primary School, York, attended the Mass in Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral on Saturday 24th June to celebrate 400 years of the Vincentian Family. In front of a congregation of over 1000 people, including parents, friends and SVP delegates attending the National Meeting, they made their Mini Vinnie pledge and received the Certificate of Registration for 2017/18.



Service with a smile in Bradford!

The SVP Conferences of St John the Evangelist and St Winefride's - under the umbrella of the parish of Mary, Mother of God, Bradford - held a Mass for the Sick at the church of St John the Evangelist followed by afternoon tea in the hall, on Saturday 17th June 2017. Around 60 parishioners attended and Mini Vinnies from St John's Primary School were on hand to help serve food to them. A good day was had by all.



Anointing of the Sick in Banstead

On Saturday 1st July, Fr Miceal, Parish Priest at St Ann's Banstead, celebrated Mass with the Anointing of the Sick. Twenty-two parishioners received the Sacrament which gives them strength, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties of life and renews their trust and faith in God.

Members of the SVP prepared sandwiches, cakes and scones ready for this special day. Flowers and well-loved china adorned the tables where forty parishioners enjoyed afternoon tea. Seventeen Mini Vinnies from St Anne's School and their teachers provided beautiful entertainment, singing three songs accompanied on the piano by their Head teacher and conducted by an SVP member. Their final song ended with the words: "We're here to care... building a better world for us all, making a difference big and small." Afterwards, the children talked to the parishioners who were delighted to meet the young members of the SVP and to hear what they had been doing. One appreciative parishioner commented that "It was wonderful to be here as this doesn't happen very often." Another said: "Everything was perfect - the afternoon tea, the singing and the company." To bring the smiles on people's faces and to have the old and the young mingled in one faith - that is what it means to be a Vincentian.



Mini Vinnies from St Anne's School providing entertainment

Ruby Anniversary



A Mass to celebrate 40 years of Priesthood - 1977-2017 - of Fr John Patrick Beirne was held at St Clare's Church in Aylesbury on the evening of Friday 23rd June.

The Mass was concelebrated by Mgr Sean Healy with Fr John and several of his fellow priests including Fr Hugh O'Donnell who attended the Salesian College with Fr John and gave a short tribute. Fr John was ordained by Bishop Charles Grant on July 8th 1977 and served at five other Churches in the Diocese before becoming parish priest for St Clare's & St Joseph's churches in Aylesbury in 1999. The Mass was well attended and a fish & chips supper was provided in the grounds afterwards. As well as parish priest, Fr Beirne is District Spiritual Advisor for the SVP.

Solihull cake sale proves popular!

Congratulations to the SVP Conference at St Augustine's in Solihull who recently held a cake sale, which raised a tremendous £402!





Flitwick mark Feast Day



Friday 23rd June saw parishioners of the Sacred Heart in Flitwick mark their Feast Day with the annual Mass for the Sick organised as usual by the parish Conference of the SVP.

Almost 50 parishioners gathered together to celebrate the Feast and support those coming to receive the sacrament of the sick through anointing. People came from all parts of the widespread parish with members of the SVP providing transport where needed. For some, the Mass has become a regular event in their lives and for some it was their first experience of such a Mass, but all said how strengthened they felt by attending the celebration. Canon Bennie Noonan was the celebrant assisted by Deacon Philip Pugh.

Following the Mass, the members of the SVP served an afternoon tea and this went on for much longer than usual as everyone was having such a good time eating and chatting.

Beeston Conference Service for the Sick

In April, the Beeston Conference in Nottingham held its annual Service for the Sick. A very enjoyable service was conducted by Fr Christopher and approximately 25 parishioners/friends were anointed.

After the service a lovely afternoon tea was provided by the SVP in the church hall, marking a very special afternoon for parishioners and members of the Conference.



Southwark's Seniors' Summer Social



A Seniors' Summer Social was held for older parishioners at St George's Cathedral, Southwark in south London on 10th July. Organised by the recently-started SVP Conference at the Cathedral, the party featured prize games such as a 1950s-themed trivia quiz and a free raffle, as well as music, chat and lots of laughter.

Food and drink included gallons of tea, delicious sandwiches and quiches, and a huge array of cakes like Conference Secretary, Paul Walker's famed coffee and walnut cake. The aim of the event was to bring together SVP members and local older people in a social setting. "Especially amidst the hustle and bustle of London, retired people can become isolated and lonely so we wanted to create an opportunity for them to socialise and have a bit of fun," commented Conference Vice President, Carolyn Wooldridge.

"And this is just the start," she added. "We also did a small survey to ask them what other social activities they might like, from a list that included picnics, trips to the seaside, and cinema and theatre visits."

Cornwall District Annual Meal



On Saturday 3rd June, members of Cornwall District enjoyed their annual meal which this year was arranged by the Truro Conference. Guests included the CC President Simon Coombs and his wife Marion, Father John Gilbert of Truro, Father Ciaran McGuinness of Bodmin and Father Cadoc Leighton of Camborne.

The meal was held at the 16th Century Epiphany House in Truro which has an Anglican background, but is these days devoted to ecumenical activities. Members enjoyed talking to fellow Vincentians from other Conferences and it was a purely social occasion. The involvement of their priests was very much appreciated. It was an afternoon of enrichment in so many ways – and it will happen again.

Watford Circle supports SVP Summer Camps

On the 1st June 2017, Watford District President, Siobhan Garibaldi, was presented with a cheque for £1,771 by Tony Kleiser, Provincial President of Province 8 of the Catenians Association, to be used to send children to the SVP Summer Camps.

The Watford Circle of the Catenian Association are keen supporters of the SVP and the work it does in the local community. During his year of office, Tony chose the SVP Summer Camps as his 'President's Charity' and was presented with a certificate of thanks at the Circle's Ladies Night.





SVP in Romania



Maria, centre, with the two Lasi Conference presidents, Marilena Bartic (left) and Ana Dobos (right)

A huge, magnificent shopping mall and several IT companies now provide work for some of the 20,000 people previously employed at the former steelworks. The two Lasi Conferences are kept busy with families struggling with unemployment.

Ana Dobos, president of St Teresa, brought me to meet Maria and her four children in their two-room home, accessed by a rough path and a small wooden ladder to the front door. Maria's husband was out looking for casual work, so the donations of food were very welcome. Maria hopes to help support the family when she completes her dressmaking course. Meanwhile a Conference project will cover the cost of house repairs.

I managed several more visits on my way to the National Meeting. Anton Dasca, president in Baltati, introduced me to Mosi and his wife. Our arrival was fortuitous as the lady had fallen outside in the snow. After bringing her inside and checking she was unhurt Anton turned to Mosi, who is paralysed and confined to bed. Many houses visited by the SVP have been divided and their home consisted of two little rooms – a kitchen and a bedroom. The couple have a mobile phone, so they can keep in touch with neighbours and their daughter in Lasi. Anton often brings food, but Mosi says he only really wants company.

After checking that a friend was on his way, we moved on to an even smaller home. Sandor and Valorica have no running water or electricity, so I was puzzled to hear a radio as we approached. Sandor, one leg amputated, shuffled from a stool in the kitchen, a room all of 2 metres square, to a bed in the adjoining room to proudly show us a bicycle whose dynamo powers the radio, a light and a small TV. The couple qualify for sickness benefit, but the system is very slow and they are glad of the food and firewood brought by the SVP.

The Society supports older, isolated people or families struggling to cope with donations of food, clothing, especially school uniform and firewood for the wood-burning stoves which are a common feature in homes with no power. Members do house

Arriving in Lasi in northern Romania at the end of April, my warm welcome from Marilena Bartic, Romanian Twinnage Officer and president of St Anton Lasi, was in sharp contrast to the icy wind and snow showers. Lasi, the “Paris of Romania,” has beautiful buildings and wide boulevards.

repairs after fire or flood damage. Lunch clubs or SVP “meals on wheels” keep older people in touch. Some Conferences visit gypsies, who mostly live on the edge of town, so the friendship and material help offered by the SVP are much appreciated. Many Conferences run after-school clubs, providing a hot meal and help with homework, particularly for the many children who live without electric light or power. The SVP organises summer camps, offering a break by the sea or in the mountains with healthy meals and outdoor activities for children from cramped, inner-city apartment blocks.



Conference members in Adjudeni brought clothes and a washing machine to the Clapotaru family

The SVP Project Scheme is helping to enable families become self-sufficient as £1000 can go towards setting up a small business. St Anton, Lasi, supported by their England and Wales twin, has bought beehives and equipment for a family to produce honey and wax products. In Adjudeni single Mum, Lenuta, already donating milk from two cows to families supported by the SVP, is preparing to rear pigs, thanks to finance from the Conference twin.

This year's Romanian National Meeting was combined with a celebration of the 400 years of the Vincentian charism. Members from the 35 Conferences, of which England and Wales is twinned with 22, welcomed the opportunity to share experiences and learn more of our Vincentian heritage. During the concluding Mass Auxiliary Archbishop Perca complimented Ana Dobos on her surprise publication of a history of the 400 years and the development of the SVP in Romania.

Mary Abel



Empowering our Twins

We have all heard the well-known saying, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Give him a rod and show him how to fish and he will feed himself not only for a day, but every day”.

The scheme to start small-scale projects sets out to do just that – providing “rod and knowledge”. The scheme has been running for many decades and has proved very successful in enabling families to become self-sufficient.

The simplest types provide the necessary capital, either as a grant or low-interest loan, to start a small business to pay for the initial stock of goods for a street stall selling fruit and vegetables, sweets or soft drinks or a business making paper and other craft goods. Loans are repaid over a period and then used to help other families. One loan enabled a man to purchase the tools to start a hair-cutting business, and so become self-sufficient and less dependent. Another enabled a woman to set up a street stall selling sweets and drinks – and stand outside the local school!

Then there is the provision of a cow or goat to a family for the milk or for rearing. Training schemes have been started in such skills as carpentry, leather-working, computing and sewing. Another scheme provides bicycles so children can get to school more easily. Occasionally there is an application to build a house for an adopted family or latrines for a community. All are overseen by the local Conference members. The maximum value of a project is about £1,000. Most come from India, with smaller numbers from our other twinned countries.

In recent years, these small-scale projects have benefitted hundreds of families directly and with the “revolving” projects,



many more families. One project to provide a cow to each of 5 families has so far benefited 19 families, all because the first calf in each case is given back to the Society to pass on to another family. It doesn't just end with money going abroad. The Project Officers in our twinned countries arrange for completion reports, usually with photographs, which are then passed to the sponsors here. These have proved valuable where Conferences involve the parish in raising the funds.

If your Conference has some “spare” funds or feels they can raise the money or would like more information, then contact your CC Twinnage Officer or email Vincent Naylor at vandmnaylor@vandmnaylor.plus.com

You really can bring hope to so many families.

Vincent Naylor

Visit to Carmelrani Conference

Pat and Carole first visited their Twin in September 2006. They both attended meetings at the Conference and the Cochin Central Council as well as accompanying members on their visits to some very poor families and assisting in their soup kitchen.

Their little flour shop has been supported by the contributions from the Bodmin Conference. Lissy Johnson introduced Pat and Carole to the Sacred Heart Boys' Home and Pat has seen them on her return visits to India every year since 2006. Carol has only visited once in 2006 due to ill health. As well as visiting Vincentian aspects, they were also able to see Kerala's tourist attractions such as backwater cruises and a tour of Fort Kochin with its famous Chinese fishing nets.

In February 2017 whilst on another visit, Pat attended a meeting of Carmelrani Conference although this was not a formal meeting.

Pat had made contact with Lissy Johnson the president of that Conference prior to her visit and she informed her she would be in the area each Sunday. In fact Lissy with her youngest son from the Sacred Heart Boys' Home, came to see Pat during her first weekend there. Pat also visited her house and met Lissy's husband who was not in good health. They again met during Pat's final weekend. Pat was shown a room which had been especially refurbished for the SVP by the parish.

At their first meeting Pat presented Lissy with a gift from Bodmin Parish and a card from members of Bodmin Conference. Pat also showed them a copy of the programme for Peter Martelli's Requiem Mass RIP. (Peter was the much respected Bodmin Conference Treasurer who died recently). To Pat's surprise Lissy arranged a special plaque dedicated to Peter's SVP service which was presented to her for the Bodmin Conference.

Patricia Riley and Carole Coates, Bodmin Conference Vincentians



Fundraising

Jim's Camino Update!



On 26th April I embarked on my 500 mile walk to raise funds for the SVP. I was prepared physically, mentally and spiritually for this pilgrimage so had no fears – even at the age of 73! I arrived in Santiago de Compostela 31 days later, on Sunday 28th May, in time for midday Mass, elated and in good health.

But why? Since reading about him in the Bible, I have always been fascinated by James the Apostle, the first cousin of Jesus. In eight chapters he covers pride, greed, lust, worldliness, discrimination and slander, all in a punchy way - my kind of man! He went on a pilgrimage to the Iberian Peninsula to spread the word of Jesus and on returning to Judea, was martyred AD44

(Acts 12) and his remains are buried under Santiago's Cathedral. I did my Camino to raise much-needed funds for the SVP's vital work in local communities across England and Wales.

Thanks to the generous support I received along the way, I am now close to achieving my target of £2,000. Could you please join me on this final stretch by making a personal gift or by organising a coffee morning or collection and giving the proceeds to my fundraising campaign? My Just Giving page will remain open for a few weeks longer. Any support you can give will be hugely appreciated.

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/James-Monaghan4

New Gift Aid Envelope

St Vincent de Paul Society
England and Wales
Turning Concern into Action

giftaid it

Can you help support our work?
We are a Catholic charity that supports people in need in local communities in England and Wales and overseas through our twinned SVP Conferences.

Motivated by the Christian faith and inspired by the message of the Gospels, our 10,000 volunteers seek and find those in need and offer them sincere friendship.

We visit them on a regular basis at home, in hospital and while in care, offering friendship and practical support such as food, furniture or financial help where needed. We organise trips and events for older and isolated people and provide holidays for children and families. We regularly support SVP work in our twinned countries and send aid following conflict and natural disasters.

Please place your gift in this envelope and provide your details overleaf so we can claim Gift Aid. Cheques should be made payable to "The SVP". Registered charity 1053992

The Society's Gift Aid envelope has been updated with some design changes and new wording to reflect current HMRC requirements. Supplies are available on request from the National Office.

Fundraising Regulation Update

As reported in the last VC, the SVP registered with the Fundraising Regulator earlier this year and the Regulator's badge is now appearing on the Society's fundraising materials. Registration means the Society is committed to the standards set out in the Fundraising Code of Practice and to the Fundraising Promise, both of which are available from the Regulator's website: www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk When you are planning a fundraising initiative, please contact the National Office Fundraising Team for guidance on when the badge must be used, which version is most appropriate to your circumstances and the requirements governing its application. They will then provide you with the version you need. The National Office must now report annually to the Regulator

on the fundraising activities of the Society and on the management of any complaints received about fundraising.



Heart speaks unto heart Lessons from the poor at The Passage

The Passage is a homelessness charity which lives by Vincentian values. It has four Catholic Chaplains who support and minister to 120 or so men and women who visit in the centre each day.

I meet two chaplains - Fr Padraig (a member of the Congregation of the Missions) and Sr Bernie (a member of the Daughters of Charity) - and attend a prayer service with a small group of homeless men. Fr Padraig tells me of the vital importance of the Christian ethos of The Passage in witnessing to these men and women their dignity and essential goodness as children of God.

“At the core of how we serve others is the Christian vision of people. I want to tell our clients of their value and preciousness to God, and to us. This can often be said not through words but just by being attentive to him.”

The concept of each client's preciousness has arisen a lot during the prayer service. Fr Padraig's key message is that we are all intrinsically precious in God's eyes. For many of these men and women, says the priest, their backgrounds are very troubled.

They are likely to have come from painful childhoods where they were deprived of the parental love needed to lay the foundations and building blocks of healthy self-esteem. As a result, they are more susceptible to damaging influences in their lives – abuse, addiction, mental illness, imprisonment because of crime, and they end up not only rejected in childhood, but rejected by society in adulthood too.

The priest continues:

“ Many people here have experienced very unsatisfactory childhoods and they feel that their lives have been a failure and that they are despised by society. But if our clients can find that there is respect, a reverence for them here, then we have done our job. ”

Fr Padraig says that each man and woman has a story, and “it is by being present to them, to hear that story that we remind them of their dignity and how precious each one of them is.”

Many of these stories are told informally, in simple everyday settings such as the dining room where Fr Padraig will dine with



the 120 men and women, most of whom will never set foot in the chapel for prayer or Mass.

“This method of evangelisation is simply through presence. Through being present to clients we acknowledge their dignity and foster hope”.

Fr Padraig tells me: “In a place like this, I go out and am present to people who won't go to church, but I will have my food with them and they will start having questions and often deeply religious conversations will take place. You never know what impact it is having.”

Fr Padraig also speaks of the value of being present in practical ways, “I am here at 6.30am on a Monday to open up and I am at reception, and people would see me then as part of the staff. They don't initially know that I am a chaplain. Clients see that you are engaged, doing menial tasks like giving them a towel, giving them a detox bath to get rid of lice. Simple tasks are a way of being present.” This practical expression of Gospel values is typically Vincentian.

“St Vincent talked about preaching with the strength of our arm, and the sweat of our brow,” Fr Padraig tells me. He said the poor are “our Lords and our Masters”. They are the people who can teach us about who we should be.

“They teach through their experience of failure. It's like the apples in the orchard. The apples only get sweet with the first touch of frost. Failure, if handled and appropriated, can mature us and make us sweet. And then, as with the wisdom of St Vincent and the Gospel, we are like the good soil and the seed can fall and be fruitful.”

Anita Boniface is Senior Media and Communications Officer for the SVP (England & Wales)



Behind the Scenes

Behind the Scenes at National Office

In this Vincentian Concern we are introducing you to the Governance, Administration and Membership Team, which is headed up by Matthew Stockton.



Matthew Stockton
Governance & Compliance Manager

"I have been working for the SVP for 10 years and since I started, my role has changed and developed in line with the business. I manage a team of 4 and my main areas of responsibility are; HR, H&S, Governance and Premises.

I facilitate the national SVP staff induction and deliver staff training. I support several committees in the Society and provide clerical support to the board of Trustees and National Council. I really enjoy working for the SVP because of the people, the variety it brings and the cause. In July 2017 I completed my Diploma in HR Practice, an area I wish to develop. My main hobby is Native American Indians. I am fascinated by their history and culture, I have many books on the subject and have already visited 16 reservations in North America. My aim is to visit many more in the years to come. To relax I like to take walks along the beach where I live in Essex, socialise with my friends and participate in Karaoke."



Verona Boreland
Administration Assistant

"I started working with the SVP 2 years 5 months ago in my role as Administration Assistant. I am the first port of call on the telephone, directing calls and meeting and greeting visitors to the SVP National Office. I am responsible for

ordering stationery supplies for the office and ensuring that all office equipment is in good working order; i.e. photocopier and franking machine.

Over the last year I have taken over the processing of SVP ID cards for full members. Although this is time consuming it is also quite rewarding. Outside of work I'm an active member of my church as part of the hospitality team. I enjoy gardening, which I find very relaxing, and cooking/baking."



Teddy Curran *Database Officer*

"I joined the SVP as a volunteer for two years and got a job as data officer in 2012. My duties are coordinating the input from Secretarial returns, preparation of secretarial return documents, providing log in details to the website for both staff and members, guiding Conferences on

the procedures by liaising with members. I am also involved in data entry input, creating data reports and monitoring all data for accuracy and providing support by updating members' records. SVP has been my second home since I arrived in the UK in 2010 from Uganda. I enjoy dealing with members, giving them a positive experience and making a difference in solving their problems. I am married to a Scottish man, William with two lovely kids that give me purpose to live. I am an SVP member Secretary of St Chad – South Norwood, and a president of St Chad Ugandan Catholic community and a publicity member of the St Chad Catholic Church Fundraising Team."



Rebecca Montgomery
Membership Administration Assistant

"Since a young age, I've had a keen interest in Charity work and helping those in need. From teaching English abroad to tin-shaking in my home town, I've been involved with various charities for the last 10 years. Growing up, I often

had a hand in SVP activities including helping at Christmas parties, sourcing and shopping for furniture, or collecting items for the food bank.

In January I started volunteering at the SVP National Office. After a few months, a position became available with the admin department as 'Membership Assistant' and I was delighted to become a part of their team. My favourite parts of the role are the various opportunities to communicate with many members and the processing of Requests for Help.

Outside of SVP, I graduated from University in 2016 with a degree in International Relations. I've been a swimming teacher for 7 years, enjoy cooking and am (slowly) learning Spanish. I also love travelling around the world so I'm always looking for new places to visit!"

Living and breathing SVP values until death

Sometimes I talk to members who do not think that the Society should be investing in anything other than local Conference work. They do not see the relevance of our Special Works or Community Support Projects (CSPs) and take issue with the need for staffing in such projects.

This month one of our staff members died unexpectedly and I wanted to share a little of his story with you.

Graham came to his local SVP shop as a volunteer in 2008. His early life had been beset by difficulties, culminating in the loss of both legs after an accident shortly before his 21st birthday.

As a volunteer he was shy with little self-confidence and started working in the back of the shop, sorting and steaming.

Gradually his confidence grew and he moved onto the shop floor and in 2014 he was successful in securing his first ever paid job as a casual Shop Manager. He proved himself to be so good that he was appointed as a permanent Shop Manager in 2015 – in the shop where he started volunteering seven years before.

Graham was not only good at his job but he was always supportive of others and especially his volunteers. In the words of his manager, Graham lived and breathed the values of the SVP.

Upon his death his mother asked if someone from the local SVP would speak at his funeral. It will be an honour for them to do so.



The SVP helped transform Graham's life and he in turn gave so much back to the SVP and enriched the lives of those he met. He will be sadly missed by his customers, colleagues and all those whose lives he touched.

Elizabeth Palmer, CEO

There is a light that will never go out...

With deepest regret we announce the deaths of the following valued members:

Mary Davis - long serving member of Our lady of Canvey and English Martyrs Conference, Essex.

Joan Garnett - longstanding member and later an auxiliary member of St Anthony's Conference, Onchan.

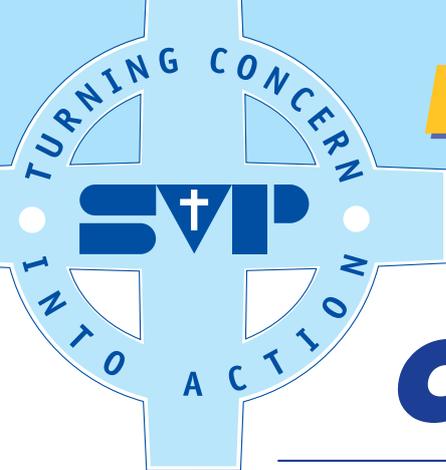
Susan James - former Secretary of Sacred Heart and St Peter's Conference.

George Mackie - President of St Patrick's Conference in Grangetown, Cardiff.

Sandra Walsh - long standing volunteer at CSP Trowbridge, Cardiff.

May they rest in peace.

Where provided, full obituaries will be displayed on the SVP website.



Information

Helpful Note from CHAS West London

In this article, Peter C. Taylor, Chairman of the Catholic Housing Aid Society - CHAS (West London) - talks about his organisation and grants that they can provide to SVP clients who are in rent arrears, council tax arrears or in need of help when it comes to a deposit or first month's rent on a new flat.

For some years now, the Trustees of CHAS (West London) have placed an advertisement in 'Vincentian Concern' encouraging SVP Conferences to apply for a grant from CHAS (West London) if they were trying to assist one of their clients who had a financial housing problem.

We are pleased to report that the number of applications is increasing, with some really sad and difficult cases, from all over England and Wales. We, of course, are not in a position to provide any accommodation.

This separately registered charity was first registered by the Charity Commission in 1965 to assist the St. Vincent's Family Housing Association Ltd. with their work.

For many years it provided loans to SVFHA and distributed a few grants. SVFHA, which operated in the South-East of England, took the decision in 2015 to the Transfer of Engagements to another Housing Association. In October 2016 this was approved and all property and assets were transferred to The Radcliffe Housing Society Ltd. They have about 375 properties so the SVFHA 42 was a welcome addition. We believe that this transfer will assist in the creation of additional flats for rent to those who are in desperate need of housing.

However, the Trustees of CHAS (West London) decided to retain the Charity in order to assist the SVP, among others, to respond with grants for people with a financial housing problem.

You may wonder why we are called (West London). In 1965 there were many local branches of CHAS around the country, over 70 we believe, but, over the years and for many reasons, they had ceased operation. However, we have carried on and retained our formal name.

We may only give grants/loans to assist with housing needs, i.e. unpaid rent, deposit for a new tenancy, etc., etc.

How does a Conference/Council apply for a grant? We have an application form and expect written evidence of, say, rent arrears to be provided. We expect the local Conference to be fully engaged in the case and we also expect them to have approached their own District Council. After all, what is the SVP Support Scheme for? We would say that very few applications from the SVP are turned down.

An application can be downloaded from our website www.chas-uk.org or obtained from our Secretary by post to 46 Bradley Road, London SE19 3NS or email noreenvilliers@aol.com

Inspiration Corner



We end your Vincentian reading with a few quotes from St Vincent de Paul:

We should help and support one another and strive for peace and union among ourselves. This is the wine that cheers and strengthens travellers along this narrow path of Jesus Christ.

It is an obligation for us to inconvenience ourselves for the service of the poor. Do whatever God asks of you and remain at peace; above all, love and support one another in Our Lord.

The grace of perseverance is the greatest gift of all; it crowns all others.

May you be forever a beautiful tree of life bringing forth fruits of love.

God does not consider the outcome of the good work undertaken but the charity that accompanies it. You acquire new merits daily by the unprecedented good you do everywhere and for all sorts of persons.

The poor are our portion, and now that they are coming to us, driven out by the hardships of war, which is emptying the countryside, it seems that we are more obliged to work for their salvation in the present affliction in the place where they are now.



St Scholastica's Retreat

An Almshouse in the heart of Princes Risborough

We want to help turn your Concern into Action!

As a member of the SVP, you may meet elderly people who are in housing need whom we could help but who may not know about us.

St Scholastica's Retreat is an Almshouse for practising Catholics who are aged 60 years or over, in need of financial assistance, and who are capable of living independently in a self-contained flat.

If you know of someone in housing need who fits this description, please let them know about us.

For more information, please visit our website: www.stscholasticas.co.uk and/or contact

The Warden, Revd Seán Duffy on 01844 344437 at 27, The Retreat, Princes Risborough, HP27 0JG

info@stscholasticas.co.uk

Registered Charity: 203583

Sources of Funding:

CHAS Catholic Housing Aid Society (West London)

CHAS (West London) was established in 1965 and the aim of the charity is to assist anyone with a financial housing problem. For instance, the Trustees would consider supporting someone with rent arrears who may be in danger of being evicted. However we are a 'specialised fund' and cannot make grants for more general purposes. The fund works closely with the St Vincent de Paul Society throughout England and Wales and, where applications are made through the SVP, we would expect the SVP to be committed to the particular case they are submitting with time and appropriate funds. Although £250 is a general amount for a grant, consideration is given to the circumstances of each case and the amount is varied accordingly.

An application form can be downloaded from www.chas-uk.org or obtained from Noreen Villiers by post (46 Bradley Road, London SE19 3NS) or e-mail (noreenvilliers@AOL.com).

Please submit the application to Noreen Villiers with as much supporting detail and documentation as possible in order to receive the full consideration of the Trustees.

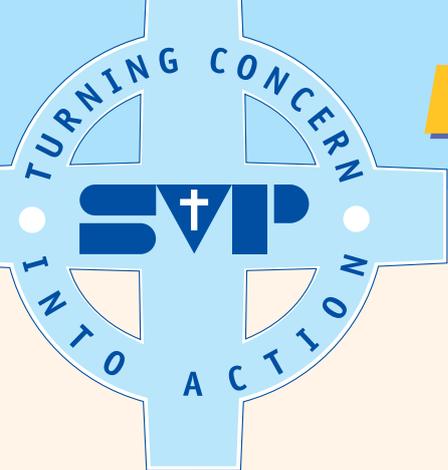
David Young's Charity

The trustees of the David Young's Charity are aware of the work that the Society undertakes at all levels. Some cases need more support than normal and even after DC and/or CC assistance, there may be a shortfall. As a separate registered Charity, we can try to assist any Member of the Society who may have fallen on hard times. Any applications for grants must be sent with any other documentation that would prove helpful to the Trustees for consideration.

The reply should be received within 30 days. As a Special Work of the Society, we are able to receive donations from Conferences, Councils and individual members. We are most grateful for those received in the past and it is helpful for administrative purposes to send cheques made out to the David Young's Charity.

The trustees of the SVP have approved support of DYC. For further information, an application form or any guidance please contact: The Trustees of the David Young's Charity, 9 Larcom Street, Walworth, London SE17 1RX. Visit the David Young's Charity website www.davidyoungscharity.co.uk or email trustees@davidyoungscharity.co.uk

Registered Charity Number 238877



Notice Board

About the SVP

The St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) is an international Christian voluntary organisation dedicated to tackling poverty and disadvantage by providing practical assistance to those in need - irrespective of ideology, faith, ethnicity, age or gender.

The Society is a lay organisation initially formed in Paris in 1833 by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and his companions, and active in England & Wales since 1844.

Placed under the Patronage of St Vincent de Paul, it is inspired by his thinking and works. It seeks, in the spirit of justice and charity, to help those who are suffering poverty in whatever form. Works include visiting the lonely, soup runs, food banks, furniture shops and charity shops in areas of deprivation, visiting the sick, giving grants to those in need, debt counselling, and assisting refugees and asylum seekers. Last year SVP members made nearly 500,000 visits to families and individuals in need. Working face to face with those we seek to help, SVP members develop lasting relationships with those they serve, and gain a rare insight into the lives of those people they help.



2017

Board & National Council Meeting Dates

Board Meetings

- 14th September - London National Office
- 27th & 28th October - Hinsley Hall (Residential)
- 24th November - Hinsley Hall (Before National Council)

National Council Meetings

- 24th - 25th November - Hinsley Hall (Residential)

Inviting content contributions for VC Winter Edition 2017

Next deadline for sending news and information for VC Winter Edition 2017 is 15th October 2017. Letters and articles for inclusion in the magazine should be submitted to: SVP, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB or email anitab@svp.org.uk

Advertise with us Reach more than 10,000 UK readers!

The Vincentian Concern is now accepting advertisements. If you or someone you know would like to advertise your business in the VC, please get in touch with Ken Madine at National Office on 020 7703 3030 or kenm@svp.org.uk

Editorial Policy

The Vincentian Concern is the official publication of the St Vincent de Paul Society of England and Wales.

- Publisher CD&P Limited
- Managing Editor Anita Boniface
- Executive Editor Elizabeth Palmer
- Editorial Board Adrian Abel, Elizabeth Palmer & Helen O'Shea

Letters and articles for inclusion in the magazine should preferably be emailed to Anita at anitab@svp.org.uk or submitted to: Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB.

Visit our website: www.svp.org.uk
Find us on Facebook and 'like' the SVP page: www.facebook.com/svpenglandandwales

