

# Vincentinean Concern

St Vincent de Paul Society (England and Wales)  
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*“I thank the Lord  
for the four hundred years  
of your charism”*

*Pope Francis*





## Serving in Hope



Blessed Frédéric Ozanam encouraged SVP members to “serve in hope”. Pope Francis, earlier this year, called on Christians to be “missionaries of hope.” As I start my term as President of SVP (England and Wales) my heart is very much filled with hope.

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**Hope is defined as “a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfilment” and also as “ a feeling of trust”. So what are the “desires” that are in my heart right now? A desire that the world will become a fairer, more caring place, without discrimination or marginalisation. A desire that our SVP members and staff can be missionaries of hope to more people. A desire that our Society will grow in numbers, in reach, in spirituality and in unity. And I do have that accompanying “feeling of trust”. I have trust in our members and staff to rise to the challenges ahead, and I have trust in God to guide us.**

I was delighted to attend the Symposium in Rome to celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian movement. This gathering of Vincentians from all over the globe, and from many different branches of the family, undoubtedly filled me with hope and inspiration. From the very moving Audience with Pope Francis; to rubbing shoulders with yellow-scarved Vincentians wherever you went in Rome, it was an occasion of great joy and hope. Joy in celebrating what St Vincent began and what has been achieved, and hope for what is yet to be achieved in the future. But there were challenges thrown down that we will have to meet. There were Pope Francis' challenges to go out and spread Vincent's work, to give time and space to those suffering from the new forms of poverty for our time, to encounter people who are poor and to give them a voice, and to be a fraternal communion among ourselves. There was the challenge to play a meaningful part in the Vincentian Family's 'Global Alliance for the Homeless' initiative, launched on the steps of St Peter's, and there are the challenges made by Vincentian leaders to change to meet today's needs, to collaborate, to find creative solutions and to pass on our traditions to a younger generation. I have hope that we can rise to all of these challenges.

I am writing this page from Khartoum where I am accompanying Ian Mawdsley on a visit to our SVP projects and to the SVDP in Sudan. After a very difficult period this is a time of hope for them. They have just had their NGO license reinstated by the government and sanctions on the country have been lifted. In the back of a rickety mini-bus on the way to visit a water project that supplies clean water to schools, prisons and localities I learned from Emile, General Secretary of the SVDP in Sudan, of the hope that our projects bring to the poorest of people, of their continued trust in our support and of the SVDP's future plans. Through the support of our members and the hard work of our Twinnage team we are enabling the SVDP in Sudan to be real “missionaries of hope”.

While in Sudan, during the hottest part of the day when we are confined to our rooms, I have found time to reflect on my new role. I give my heartfelt thanks to Adrian Abel for his dedicated hard work as National President and for being a wise, kind and patient mentor to me. As to the years ahead, in Vincent's words, “what must be done?” There is much to build upon and many challenges to meet, but in a spirit of unity and with determination to help those most in need, I am sure we can achieve so much. I have been buoyed by the messages of support I have received from members and staff, and I would like to thank you all. Thank you also to everyone who is praying for me and for the Society and for those we serve. Please continue to do so and continue your work with good heart, with open mindedness, with hope and with joy for, as Pope Francis says “joy is the sure sign of true Christian hope.”

God bless, yours in St Vincent and Blessed Frédéric.

*Helen O'Shea, National President*

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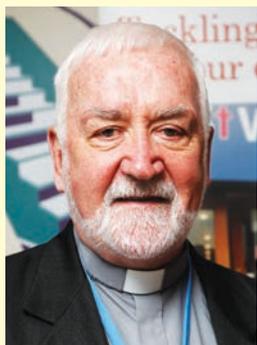
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## Christmas Day - Every Day!

At Christmas we celebrate God becoming a human being like us. God lowering himself to our level, identifying himself with each person individually, from the beginning of humanity until the end of time.



**God was not afraid to become a man: not a famous man, but a child, fragile and threatened from the beginning.**

Saint Vincent would say: "Don't we also see that the Eternal Father, having sent His Son on earth to be the light of the world, nevertheless, had Him appear only as a little boy, like one of those poor little ones you see coming

to our door?" It is the love of a father that makes God want to bend down over us and embrace us and share his love and life with each of us. This is the mystical insight that will lead Vincent to recognise the continual incarnation of God in the poor.

To live the mystery of the Incarnation today is to realise that there is this desire of God living within us, which causes us to share and manifest it to others, especially those living in poverty. Everyone wants to be looked upon favourably by others, to feel respected and of real worth. But so many are disappointed. Instead of feeling cherished by others they encounter glances that belittle them and say, you are worth nothing, you are a meaningless zero. This is how so many people come to regard themselves.

“ But God sees people favourably and wants to make his home in them. The challenge of all Christians, and especially the Vincentian Family members, is to make the love of God real to them, and help them to realise how loved and how precious they are in the sight of God. ”

I am writing this reflection to you from Kenya where I am visiting the Daughters of Charity. Through their work I am witnessing the Love of God being manifested again and again – God continuously present in human form, every day is as Christmas day! For example, seven hours drive from Nairobi, in Kitali, a large settlement of 'Internally Displaced People' live in dreadful poverty. The homes they have built in a swamp area easily



The Daughters of Charity

sink when rain is persistent. But little by little over 120 of these families now have fenced-off kitchen gardens, in which they grow nourishing vegetables and can even sell some of their produce at the local market. Clean water has also been made increasingly available to them through wells and tanks storing the rainfall. Three hours further into the mountains near the border with Uganda is Chepnyal, a neglected and forgotten region which now has excellent medical outreach to very remote areas, care for the elderly and good education at pre-primary and primary level. I met here with girls as young as 12 who have been rescued from forced marriages and are now completing their secondary schooling.

The Daughters of Charity in all of these works are Kenyan, and Irish, English, American (including Filipino-American) and Ethiopian. They provide an inspiring example for the SVP and other Vincentian Family members in Britain – for we too are called to continue making the miracle of Bethlehem a living reality today, and a source of praise and thanks to God. Make each day a Christmas day – when God comes to live among his people.

Paul C Roche CM.



# Members' Info

## The Year of Bailly

The International Confederation of the Society has awarded the Diploma of Honorary Mention to Dr Austin Fagan for his essay "The First Conference".

**The award was created to stimulate knowledge surrounding the members of the first Conference to which Dr Fagan's research has been a significant contribution, and from which we can gain a great deal of knowledge regarding one of our founding members.**

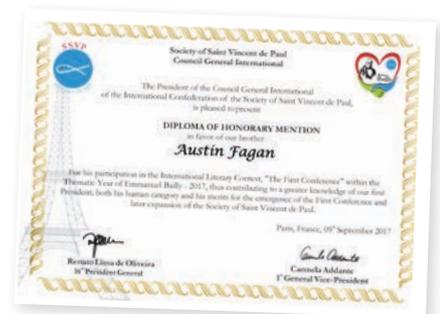
*Excerpt from The First Conference, Austin Fagan:*

When the Charity Conference was founded, Emmanuel Bailly, at 42 years of age, was much older than the six other founder-members, aged from 19 to 21. His continual involvement with and encouragement of young people's participation should remain an example to all our members. At any age, we can try to imitate our Founders by keeping, as long as possible, that constantly young attitude, ready to adapt ourselves to new developments and showing Christian and Vincentian willingness

for reconciliation. May we always be ready to welcome one another and to hug one another with "Happy New Year", not only for the next day but for every day of our lives.

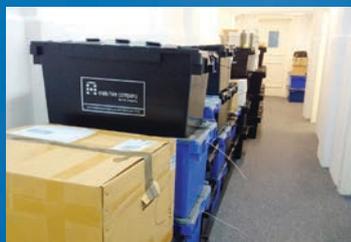
The essence of such continuing friendship should act, in Bailly's vision, as a safeguard against imposition and as a willing acceptance of other members' good intentions:

"Let that advice be given and received in the same spirit; thus disposed, we shall reject no reasonable proposal, no genuine improvement."



### SVP Office Move

The National Office has moved to new offices within Romero House, sharing space with our colleagues from CAFOD.



The move makes financial sense for the SVP as commercial rents were becoming unsustainable within London. The office environment and facilities are much improved on anything we could afford on our own. SVP staff benefit from a clean and modern working environment and there is a long list of social activities on offer at lunch times or after work. There is an excellent range of meeting rooms available, with access to modern technology to enable virtual meetings when required. Working in a Catholic office environment means that there is weekly Mass on site and the opportunity to celebrate in line with the liturgical calendar. There are also synergies with the work of CAFOD and the SVP, in the service of the poor overseas and in England and Wales and staff from both charities can meet formally and informally with their counterparts. We even hope to start an SVP Conference based in the building, so watch this space!

### Awareness Month Feedback

Thank you to all Conference Presidents who responded to the feedback survey. In previous years the survey was sent out in paper format but this year it was managed using Survey Monkey, an online platform which offers a fast, inexpensive and convenient way to respond. We plan to use it for future Member surveys.



90% of presidents reported that they found the materials useful. Many parishes adapted them to suit their local context and some plan to use them in the future. Some suggested the scheduling of the campaign should be revisited, in order to avoid the lead up to CAFOD's Family Fast Day. The posters were well received; 83% used the A4 posters, 65% the A3 poster. 36% used the newsletter inserts and 27% the lectern addresses, mainly to support member recruitment, but some felt that the addresses were too detailed. 55% said parishioners expressed interest in their work and 13% saw an increase in referrals. 39% attracted new members or received enquiries about joining the SVP. Few Conferences ordered a roller banner or downloaded the materials from the members area of the website. The feedback will be used to inform next year's Awareness Month campaign.

## Faith in Action roll out is just the start

Trainers from all over the country gathered in Birmingham on November 11th for the National Trainers' Meeting. The event reflected on the success of the roll out of the *Faith in Action* module and examined how training will develop in the future.

The number of trainers operating in the SVP has increased dramatically this year with some Central Councils now having as many as 10 people who are able to provide training for members. As a result, the most proactive CCs are now running Faith in Action as frequently as eight times a year. SVP Vice President, Ann Harris, who hosted the event, said that the target was to run Faith in Action at least once in every District each year. However, for this to be achieved will require more members to come forward as potential trainers.

The meeting looked at the mentoring programme that has been introduced for prospective trainers, and Sue Johnson and Tony Chadwick from Shrewsbury CC presented a case study of how the scheme worked for them, with Sue as mentor and Tony as a new trainer brought up to speed by the system. Tony enthusiastically described how his confidence grew as the mentoring scheme progressed and he observed how "rewarding and interesting" the whole experience had been.

The meeting considered future plans for training and membership development, and Ann Harris revealed that new modules are in the pipeline including safeguarding, working with people with mental health issues, fundraising by Conferences, presentation skills and risk assessment.



New trainer, Tony Chadwick from Shrewsbury CC addressing the National Trainers' Meeting

Ann concluded by pointing out that the Society's rules stipulate that the SVP should continually promote the formation and training of its members and also that its vitality depends on rapid and regular exchange of news and information

Faith in Action is designed to renew and invigorate both existing and new members. Contact your Central Council to request a session near you.

If you are interested in becoming a trainer please email [membership@svp.org.uk](mailto:membership@svp.org.uk) to find out more.

## Dementia Workshop success to be repeated



The Dementia Workshop held on November 1st was such a success that it will be rerun in the New Year. Ticket sales were so strong that they sold out within a week and a full house of 75 people attended the event at St Aloysius Church Hall near Euston Station in London. Members talked about how 'inspired and informed' they were by the session run by specialist trainer, Ben Bano.

But many more members were disappointed at not being able to get tickets, so the Workshop is now due to be run again in the north of England – probably in Leeds. The date and venue will be arranged in January.

Meanwhile, Ben Bano's PowerPoint slides and also a Dementia Toolkit he devised for CSAN can be downloaded via the SVP website. Go to Membership Development and select Knowledge & Skills.



# Members' Info

## When Something Just Doesn't Seem Right...

### How Reporting a Safeguarding Concern Can Save Lives

**A serious safeguarding case recently came to light when a member named Robert reported to his Conference that something "just didn't seem right" after a visit to a beneficiary named Katherine.**

Katherine was a severely learning-disabled adult who was living with her partner Henry. Recently, she told Robert that she hadn't been feeling well and had been vomiting almost every morning for the prior two weeks. When Robert suggested that she visit a doctor, Katherine replied that she didn't need a doctor or anyone else to look after her. She reported that Henry had told her that doctors were all "useless gits" and that he would take care of everything she needed. Katherine said Henry had been giving her tablets from the chemist which he said would "do the trick."

At the next Conference meeting Robert reported that he wasn't sure what to make of the conversation and while it left him a bit worried, he couldn't explain why. He also said that he didn't "want to make a mountain out of a molehill." The Conference president, who had just completed Educare safeguarding training, recognised that Katherine might be the victim of domestic abuse. He encouraged Robert to call safeguarding just to get it off his chest. "If it's nothing, she'll tell you. Then no harm done but you won't have to worry about it anymore."

After speaking with Robert, the Society's safeguarding officer was sufficiently concerned about Katherine's welfare that she reported the matter to the local adult safeguarding authorities.

On investigation, it turned out that Katherine was four months pregnant. She had been pregnant twice before but because of the severity of her disabilities, both children had been taken into care at birth. Henry was determined that they wouldn't lose this third child and had been keeping Katherine confined to the house so no one would know that she was pregnant. He told her that she didn't need a doctor for something as normal as pregnancy. They intended to deliver the baby at home themselves so no one could take it away.

Katherine and her unborn child are now under doctor's care and Katherine and Henry are receiving family counselling around Henry's controlling and manipulative behaviours.

Robert knew nothing of these facts. But had he not acted on his feelings of "something just not being right" and had the Conference President not been aware of the signs of domestic abuse, the consequences might have been tragic for both mother and child.

Social services cannot commit to their future plans for this family but because of Robert, this child will at least have a future. It might have been otherwise.

Safeguarding awareness is an essential tool in keeping both members and beneficiaries safe. The Society has produced very useful safeguarding awareness and response cards which can be tucked into a purse or wallet. Members are also encouraged to complete the basic adult and child Educare on-line safeguarding modules available to all. Alternatively, all Dioceses provide face to face safeguarding training which Society members may be able to attend. Training can also be provided by national and central council safeguarding officers on request.

To order a safeguarding wallet card or for any safeguarding questions, concerns or to arrange training, contact Catherine Kerr, National Safeguarding Manager at **020 7703 3030** or by email to **catherinek@svp.org.uk**

For information about Educare, contact your local Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator, speak with your parish rep or contact the National Office.



### Working with children?

If you or any member of your Conference work with children e.g. mums and toddlers, parental respite or coffee mornings, please get in touch with Catherine Kerr for safeguarding guidance.

## Christmas Health & Safety Tips

Christmas is the time of year when many Conferences host parties, trips to the pantomime or Mass, or shopping expeditions. Friends come together to reconnect, enjoy each other's company, and to celebrate the joy of the season.

As these events often include older people, we thought it worthwhile to repeat some of the holiday safety advice we have given in the past. However long your gathering takes, it's worthwhile to make your event as safe as possible for their visit.

*Here are some easy, thoughtful preparations to make:*

- **Remove obstacles and clutter that could cause a fall.** Falls are a serious issue for older adults. One third of all people aged 65 or older will fall each year, and many are seriously injured. Here are some things you can do to reduce the possibility that a guest will fall at your event:
  - **Remove or secure area rugs and carpets.** Each year, thousands of people trip over the edges of carpet, or slip on an unsecured throw rug. Secure the edges of area rugs with double-sided tape or a nonslip backing, or remove them entirely if possible.
  - **Remove clutter promptly.** Keeping floor surfaces free of obstacles is especially vital if your visitors have to move around in wheelchairs, use zimmer frames, or crutches/sticks. Move items from the party location and keep them off the floor. Even in the midst of a gift exchange, help guests place packaging in bins and maintain a clear path at all times.
  - **Rearrange furniture** so guests with impaired mobility or vision don't need to make their way around tables and chairs.
- **Deck the halls - safely!** If you are having a Christmas tree or other decorations, position them out of the main footpath of the hall.
- **Increase lighting wherever possible.** Holiday lights are festive and candles are romantic – but neither provide adequate light for people with decreased vision, which includes most people over 65. Turn on as much light as possible and, if you're using Christmas lights, make sure there is plenty of white light to supplement the colours.
- **Be aware of winter weather hazards.** When arranging transport for your guests, ensure you have taken into account their mobility. If pavements are slippery or outdoor lighting is inadequate, accompany senior guests from the car and into the event location.
- **Consider accessibility needs.** If an elderly guest has trouble moving around, ensure they have easy access to the bathroom during the event.



- **Enlist the help of young guests.** Sometimes bringing younger people to the Christmas party can provide a real lift to your event. Encourage them to spend time with the older guests, who will love to have some energetic young people around!
- **Remember food safety.** If you will be serving a meal or refreshments, check ahead of time whether your guests have dietary concerns or problems with eating, chewing or swallowing so you can offer some foods they can eat easily and safely.
- **Accidents.** Accidents happen, so you need to make sure you're prepared for any emergency. Is it possible to have a first aider at your party? Can you ensure you have contact telephone numbers for guests' next of kin? All accidents should be reported to the National Office, not only for legal reasons, but so that they can be investigated, and lessons learned can be shared across the Society.

If your conference is planning to provide Christmas Hampers or toys to families in your local area, here are a few things to consider: type of food, whether it is appropriate to include alcohol or not. If giving toys to children – the type of toy, the ages of the children, and the safety of that toy. Make sure any toys given to children, if second hand, have been cleaned and checked for safety issues (no small batteries, for example). However, if a toy needs a battery, please don't forget to include one!

Finally, it is not the intention of the Society to put barriers in your way preventing you from giving people a good time. On the contrary, we want members to feel confident in organising events that will bring happiness to those we want to help, but we need to do it with confidence that we have done our best to ensure there are no tragedies through our neglect or lack of preparation. So go out and organise that event, but use your common sense and record your risk assessments just in case.



# Rome Symposium

## “I thank the four hundred ye

From 12th-15th October over 10,000 Vincentians from around the world gathered in Rome for the Symposium marking the 400th anniversary of the Vincentian charism. The following pages feature highlights and excerpts from the inspirational talks and presentations.



**There is much to take in, reflect upon and discuss. Conferences might like to use passages as spiritual reflections at meetings over the coming months. Limitations of space mean that they have been edited (except for the Papal address) but text versions and additional content are available from the Conference Bulletin Board in the Members Area of the SVP website.**

England and Wales was represented by about 20 people, only a tiny percentage of our membership, but hopefully readers will get a sense of the joy and excitement of the event and of the enduring relevance of the Vincentian charism in our world today.

### Papal address to members of the Vincentian Family 14th October 2017

I greet you and together with you I thank the Lord for the four hundred years of your charism. Saint Vincent generated a zeal in charity that has lasted through the centuries: a zeal that came from his heart. That is why today we have here the relic: the heart of Saint Vincent.

Today I would like to encourage you to continue this path, proposing three simple verbs I believe very important for the Vincentian spirit, but also for Christian life in general: to adore, to welcome, and to go.

To adore. There are countless invitations from Saint Vincent to cultivate inner life and to dedicate oneself to the prayer that purifies and opens the heart. For him, prayer is essential. It is the compass for every day, it is like a manual for life, and, he wrote, the “great book of the preacher”: only by praying can we draw from God the love to pour into the world; only by praying can we touch the hearts of the people when we announce the Gospel. But for Saint Vincent, prayer is not only a duty, far less a collection of formulas. Prayer means stopping before God to stay with Him, to dedicate oneself simply to Him. And this is the purest prayer, that which makes space for the Lord and for His praise, and nothing else: adoration.

Once discovered, adoration becomes indispensable as it is pure intimacy with the Lord, Who gives peace and joy, and melts away the sorrows of life. Therefore, to someone who was under particular pressure, Saint Vincent also advised staying in prayer:

“ without tension, turning to God with simple glances, without seeking to have His presence with perceptible efforts, but abandoning oneself to Him.

(Letter to G. Pesnelle, 1659)

This is adoration: placing oneself before the Lord, with respect, with calmness and silence, giving Him the first place, abandoning oneself trustfully, to then ask that His Spirit come to us and to let what is ours go to Him. In this way even those in need, urgent problems, difficult and burdensome situations enter into adoration, so much so that Saint Vincent asked to “adore in God” even the reasons that we struggle to understand and accept (cf. Letter to F. Get, 1659).

## Lord for the ars of your charism”

He who adores, he who attends the living source of love, cannot but remain, so to speak, “contaminated”. And he begins to behave with others as the Lord does with him: he becomes more merciful, more understanding, more willing; he overcomes his own rigidity and opens up to others.

We thus arrive at the second verb: to welcome. When we hear this word, we immediately think of something to do. But in reality, welcoming is a deeper disposition; it does not demand merely making space for someone, but of being welcoming people, willing, accustomed to giving themselves to others. Just as God does for us, we do for others. Welcoming means cutting the self down to size, straightening out our way of thinking, understanding that life is not my private property and time does not belong to me. It is a slow detachment from all that which is mine: my time, my rest, my rights, my plans, my agenda. Those who welcome renounce the self and bring you and us into life.



The welcoming Christian is a true man and woman of the Church, because the Church is Mother and a mother welcomes life and accompanies it. And just as a son resembles his mother, bearing her same features, in this way the Christian bears these features of the Church. And so, he is a truly faithful son of the Church who is welcoming, who without complaining creates harmony and communion, and with generosity sows peace, even if this is not reciprocated. Saint Vincent helps us to value this ecclesial “DNA” of welcome, of willingness, of communion, so that in our life we may:

“ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away... along with all malice.

(Eph 4: 31)



SVP Trustees

The final verb: to go. Love is dynamic, it comes out of itself. Those who love do not stay in their armchair, watching, waiting for the advent of a better world, but with enthusiasm and simplicity they get up and go. Saint Vincent put this well:

“ Our vocation is thus to go, not in a parish or even just in a diocese, but in all the earth. And to do what? To inflame the hearts of men, doing what was done by the Son of God, He Who came to bring fire in the world to inflame it with His love.

(Conference of 30th May 1659).

This vocation is always valid for all. It poses to each one the question: “Do I go towards others, as the Lord wishes? Do I take where I go the fire of charity or do I stay at home to warm myself before my hearth?”.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you because you are in motion on the streets of the world, as Saint Vincent would ask of you today too. I hope you will never stop, but instead continue to draw every day from adoration the love of God and spread it in the world through the good contagion of charity, willingness, harmony. I bless you all and the poor you encounter. And I ask of you, please, the charity not to forget to pray for me.



# Rome Symposium

## Fr Tjeu van Knippenberg

Fr Tjeu van Knippenberg, Professor of Practical Theology at Tilburg University, spoke on welcoming the stranger. He is involved in the Vincent de Paul Centre in The Netherlands.



Fr Tjeu van Knippenberg

**In the Bible the attitude to the stranger is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, God is only there for Israel, the chosen people with its own land, language, and rituals.**

On the other, how can other peoples be saved? In this ambivalence, God calls the people to keep the memory alive that Israel has been a foreigner and stranger itself in Egypt. Leviticus 19:33-34:

“ The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God. ”

Exodus is a call to come to our destination – when Israel was in Egypt's land: let my people go. From slavery to freedom, from unconsciousness to consciousness, from selfishness to love, from ruling to serving. Return as a people and as an individual to your own history. Go back to your inner self and see what it's like to be a stranger and to be welcomed in a common house.

We follow the story of Vincent de Paul as a young man in French 17th century culture. He has been a guardian of pigs and sheep. He came to school as a young man from the countryside to the city of Dax. He experienced what it is to be alien, odd, curious. He was ashamed of his badly dressed father when he came to visit him. Through this experience, he was pulled between feelings of shame and love for the poor. He experienced in himself the ambivalent feelings of reserve and approach. It was not without struggle that he learned to handle his different

feelings and hold in motion the ambivalence that was part of his existence. Later, he received the charism of mission: developing prophetic courage, i.e. respecting the countless refugees who came from areas of war to Paris. And so he got the charism of charity: becoming an icon of social commitment in receiving them and creating conditions for living.

We know dealing with strangers is not easy. We see it in political negotiations on quotas and in closing borders. The challenge of mission today towards refugees and strangers is to embrace the opposing feelings of shying away from and being attracted by the stranger. The Greek word 'xenos' means stranger and guest. Stranger refers to being different, guest refers to commonality. The first is about being focused on yourself in a sheltered world. The other speaks of openness and the opportunity of learning something new. This tension is at work wherever people live. How can we contribute to building up the contact between strange and familiar, understanding each other in our pluralism? We see signs of it in today's world; parables that address the challenge of the difference and that inspire us to live in harmony. An example is the answer Pope Francis gives to important problems of our time. The Vincentian charism of mission is manifested in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*. As a Vincentian Family in The Netherlands, we want, in cooperation with others, to contribute to the Pope's policy. The basis for doing so is in remembering the exodus-history of Israel and the son-father-story of Vincent de Paul. These events teach us that a conversion to the stranger takes place by being conscious of the stranger in ourselves. This consciousness may lead us on the way of prophetic courage and social commitment.



## From Here to Where?

Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, CM, Chief Operations Officer of Ascension Health.

### *We need to work together as a Vincentian Family*

**The Society of St Vincent de Paul has the deepest day-to-day knowledge of the poor across the world. They know the poor first hand as well as any of us, and can mine and distribute that knowledge if they so choose for all of our benefit.**

Few of our members know the young exceptionally well, but the members of the Marian Youth do. Who knows what we could do together!

### *We also need to work with others*

**It's a mistake to ask, "What can we do with our current resources?" We should ask the big question: "What do the poor need?" and then start thinking creatively about with whom should we partner?**

18 years ago, the Daughters of Charity and Sisters of St Joseph in the US handed over all of their healthcare works – everything – the hospitals, the nursing homes, the clinics, the doctors' practices. Everything. For free. More Catholic hospitals and religious congregations followed because they knew they could serve more people, more effectively and more sustainably if they created a new organisation of everyone, instead of holding tightly to what they had built themselves. Today, Ascension is the largest health system in the United States, and the world's largest Catholic health system.

Imagine if the Vincentian Family took on projects for and with the UN, the World Bank, the Gates Foundation, and more. They all have great resources and sophisticated knowledge, but we have something they do not: Reach. We know the poor personally. The poor trust us. We can bring first-hand knowledge to the design of large scale reform, and we can create conduits for delivery of that reform.

### *We need to work smarter*

**I'm not sure that in the Vincentian Family we're always up-to-speed on what's been written and learned about the best ways to address poverty.**

Few of us are experts in poverty-relief. Perhaps we need to become so, or perhaps even recruit world-class experts into our organisations, whether as full-time employees, consultants, or advisory boards. The poor deserve more than good-hearted amateurs. They deserve experts.

### *We need to inspire others' hearts to care about the poor*

**Most of us know poor people, and by name.**

We know their struggles. We know how those struggles have changed over time. We know how so many things get in the way of them living their lives. We need to tell those stories. We know these stories and these struggles and people listen to us. We have nothing to gain and therefore our voice is credible. We must speak. Silence dooms the poor to more of the same treatment by society. And we must use the new tools at our disposal.

### *Finally, we need to make sure our tradition is passed on*

**We need to be communities of invitation, inviting the young to visit the poor with us, to see our commitments.**

We need to make sure the Vincentian charism itself is passed on. We must make certain that we have historians for the future, and they will not likely be priests or sisters. For the next hundred years, it becomes the responsibility of the Vincentian lay organisations to train, hire and fund historians. The same is true for experts in Vincentian Spirituality. Who will inspire us and form our spirits in the century ahead? These could be priests, brothers and sisters. They could also be lay. What matters is that they are trained, and trained well.

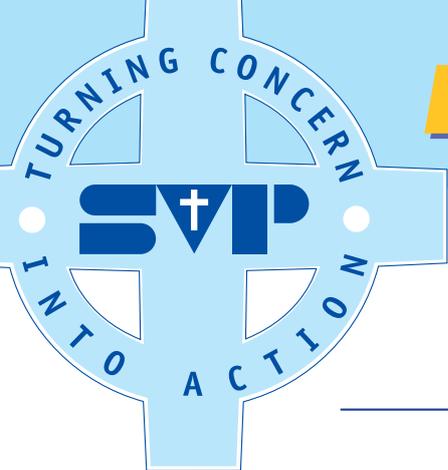
**Despite how the world is changing, one key factor remains constant:**

We are privileged to bear and continue the love that Jesus Christ had for the poor. His heart for them was our founders' heart for them, and for these years it's our turn to bear this heart for the poor. We're being asked to break open a new path so that the Vincentians who follow us can continue to work in a new way.

### *From Here to Where?*

**I can't predict our future. But I know our future needs us to work together as a Family, to work with others outside the Family, to work smarter, to inspire hearts for the poor, to make certain we know who we are in our Vincentian history and our Vincentian spirituality.**

If we can rise to those, and be unafraid of change, I know our fifth century is going to be a true blessing for the poor.



# Rome Symposium

## "A Love Inve

Sister Peggy O'Neill SC spoke about the mystery and compassion of God, and an "Evolution in love."

**Vincent truly believed in partnership in the Church and that is why he listened, learned and trusted the instincts and wisdom of Louise. Together they imagined and gave birth to a movement that has inspired us all. They started a revolution of tenderness... a revolution to humanize and put a face on the stranger and the vulnerable.**

Our Founders knew the need to look eyes and to join hearts with those to whom human dignity and human rights were denied. With zeal, with a passion, Vincent and Louise responded to human needs and organised institutions to keep charity alive, keep love expressed. They were fully awake to their troubled times and they risked responding to them in new ways. They challenged church, society, and each other, when necessary, with hope and deep confidence that their project, their ministry was of God.

Clearly, we have come to this Holy City to re-commit ourselves to boundless loving so, I ask each of us, "How do we stay awake? How do we stay faithful in our own times, in our context? Four hundred years later what is the spiritual revolution needed to transform us, and our world? What and how should we teach by our actions and our words to a world so broken...a world so far from the dream of God?"

Our world is so broken, so disconnected, so afraid, so longing to be healed, a world so in need of love. Are we ready to admit that we have trespassed on the fullness of God, the fullness of Mystery, by trying to lock God in a religion, a book, a person, a gender? Can we only think in nouns? Is it too late to re-verb? Can we finally confront Aristotle who puts forth the theory that Substance is always over Relationship? A more refreshing current theology of Trinity can enliven faith in a way that is not just rooted in our own tradition but in, all wisdom, experience, and love. I ask us, "Will we... let God be God? Will we... let Love be Love?"

This must become our mantra, the Vincentian mantra: there are no strangers. What was budding in the hearts of Vincent and Louise is beginning to flower. Everything, everyone is invited to be a part of this three part harmony, this holy communion, this radical relationship... humanity is created in the image of community, in the image of Trinity. Today scientists confirm for us that everything is inter-related. They tell us that everything that exists is never stable, and is nothing but a jump from one interaction to another. The Italian scientist, Carlo Rovelli suggests that we should no longer talk about the big bang but maybe rather, about the big bounce... things moving, emerging, relating. Marinate in this... Trinity is not just a teaching about the life of God but about the life of personhood.

Let me suggest: this is the spiritual Paradigm shift our world needs. God is not a Being... but inter-being, Absolute Relatedness. I want to suggest, we do not look at the Trinity as spectators, as outsiders. Rather, we are all invited into this dance of love, into this wave of love that is unstoppable. God is not the Dancer but the Dance... start thinking movement... start thinking verbs... not just nouns... start thinking relationships not just substances... God is the dance, not the Dancer...and we are part of that very dance.

Will we try to midwife new metaphors for this creative Energy and power that continues to invite us to renew the face of the earth? Will we try to use our creativity to find new ways to nourish and sustain our spirits? Will we swim, and dance, in a spirituality birthed out of the awareness, that we truly praise God when we build right relationships... with people and all other species on this planet and that sin is in destroying relationships. Will we let this sink into our souls and have it shape the way we touch our planet, our borders, the way we use, share all natural resources?

Who is our neighbour? The Good Samaritan, yes...the Syrian refugees, yes... the children sold for sex, yes... and... the sea turtles, the bees, the butterflies... yes.

Our radical understanding of God is, that God is not an isolated nomad, but a living communion in relationship with the world... in effect we say that God is what God does ...love. ...God is not a BEING but inter-being... Absolute Relatedness... the life force of everything ...the life force of everyone. We do not just look at Trinity as spectators, marvelling and imitating... rather, Mystery invites us to live within the flow of love expressed... to be part of this harmony.

Listen to the poet, Emily Dickenson: In the name of the birds, the butterflies and the breeze, Amen. Can we not say, "In the name of Vincent, Nelson Mandela and Gandhi", Amen. In the name of, "peacemakers, caregivers, and Vincentians", Amen. So let us say: In the name of Vincentian Baptists, Vincentian Buddhists and Vincentian Catholics, Amen.

We belong to each other and the Creative Force you and I call God is responsible for that. That Force, that Energy, is what connects everything, everyone. Ivone Gebara calls God the SAP of life, the life force of everything. Will we let this disturb us... call

## ntive to Infinity"

us to see a real responsibility to treat everyone with tenderness... live in real solidarity? Will we wake up from our isolation, from our inhumanity?

To be human is to have open arms: to embrace, to build, to heal, to let the life force pass through us and meet the very life force of the other. But to be human is also to make fists in the face of those structures that rob people of their humanity, that indicate they are not wanted or do not deserve rights, dignity, a safe place to live and grow. The heart of the message of Pope Francis is the radical, uncompromising nature of solidarity. He reminds us by words and actions that we have fallen into the globalisation of indifference... an attitude that... oh, it does not concern us... it is none of our business. He warns us that we cannot embrace our own humanity if we do not embrace the humanity of the other.

May I stress, in this moment of time, we all need to shout by words and actions to everyone we serve: Get a life, get, a real life... Get a life not measured by stock portfolios, or the manic pursuit of material consumption. Rather, get a life where together we envision and build a circle of compassion with no one standing outside of it. Let us give each other hope that a humane civilisation can and will be made concrete, by considering first the community rather than the individual.

More than ever, the world needs economic structures, economic systems that are built on solidarity, on the tenderness between pueblos. More than ever, the world needs to rethink borders, welcome the Other, as Kin, not as Stranger. More than ever, we need to build bridges not walls. (We built walls in the 14th century!) We cannot amputate our creativity. We must risk, peek around corners, travel to places where there are palpable longings for justice and peace. Yes, I repeat we must stare at how inhumane humanity is.

More than ever, we must be awakened by the scandals we see...the scandal: of hunger, the corruption and impunity of so many of our institutions, the scandal of excessive greed! If we do not perceive the scandals, we will never act. We must see and feel the pain of the world to be a part of this new birthing.

Let us gather here these days with a genuine attitude of gratitude knowing,... that God still has faith in us... and knowing, that we still have faith in each other. Let us promise to touch each other and our world with a tenderness that transforms and with a truth that challenges.

Ours is an age of something radically new. It is more than a reformation. It is to be... an Evolution in love... an Evolution in solidarity, "a Love Inventive to Infinity."

### Extracts from the sermon given by Father Tomaž Mavrič, CM, Superior General, at the closing Eucharist of the Symposium held at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls on Sunday 15th October.

To let the Spirit of Jesus move freely, to collaborate with Him, means we must allow ourselves to be surprised to the point that new branches – or groups of the present branches – may be founded in the future in different parts of the world. To see the "face of Jesus" clearly before our eyes, to grow in charity, to be convincing followers of the Vincentian Charism it is of utmost importance for us:

- To live a deeply spiritual life. The Incarnation, the Holy Trinity, the Eucharist, Mary, the virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, giving priority to Jesus and not to persons and things, for the mission, for the salvation of humanity must be the pillars of our spirituality.
- To combine prayer and action in all we do, being apostles in prayer and contemplatives in action. Vincent had learned that "even if you never said a word, if you're really united with God, you'll touch hearts by your mere presence."
- To discover and see Jesus in the Poor and the Poor in Jesus. Saint Vincent de Paul had a holistic approach to persons, reacting to their specific needs: spiritual, material, emotional, and physical, but in a logical order. This approach, this understanding, this discovery made him a "Mystic of Charity." We, as members of the Vincentian Family, are called to become "Mystics of Charity."
- To renew, deepen, and revive our closeness to the Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family by spreading veneration of, trust in, and intercession to them at the local, national, and international levels.
- To base our assistance on good formation in all its aspects: human, spiritual, and professional, each in relation to the specific service in which we are involved.
- To continue developing close collaboration with all the branches and members of the Vincentian Family, whether they belong officially or unofficially to a specific branch on the local, national, and international levels.
- To engage more decisively on the path of the "Systemic-Change" model that frees the Poor from their bonds as victims to become instead equal partners for the good of all humanity.
- To keep collaborating with other groups, organisations, and institutions outside the Vincentian Family who share our same goals and vision on the local, national, and international levels.



## Symposium Ref

11,000 Vincentian pilgrims attended the four day Symposium, of which the SVP is the largest part, with 800,000 members

Members of the SVP England and Wales contingent share their memories and reflect on what they took away from this unique experience.

### Something that stood out for me...

“The sheer number of Vincentians present made me feel part of a worldwide family and introduced me to parts of the Vincentian Family I had never encountered before, such as the Vincentian Marian Youth.” *Helen O’Shea*

“Although I know we are part of a wider Vincentian family, I didn’t know anything about those other branches - you don’t often have the opportunity to network with a member of the Lyon branch of the Ladies of Charity in France while walking from the metro to evening prayer in Rome!” *Barbara Molloy*

“It was extraordinary, and humbling, to be part of such a massive gathering. To look across a packed bus or underground and see the distinctive yellow symposium scarf; to smile, laugh and wave knowing there was a shared purpose; shared values and ideals.” *Maureen Dyson*

“Seeing Pope Francis’ smile as he drove around the square and how he stood very thoughtfully in front of the casket containing the relic of St Vincent’s heart.” *Mary Abel*

“The feeling of unity, joy and goodwill, like a family in harmony, happy in each other’s company, prepared to get to know each other and work together.” *Marie Atherton*

“The huge Papal Audience and the arrival of the reliquary containing the Heart of St Vincent.” *John Atherton*

“The testimonies of amazing courage and perseverance by young people and families from Syria who had continued to reach out and offer charity and human warmth to all in a region torn apart by war.” *Thomas Gillespie*

### My special memory...

“The huge wave of emotion when the Holy Father arrived and addressed us as one family. It was very special and unifying.” *Helen O’Shea*

“It was so affirming to know that however large or small our contribution, what we do in the name of St Vincent de Paul warrants Pope Francis’ attention.” *Barbara Molloy*

“When Pope Francis arrived, the whole Square erupted and everyone had a chance to see the rather frail but beaming Pontiff. His message of welcome to all branches of the Vincentian family was very special. The work of the SVP is clearly very close to his heart.” *Ann Towey*

“Shaking the Pope’s hand and seeing his kindly, knowing eyes... and Sr Peggy O’Neill’s standing ovation for her exploration of the Trinity, reminding us “*Vincent and Louise knew that the “giver is the getter and the getter is the giver”!*” *Dee Mansi*

“Pope Francis said: Those who love do not stay in their armchair, watching, waiting for the advent of a better world, but with enthusiasm and simplicity they get up and go”. Saint Vincent said: “Our vocation is thus to go... to inflame the hearts of men, doing what was done by the Son of God, He Who came to bring fire in the world to inflame it with His love”. This vocation is always valid for all. It poses to each one the question: “Do I go towards others, as the Lord wishes? Do I take, wherever I go, the fire of charity or do I stay at home to warm myself before my hearth?” *Mary Abel*

“The Mass on the second day started with the song “Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live.” As the world becomes increasingly divisive and often refuses to welcome the stranger, our unity of purpose became very apparent to me in that moment.” *Thomas Gillespie*

## lections & Memories

representing the 2 million Vincentian family members around the world, worldwide. 3,000 more joined them for the Audience with Pope Francis.



### A special thought I took away...

“It would be easy to remember this unique event only as a celebration of past and present Vincentian achievements. I have great memories of being part of a tide of people from all over the world, sharing a common Vincentian identity in our yellow neckerchiefs, as we swarmed through the city. But I want also to keep alive the inspiration of Pope Francis and Fr Tomaz as their insights and direction give us so much to work on.” *Mary Abel*

“We must not squander what we have gained from this experience. As Fr Tomaz Mavric said in his closing homily, “now we must water, nourish and trim the tree so that it can flourish”. We left refreshed, renewed and invigorated as Fr Dennis Holtschneider CM exhorted us to “work smarter” because “the poor deserve more than good-hearted amateurs. They deserve experts”.” *Dee Mansi*

“When the Pope told us that our lives and our time are not our private property. When things have got particularly busy I’m sure, like other members, I have moaned that my time is no longer my own, but the Pope reminded us not to be possessive about our time or be resentful about giving it to help others. This seemed particularly appropriate for me and, perhaps, for many in the SVP.” *Kieran Knights*

“It was so wonderful to see so many young people who had made the journey and whose enthusiasm was palpable – and voluble! A real and powerful sense of belonging to something bigger...” *Ann Towey*

“I was inspired to see how much we can achieve if we harness the immense energy of the global Vincentian family. Mark McGreevy of Depaul International hit upon this in his speech about the new Famvin Homeless Alliance and posed a key question about how we can do more to encourage the growth of new innovative services for homeless people and refugees in particular.” *Thomas Gillespie*

“The words of Vincentian priest, Dennis Holtschneider, stood out for me:  
“We need to make sure that our tradition is passed on and let young people experience knowing the poor. We need to pass on the Vincentian charism to younger members. We need historians. The same is true of Vincentian spirituality. People need to be trained. We are asked to break open new paths, so that the Vincentians who follow us can work in a new way.” *Mary Abel*



After a blessing in Saint Paul's Church Hall in Alwoodley from Father Tim Wile, Parish Priest and Spiritual Director of the SVP Leeds North-West District Council, over a hundred hardy souls set off in hazy September sunshine for the now traditional Annual SVP Sponsored Walk around Eccup Reservoir, on the Sunday before Saint Vincent's Feast Day.

The Walk raises thousands of pounds each year for the SVP Leeds Central Council Community Support Projects, allowing them to provide help for some of the poorest and most vulnerable people across West Yorkshire. Projects include large shops and cafés at Support Centres in both Leeds and Bradford. Also in both cities, the SVP has expanded its Furniture Stores to become a distribution "hub" for over a dozen more community shops in some of their most deprived areas. Our Support Centres in Leeds and Bradford also offer more specialised help including debt counselling, English language courses, Job Clubs and an immigrants' "drop-in", plus help for refugees and asylum seekers.



## Leeds Sponsored Walk

Our Bishop, Marcus Stock, last year blessed the entrance to the St Vincent Support Centre in Leeds, proclaiming it a "Holy Door", truly reflecting our message of "Welcoming the Stranger".

*Pictured: Tony Nolan, this year's walk leader and Regional Manager of the Community Support Projects across Yorkshire, resplendent in his "Hi-Vis" yellow jacket, with walkers just about to set off on the walk from St Paul's.*

## Blackfriars Café



Blackfriars Support Centre in Newcastle have set up their very own free café to help provide cooked meals to those in need.

Fiona, employed to run the café, and Helen, Chair of Tyne CC Local Oversight

Group came together with a team of SVP members and volunteers and travelled all around Newcastle and Gateshead to see what was available to those in need, and after discovering many wonderful free cafés they decided to start one of their own! With donations from local schools, Mini Vinnies, Harvest festival contributions, as well as assistance from local supermarkets, Fiona puts together delicious, healthy meals with the help of a dedicated team of volunteers. Once word had been spread through flyers, social media, and word of mouth people started to visit; Tuesday morning at Blackfriars has become a place where everyone is welcomed, where people can meet in a warm environment and enjoy a good meal and good company from friendly SVP members.

## Blackley Community Shop's Pre-Christmas Event

The well-established Community Shop in Blackley, Manchester hosted its 2nd annual pre-Christmas shopping event at St Thomas More's church hall on Sunday 5th November. The shop managers and dedicated volunteers worked over a number of months preparing items for the sale. The church hall allowed us to sell cakes and drinks, donated by a local bakery, which went down really well with the customers. It was a real team effort on the day and shop managers Lesley Breen and Philomena Robinson roped in family and friends to support the volunteers in manning tables selling items donated via the shop. Stalls included shoes and bags, children's toys, Christmas jumpers and several stands of clothing. Two local children were very much in the festive mood and treated onlookers to an impromptu rendition of "I saw mommy kissing Santa Claus"; they went down so well they've been booked for the Volunteers Annual Christmas party! In total the event brought in just over £1,200 for the Society, so well done Blackley!

*Beverley Whittaker*

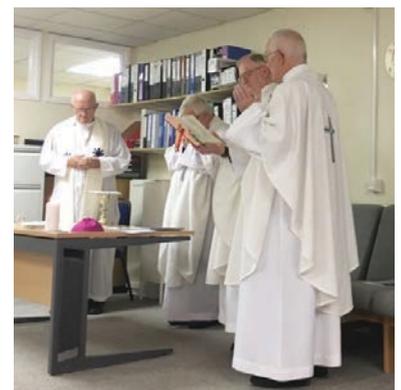
## 30 Years and Still Going Strong:

### The Hallam St Vincent Furniture Store 30th Anniversary Mass

On Wednesday 27th September 2017, the feast of our patron, St Vincent de Paul, a Mass was held at St Vincent's Furniture Store to mark the celebration of its 30th Anniversary.

Led by Bishop Ralph, Father Andrew Browne, Father Shaun Smith and Mgr Kilgannon the event was a joyous occasion made all the more meaningful by the fact that it was held in the store itself! Bishop Ralph spoke of St Vincent's early life, and commented that the founding principle of the Furniture Store was the notion of recognising Christ in the poor and responding to their needs and this remains the guiding principle today, concluding with the words "May the Lord who began this good work, and who sustains it day by day, bring it to completion".

Let us acknowledge all the hard work that has gone into the 30 years that the store has been open, and the service that has been provided to the community by a truly dedicated team of staff and volunteers. Bishop Ralph reflected our sentiments exactly with his words "we are obviously proud and delighted to have reached this significant milestone and we should be, for the service we provide has made it possible for many people, perhaps already written off by some, to turn their lives around and make new beginnings."



## Vinnie's: The way forward

**Newcastle was the first UK city to introduce Universal Credit. The Council leader says it has been a disaster, with claimants now £1.1 million in rent arrears and some even finding themselves homeless. So there are many reasons why people are now reliant on the free food services provided around the city. The SVP in Tyne Central Council was keen to respond.**

We plan to build on the drop-in service with advice and support, to alleviate the reasons why people come to us for food. SVP members are on hand to chat to clients, get to know them and learn about their motivation for coming to us. They can also complete referrals for emergency food parcels. Computers are available, along with free Wi-Fi and we hope to have housing advice and debt experts on hand, offer smoking cessation and other support services, and provide robust signposting to other support.

Vinnie's is also an opportunity for long-term unemployed people to regain their confidence, develop skills and start the transition back into work by working alongside our SVP volunteers.

We were recently made depot charity of the year by Bidfood, one of the largest food wholesalers in the UK. With their assistance, we will be able to make connections with local businesses who

can provide us with expert advice and support. They are also offering opportunities for work experience and potentially even jobs for people who volunteer with us and are ready to move on to employment.

As we support 21 homeless people in our adjoining supported accommodation, we want to provide a service for them. Working with a Community Interest Company called Food Nation, we have started a peer-led cookery club. This not only teaches our residents how to eat more healthily and cook for themselves, but acts as a springboard to encourage them to volunteer at Vinnie's. This has already paid off, with one of our residents, James, now volunteering with us several days a week. He is pictured here with Heather, one of our other volunteers, learning how to bake a cake.



*Sue Walker, Head of North East Region*

## Tower House Opening

**On 19th September 2017 Brighton's St Vincent's Tower House was officially blessed by Bishop Richard Moth and opened by our (incoming) President Helen O'Shea, accompanied by outgoing President Adrian Able. Bishop Richard has also agreed to be Patron of our centre. A total of 75 people attended the opening of the SVP's first support centre for older isolated people in the South East of England.**

It has been a remarkable journey of faith and persistence for Vincentian members and staff to get the new project up and running and lunches and activities have already started. We hope that Tower House will become a flagship service for us in this region, where we can begin to create a place of hope and



*Photo courtesy of Harry Robertson*

enablement for all who come through our doors. If you would like further information please contact Thomas Gillespie, Regional Head of the South East CSP, at [thomasg@svp.org.uk](mailto:thomasg@svp.org.uk)

## Leeds ESOL goes green on the Yorkshire Dales

**Learners from the ESOL classes at the St Vincent's Support Centre in Leeds spent the day lending a helping hand to ensure the growth of a forest of trees on the Yorkshire Dales.**

The trees, planted nine years ago, were in need of some attention to ensure their protection from both the elements and from hungry rabbits. The group greatly enjoyed the day out with one member saying that it was the first time he'd been outside the city since arriving in Leeds, and just seeing green made his heart feel good. A huge thank you to Judy and Carol from the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust for helping to organise the trip and to Brian for driving the bus.



# Young Vincentians

## MINI VINNIES

### Andover Mini Vinnies Sleeping Rough



Making Vinnie Packs with money raised from the sleepover

**The Mini Vinnies of St John the Baptist Catholic Primary School in Andover had noticed the increase in the number of homeless people in the town and wanted to do something to help them.**

As the SVP already provide Winter Vinnie Packs containing essentials for those sleeping rough, the Mini Vinnies decided to concentrate on places such as Two Saints at Dene Court, where they were told that packs of toiletries would be most welcome. They discussed many fundraising ideas but eventually persuaded their mentor, Mrs Catherine Whateley, that sleeping rough would

have the biggest impact on them and they could raise a lot of money that way.

In the Summer Term, on the 7th July, 35 children and 4 members of staff spent the night on roll mats and in sleeping bags in the school hall. The children set up their sleeping areas and then, once hot chocolate and biscuits had been consumed to calm their nerves, all settled together around a prayer focus for a short liturgy. They read the parable of "The Good Samaritan" and reflected on the sacrifices they were making in order to help others. The children lit a tealight candle each to represent someone sleeping rough that night and wrote reflections and prayers. They prayed together and then they took their tealight to the sleeping bag to glow all night (electric tealights not real flames!) and remind them why they were doing this.

Throughout the night, they were encouraged to write further reflections and prayers if they were wakeful or worried. In the morning they gathered again for prayers and reflections. The children felt humbled by the experience. Their efforts raised over £400, and three dozen packs of toiletries will be delivered to the homeless shelter.

### Mini Vinnies Vintage Tea Party



**The Mini Vinnies of the Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Conference in Birmingham recently held a vintage tea party for members of the Parish and their friends.**

The group were joined by Year 5 Mini Vinnies from the local parish primary school, who helped prepare table decorations, made posies for the ladies and waited on tables. During the course of the afternoon the children had the opportunity to

sit with parishioners for tea, sandwiches and cakes where parishioners could reminisce and share their memories with the children. The children then entertained the parishioners with songs they had learnt in school. The event proved to be such a success that a Christmas Tea Party has now been planned to incorporate hymns and carols. Proceeds from the event, though voluntary, went to the Parish homeless appeal.

# Young Vincentians

## Adult Youth Conference Relations

Joanna Waller of Whitstable SVP reflects on how an adult and youth Conference can work together...

**“When we set up the YSVP conference, we thought we were doing it to help the young people to put their faith into action in their own lives. But over time we also found that their contribution became indispensable for us in the adult conference. They participate in everything we do, from organising the food bank to helping raise hundreds of pounds for our work on behalf of people in need throughout the town. Their creativity and imagination make them an amazing group to work with.”**

### How do we work well together?

- We use the adult SVP members’ experience and knowledge to support and apply our ideas in a realistic capacity.
- The adult Conference uses their contacts to get us in touch with people who can support our ideas and might be interested in our events.
- We plan events, but the adults help organise venues where we can hold them.
- Our imagination is a great help to the adult Conference, as we come up with creative new ideas for fundraisers and events, and help them to apply their needs in new ways.



Running the toy stall at the Parish Fete



Youth quiz night which raised around £500 for the Conference

- In regards to our food bank, our youth group is primarily in charge of sorting the food and making up food parcels, but the adult conference take them to families around the town.
- In short, now one can't work without the other!

## How Social Media Saved Our Food Bank

**Our SVP Conference in Whitstable relies almost entirely on donations from our fellow parishioners. Without their generosity our work would be impossible, and this generosity shone out more than ever recently when we had a crisis at our food bank. The shelves were all but empty; we had no meat, fruit, vegetables or other essentials to give out. I posted an appeal on the Parish Facebook page, but I could not have predicted the overwhelming response it received!**

Within ten minutes offers of donations appeared and by the next day the appeal had been shared all over Whitstable. Three days later we had received donations of both food and money in quantities we were entirely unprepared for, some from people who until then were unaware of what we do. Bags of food and essentials were piled at the back of church, and people called to offer money and other services to help the food bank survive. A week later our shelves were groaning, and donations still pouring in. The sense of community that emerged during this appeal is incredible, and it just highlights how important social media is



Empty shelves



Full shelves

in spreading our message of charity, showing ourselves to new people and making our voice heard. Sites like Facebook and Twitter can help us to interact with others who have the same drive for charity as we do, reach out to those in need, and allow us to further fulfil our promise to turn concern into action.

*Beth Sorensen, Whitstable Youth SVP*



## Spotlight on a Conference

# The Resurgence of Stoke Town SVP Conference

About a year ago, our parish priest, Fr Michael Miners of Our Lady of the Angels and St Peter in Chains, appealed for members of the congregation to re-establish the SVP Conference which had been active for many years but had sadly gone into abeyance.

**Our group was once again firmly established in the autumn of 2016. I was nominated as President, with Rose Bridges as Secretary, Julia Frodsham as Vice-President and Jose Sibi as Treasurer. With other committed individuals and Deacon Tony Bradshaw agreeing to become the spiritual lead, we had everything in place to start doing the good work of the SVP and to try and make a difference in our parish community.**

One of the first connections we made was with ASHA, a local organisation in Stoke-on-Trent that works with refugees and asylum seekers coming into the city. It supports hundreds of individuals and families from a range of countries who are in need of acute and long-term help. Most of the people who use their services arrive in the UK with nothing and need basic necessities such as shelter, food and clothing. Our SVP work has involved organising monthly congregational collections of food and clothing. The generosity of our congregation has been overwhelming and it is always a pleasure to drop off the items, which are clearly appreciated. Fr Michael also kindly donated £700 raised from a classical concert he organised in church, which helped replenish the food supplies. Some of our group have helped with teaching English and attended a course in conjunction with Keele University to ensure that they understood the criteria for engaging in this activity. I also personally helped a young boy who had arrived from Eastern Europe to get involved with a local football team, as he did not know how to develop his love of and talent for the sport. I foresee the ASHA connection continuing to gain strength as we expand our help for those who are in real poverty and desperation and who need a caring hand to stretch out and welcome them.

As with traditional SVP work, our dedicated team also visit the lonely, elderly and troubled on a weekly basis, providing company and solace to individuals in dire need of human contact. Our Conference recently organised a Festival Conference for both Stoke districts – East and West, to participate in the theme of “Becoming Dementia Friendly”. This event proved immensely popular, with over forty SVP members attending from all over the city and the Staffordshire Moorlands. In conjunction with Approach Staffordshire, a leading Dementia organisation who provided a wonderful speaker free of charge, we convened at our church on 15th October for an afternoon



Carol Lovatt and Slyvia

of worship, celebration and education followed by a delicious afternoon tea. Everyone said how much they enjoyed the activity and how they had learnt something about a condition that can impact on all our lives. More importantly, we are now more informed in our region about the nature of the condition and how we can support people in our role as volunteers.

The resurgence of Our Lady of the Angels and St Peter in Chains SVP group is gaining momentum. With so much demand in our society for support, and with an emphasis on ‘Welcoming the Stranger’, we look forward to doing more good work in the years to come with the spirit of our Christian faith and the Vincentian charism at the heart of it.

*Carol Lovatt, Conference President,  
Our Lady of the Angels and St Peter in Chains*

## Welcoming the Fourth Man

Over one hundred Vincentians from across Leeds Central Council enjoyed a special moment together as they became present at the "Supper at Emmaus".



Fr Bede Leach OSB from Ampleforth led the group in **Lectio Divina**, focusing on the gospel account of the supper at Emmaus and Caravaggio's inspired painting of the scene. Very quickly 110 brains and hearts were immersed in the painting and the primary focus centred on the "fourth man" (after Jesus and the two disciples).

With the simple tools of a copy each of the painting, a pen and a flip chart Fr Bede recorded the divergent insights of those present; drawing upon our wisdom and encouraging us to deeper insights. Ideas flowed as we focused on the fourth man, what he might reveal to us and Caravaggio's possible vision.

Was he the wine waiter, Caravaggio himself or another Rabbi present in the Inn and witnessing the scene?



Focusing on the fourth man drew us in to the scene and enabled us to become present and see with fresh eyes.

The focus then switched to the message for us today. The disciples walked with an apparent stranger throughout the day and together with Caravaggio's "fourth man", the realisation begins to dawn that the apparent stranger in their midst is in fact Christ. Then Fr Bede, through the use of contemporary recent everyday stories and insights, drew out from us and enabled us to begin to know first-hand, the heart of this gospel passage: **namely witnessing the Christ present in every human being and recognising the grace we receive as we move towards the stranger in our midst; the Christ truly present.**

*Mike Woods, Secretary of Leeds Central Council*

## Beaconsfield Healing Mass



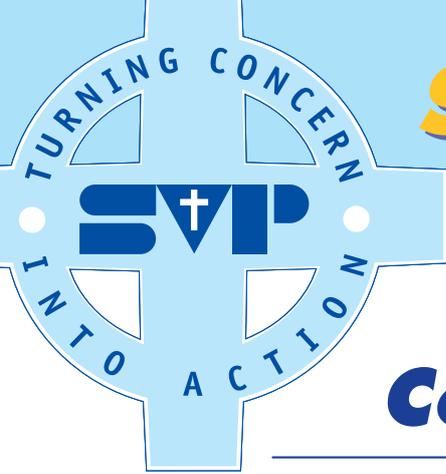
The St Vincent de Paul Society at St Teresa's Beaconsfield organised the annual Healing Mass for the Sick on Thursday 19th October. The Mass was celebrated by Monsignor Sean Healy followed by a high tea held in the Parish Centre.

## Concert for BOSCO

Enjoy an evening of classical music with performances from Jacques Allen and Alex Carter, guest performances from Andrew Wright (Music director at Brentwood Cathedral) and Art Wangcharoensab (Graduate of the Royal College of Music) and, if that wasn't enough, there will also be a special folk interlude from the Toot Hill Folk Group! Proceeds from the event will go towards the BOSCO children's camp.

Date: **Saturday 3rd February 2018, 7.30pm - 9.30pm**  
Cost: **Advanced Tickets £8, on the door £11**  
Venue: **New Windmill Hall, St. Mary's Lane, Upminster, Essex, RM14 2QH**  
Call: **07597 382592** Visit: **www.concertforbosco.com**





## St Edmund's School SVP Conference shows the way

In recognition of the outstanding work being done by the SVP Youth Conference at St Edmund's School in Portsmouth, one of their foundation governors, Martin Lewis, who is also President of the SVP Conference in Waterlooville, presented school chaplain, Fiona Fleming, and members of the school's SVP Conference, with a framed commemorative photograph.

**The picture, printed on canvas, was taken by Martin when he went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land led by Fr Tom Grufferty in 2014. It shows two fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee and will be used as a focus for prayer by the Youth SVP, chaplaincy and other groups within the school.**

As Fiona explained: "The photograph reminds us of Jesus calling the first disciples and is indicative of the work the school SVP group do in following in the footsteps of Jesus."

Every Monday after school has ended, 21 students from Years 9 to 11 at St Edmund's gather in the school chapel under the guidance of Fiona Fleming to plan activities that they hope will have a profound effect not only on their peers and staff in the school, but also others both in the city of Portsmouth and

further afield. Recent activities have included the 'PIP Appeal' (Play in Peace) where every tutor group in the school donated new and used toys which were passed on to the Roberts Centre in the city for use as Christmas gifts for children. During Lent, prompted by the students in the SVP group, the whole school took part in 'The Bucket Challenge' which supported the CAFOD Lent appeal in raising funds to ensure fresh water was available for people in outlying villages in Uganda. The school also put together a rucksack of items to help homeless people across Portsmouth.



*Kieran Knights*

## Bradford Alpha Evangelisation

**The Conference at St Mary's Parish in Bradford welcomed two new members who have become involved in the society since attending the Alpha course with current members of the SVP.**

Alpha stresses the importance of new Christians becoming involved in the local community to help build and maintain their faith, which fits well with the aims and ethos of the SVP.



## Chippenham District says Happy Retirement to Harry Purdon



**Chippenham District says Happy Retirement to Treasurer Harry Purdon of the Our Lady and St Alphege Conference.** To mark Harry's retirement as long-standing and highly regarded DC Treasurer, he was presented with a neck tie to add to his collection of over 150 ties! The tie was patterned with £££ signs. The DC thought that was very appropriate for an ex-treasurer.

*Barbara Molloy, DC District President*

## Hallam take part in the Sheffield Half Marathon

On a lovely Sunday morning, back in April, Father Andrew Browne and Marie Grant lined up once again, to tackle the hills of Sheffield. For the fourth year in a row they had volunteered to run the Sheffield Half Marathon in aid of St Vincent's Furniture Store.

Since 2014 Father Andrew and Marie, along with Vic Gould in 2014 and Dec Healy in 2016, have raised over £6,600 for the Furniture Store. This year the fantastic amount of £1517 was raised.

Over the past four years the money raised has enabled the Conference to buy new beds for 56 children and 44 adults. Lorraine Healy, Manager of St Vincent's Furniture Store, commented: "It is when you actually see the good that we can do with the sponsorship money that you thank God for Father Andrew and Marie. They train all year round, in the sun, wind and rain so they are able to complete the half marathon. They are not just turning up on a Sunday morning in April and running, loads of preparation goes into it all and everyone at the Store is full of admiration for them".



Marathon Presentation 2017

If anyone would like to join Father Andrew and Marie in running the half marathon for St Vincent's Furniture Store in April 2018, please contact Lorraine at the Store on **0114 2703990**.



## Good Shepherd Shelter

On 19th November 2017, the Good Shepherd Conference in Telford, Shropshire reflected on Pope Francis having designated the day as "World Day of the poor" by creating a makeshift shelter at the entrance to St Mary's Church. The shelter included items that replicated the provisions distributed to Myanmar refugees by Caritas.

This was our simple attempt to foster awareness in our parishioners of the plight of many refugees around the world. We encouraged parishioners to take time to visit the shelter, to reflect on the plight of refugees and to pray for them and for our world.

*Michael Coyle, The Parish of the Good Shepherd*

## Holy Mass offered for the Society



St Vincent de Paul Annual Mass 2017

As part of "Awareness Month" on 25th September Holy Mass was offered for the past and current members of the parish conference at Our Lady and St Kenelm Catholic Church, Halesowen. Pictured is the Altar which has displayed on it for the occasion a Relic of St Vincent de Paul together with a statue of the Blessed Saint.



## SVP Conference 'Day Tripping' to Brighton

**In a time of economic uncertainty a trip to the beach or a few days in the Lake District can be near impossible for some families.**



The Luton Conference at the NOAH Centre made this possible for Anna and her seven young children by arranging to take the family to Brighton for the day; for the children this was a chance to see the beach and the sea for the first time, whilst allowing Anna to enjoy some time with her family.

Warren Edwards comments "Although quite windy, it was a very sunny day. The highlights for the children were playing in the sand, running into and out of the sea, and also going on the rides on Brighton Pier... During this trip it became clear to me what a great blessing it was to share in this young family's joy, experiencing the south coast for the first time, with young children enjoying the simple things in life like an ice-cream, or ride on the dodgem cars. It can serve to remind us of how much we take for granted as adults in daily life, and also the important lessons we can learn as adults from young children. I think of the words Jesus told his disciples, 'whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a young child will never enter into it', Mark 10:13-16."

## Sacred Heart Northampton Conference Hosts the Bozeat Windmill Singers

In March the Sacred Heart Conference raised £626 by holding a concert featuring the Bozeat Windmill Singers. The choir kindly offered their services for free, and performed everything from Abba classics to John Rutter. It was clear the choir enjoyed their work and the evening was deemed a resounding success.



## Kathleen's Toy Donation

Kathleen Wilkinson grew up in Leeds and at the age of 6 her father was taken ill and was hospitalised for 18 months. Her mother went through terrible hardships bringing up 5 children on her own at that time, and a concerned neighbour saw the plight the family was in and informed a member of the SVP who responded immediately, giving food to the family and providing them with support through the difficult time.

Mrs Wilkinson fondly remembers Christmas and receiving lots of wonderful gifts from the SVP and she loves to collect Toys throughout the year and give these to the children in need that the SVP help.



Mrs Wilkinson with Leeds depot driver Colin Lansdowne

Photo Copyright Gordon Wilkinson

## Celebrating Success at Portsmouth CC Festival

**Not all problems we encounter are unpleasant! We were treated to a problem of the pleasant variety at the Portsmouth SVP Central Council Festival on Saturday 30 September 2017. With an estimated 60 SVP members expected in St Peter's Winchester, a total of 72 attended.**

Father Mark Hogan opened the festival with an uplifting Mass. Then three young Vincentians introduced the audience to the fabulous work of their B-Attitudes team; sending Christmas cards to prisoners, making cakes, growing vegetables to raise money to help feed the Fareham homeless, and a sponsored swim in the cold April waters of the Solent. They also entertained us with photographs of their very busy and productive year. In keeping with the festival theme of "celebrating success", our wonderful young people gave us a lot to celebrate.

Ken Madine, Head of Fundraising, Communications and Marketing at the National Office, then spoke eloquently and persuasively on the topic of raising and distributing funds. This was also a gentle reminder that although the SVP is a charity, it has legal and moral obligations to operate with financial probity. It was also a moment to reflect on the essential but different roles we play within the four tiers (Conference, District Council, Central Council and National Office) of the Society. One of the endearing aspects of the Festival was the presence of representatives from various sections of the Vincentian family; young members, new members, mature members, and those who have dedicated most of their adult lives to serve the poor and lonely.

Elizabeth Palmer's presentation was also on the theme of celebrating success and comprised a factual and comprehensive tour of the wider activity of our Society. Again, there were plenty of reasons to celebrate here; the facts told a story of continuing success, from sustained membership numbers to financial stability. Not bad for a charity that can trace its origins back to 1833. Elizabeth encouraged everyone to visit the new SVP website; designed by professional website developers, it was

lauded as a valuable source of information.

At the tea-break, members were invited to engage in discussion with representatives from Twinnage and Youth-development; stalls were available with helpful material, and Stephen Hogg and Anne Johnson were on hand to answer questions.



Ann Harris then provided a whirlwind introduction to training courses and told us about various modules which are available on the new website. As an example, 'Faith in Action' was described as "4-hours packed with value".

Our celebration ended with Elizabeth Palmer presenting medals to four dedicated individuals from the Portsmouth Diocese; Audrey Atter, John Scicluna, Brian Arthur and Tom Turnbull. In her presentation to Tom, Elizabeth recited a humorous tribute in a very passable Geordie twang; evidently, watching those old episodes of 'When the Boat Comes In' paid dividends. *Wey aye man!*

As a demonstration of the SVP's ability to reach out to the most vulnerable and needy, John Scicluna ended the day with a brief talk on Vinnie Packs which are distributed to homeless people in our area. The packs include everyday essentials such as socks, a thermal hat, gloves, toothpaste, shower-gel, a pen, and an information sheet about where to get help. The packs were purchased with funds raised by one of our wonderful Mini Vinnie Groups.

The festival at Winchester was an enthusiastic celebration of both past and present achievements. With the help of God's grace we look forward to future successes.

*Martin Allen, (soon to be) Secretary for Portsmouth Central Council*

## St David's 50th Anniversary Celebrations!

St David's Conference in Mold, North Wales celebrated their 'Golden Jubilee of Aggregation' in November. Some of the Conference members are pictured here along with parish priest Fr Pius Mathew who celebrated a special Mass for all SVP members past and present.





## Lymington Conference Feedback

In light of Awareness Month the Our Lady of Mercy and St Joseph Conference, Lymington have gathered feedback from individuals in the community who are recipients of visiting and befriending



**These quotes have been collected by Olive Wilkinson and Louise Curtis of the Home Visiting Team and Melanie Thomas and Frances Walker of the Friendship Club. The Home Visiting Team visit individuals either in their own homes or care homes once a month to catch up, whilst the Friendship Club brings community members together on a regular basis to interact and enjoy themselves.**

Here are just a few of the wonderful comments the teams have received in response to the help and support they offer to the local community.

### The Home Visiting Team...

*"You relieve my boredom and you make me laugh."*

*"I must admit that I was in a state and I didn't know what I needed and who I could trust. You made me feel so welcome and safe with a warm smile and a cup of tea."*

*"They've been looking forward to your visit all day."*

*"Your visits after hospital changed the way I looked at things. You lifted up my spirits and helped me on the road to recovery."*

### The Friendship Club...

*"Makes us get out of the house to meet some lovely people. It also gives me some me-time."*

*"I enjoy the lovely afternoons with very friendly people plus the excellent afternoon-tea and home-made cakes. I would recommend the Club to anyone – there's always lots of laughter."*

*"I love the company, the food and the lovely, friendly atmosphere. Yes, it does make a difference."*

## Easingfield York Mass for the Sick

On Thursday 28th September the church of St John the Evangelist played host to thirty senior citizens and members of the SVP to hear Mass and the Blessing of the Sacrament of the Sick, presented by the Parish Priest, Fr Leo Chamberlain.

"The tables in the Parish Hall were bright with flowers and two of our new members had been busy in the kitchen so that Shepherd's pie and vegetables, prepared by SVP members and helpers, could be served immediately after Mass. This was followed by a choice of desserts with ice cream and all went home happy after this annual event."



Mary Melling, Secretary of St John the Evangelist Conference, Easingwold

## Ann Widdecombe Speaks at SVP Event

Over 200 members of the St Vincent de Paul Society from all parts of the Birmingham Archdiocese, plus friends and family members, flocked to St Chad's Cathedral for their Annual Mass and Festival Gathering in September. This important event in the life of the SVP in the English Midlands is held on the Saturday nearest to St Vincent's Feast Day and this year was no exception.

The Principal Celebrant of the Mass was Bishop Robert Byrne, Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham, who has long-standing family connections with the SVP. Enthusiastic singing was led by Andy Ross and Emily Clark of *One Life Music* and the choir of St Joseph's School, Nechells.

A buffet lunch followed in the Grimshaw Room, with food provided by Teresa Griffin Parry from Rednal SVP, together with her daughters.

The Festival Gathering then continued back in the Cathedral, to listen to Birmingham Central Council President Clare O'Brien, Bishop Robert and the principal speaker, The Rt. Hon. Ann Widdecombe, DSG, Patron of the St Vincent de Paul Society of England & Wales, who spoke eloquently on the plight of prisoners "*Forgotten behind walls*". As a former Prisons Minister, she was able to speak authoritatively and movingly on this topic. This was followed by an opportunity to put questions to Miss Widdecombe.

She is also, of course, a well-known author and brought a selection of her books for sale, with the profits donated to the SVP, a wonderful and much-appreciated gesture.

Stewarding of the event was carried out by SVP members from many different parts of the area.

The date has been booked with the Cathedral for next year. All are welcome on Saturday 22nd September 2018.

*John Barley, Secretary, SVP Birmingham Central Council*



SVP Birmingham Mass



Ann Widdecombe and Dudley District President Peter Tompkins

Photos courtesy of Aidan Tompkins

## A Busy Month for Pocklington Conference

September was a busy month at the St Mary and Joseph Conference in Pocklington. The annual Mass and Anointing of the Sick was held on the 23rd, made extra special as the Conference welcomed children who will be making their first communion next year. They met their prayer partners who were chosen from amongst the SVP beneficiaries.

Following the previous year's great success, Race Night was held on the 29th, proving even more popular than before! Supported by Father Michael, the parish and friends, tremendous fun was had by all resulting in a profit of over £900. A huge thank you from Conference Treasurer, Catherine Black, to everyone who helped and supported the event.





## Fulfilling Hop

In 19 years this is the first time I've landed at Khartoum in daylight and from the air it served to remind me of the dire existence of so many people who have absolutely nothing and live in a landscape devoid of any colour other than the bright clothes worn by some of the women.



Helen and baby

*Ian Mawdsley reports from Khartoum:*

**I'm grateful that Helen our new National President could join me on this visit and I know she was deeply moved by what she witnessed. Helen agreed that in this article I should share some of my personal feelings and reflections.**

As Vincentians we are privileged to work with the poor. But for an accident of birth it could be any one of us living without food, water or proper shelter. Seeing the types of shelter they build for themselves is heartbreaking. After nearly 20 years of involvement it doesn't get any easier to witness such deprivation; surely poverty doesn't get any worse than this. It really does break my heart to see. But to be positive, members and friends of the SVP in England & Wales have given tremendous support since we first asked for help in 1998. Many young people have been given training to enable them to earn a living and support their families as well as providing employment for others. Your support has impacted the lives of many hundreds of thousands of people.

I have a concern which I've felt over the years, and in conversation with Helen on our return from visiting 3 baby feeding centres she shared the same feeling of embarrassment.

In a way we feel that we are being presented as bountiful benefactors when really, we are only your representatives and there to report back to you that the support is being given as expected, and that the money is being spent in a way which is expected by you. Those who visit Sudan and South Sudan are merely the messengers.

On recent problems. In 2013 the Human Aid Commission (HAC) – the Sudanese government department responsible for addressing the needs of the poor, removed the permit to operate from over 30 NGOs, including the SVP. At this point ASASE (The Swiss Association of the Friends of Sister Emmanuelle) and the donors who contributed through them withdrew their funding in favour of SVDP in Juba, South Sudan. This had a disastrous effect on the SVDP in Khartoum as ASASE had started all the major programmes here.

At this time SVP (England & Wales) took the view that we would continue our help as Vincentian brothers and sisters, with limited support for some programmes which could be operated by members and volunteers, low key and without the need for the huge numbers of staff (believed to be 186 at the highest point). After the closure of the foster homes, staff numbers reduced to 32. Our support continues and other than the SVP in South Tyrol who provide infrequent donations of between €5K and €15K, the SVP (E&W) are the only providers of funding for the SVDP in Khartoum.

### *So where are we now?*

As in the rest of the world, the members in the Khartoum area work one-to-one with those in need. We have 151 Twinned Conferences in Sudan. However, the country is beset with problems caused by 60 years of civil war and the displacement of millions of people. As a result some major programmes had been developed including medical centres, water distribution, baby feeding, foster homes for street children, and vocational training. The last two programmes (foster homes and VT) were costly, labour intensive and difficult to manage and have now been closed. At the moment medical clinics are limited to the men's and women's prisons. 13 of the previous 16 baby feeding centres are operational and the water programme is running at reduced capacity due to shortage of funds and technical problems.



# es and Dreams

Desolation



## What is working well and what needs fixing?

The programmes are all bringing benefit to huge numbers of people. Key issues which need to be addressed include: The water tanker and minibus are likely to fall apart soon. The HAC permit to operate is only for one year with a promise that it will be renewed if we behave! The staff are paid a pitiful wage; the most senior member of staff is paid the equivalent of £6,000 a year - and contrary to peoples beliefs it's more expensive to live in Khartoum than London. The working conditions endured by staff are poor; the office which is in a house owned by the Tadros family is in need of refurbishment. It was recently necessary to reduce the number of Baby Feeding Centres through lack of funds.

As well as developing relationships with our brothers and sisters in Sudan, our visit serves to provide encouragement to SVDP members here in Sudan. During our visit it became apparent that some SVDP staff lack understanding of Vincentian values and international structure. As well as gathering information for you we assess the impact of your support and review the situation in respect to the number and needs of the people needing help. Assessing the impact and benefit of the support we have provided also steers us in future strategy and forward planning. In our meeting with the Director of the Human Aid Commission (HAC) for the government in Khartoum I stressed that it is our policy to plan for long term support rather than a "sticking plaster" solution. In an effort to address their (HAC) concerns Helen also emphasised that our support for the poor is given without thought for age, gender, religion or ethnic background.

Together with our members in Khartoum, some of the important issues Helen and I noted as needing attention include: Improving methods of communication - one of the barriers is language which can often be resolved in the written word, but any meaningful communication must convey feelings and attitudes which are only possible through verbal communication face to face. This will need improved I.T. facilities in the office in Khartoum.

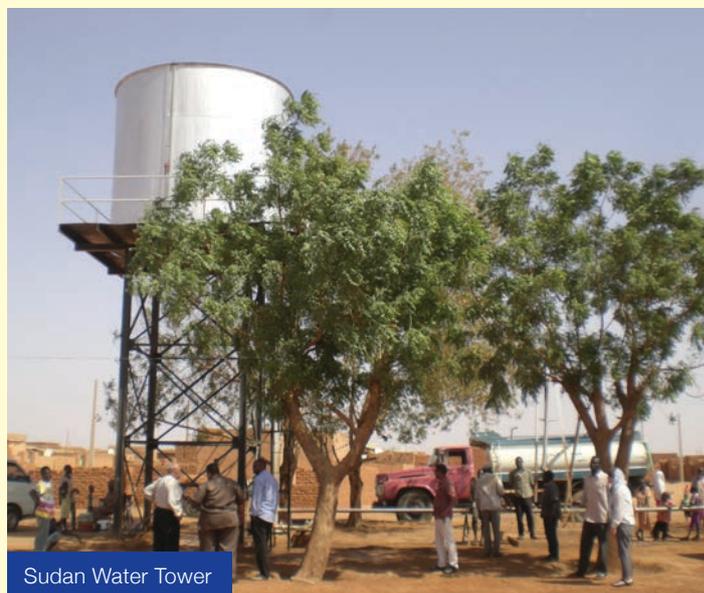
But what an impact the SVDP is having on the lives of individuals. Last year alone 3,500 medical treatments were provided, 11,000 people benefitted from the supply of clean water, and 6,750 young children of preschool age received a nourishing meal 5 days a week.

The SVDP here have assets which aren't being utilised including the farm at Gebel Awlia which is closed at present. Reopening will need additional funding from sources outside the SVP such as grant making bodies or previous donors. Future plans include the training of young people at present cared for at a government run home for abandoned children.

There isn't space on this page to answer all questions or give all the details of our visit, but please visit the Twinnage website: [www.twinnage.org.uk](http://www.twinnage.org.uk) where you'll find a copy of the full report from Helen and myself with lots of other interesting material.

**One thing we can certainly claim: not only are we saving lives, we are helping huge numbers of people to fulfil their hopes and dreams.**

Thank you for your continued support and please be assured that you are in my daily prayers.



Sudan Water Tower



## Correspondence Between Indian Twins and England & Wales

David Wiles reflects on the fundamental principles of Twinnage and what we can do to ensure consistent contact between Conferences in England and Wales and those in India.



Holy Mother of Lourdes Conference, Mettupalayam

**Correspondence between Twins is one of the three fundamental principles of Twinning and all parties should seek, where possible, to contact their twin at least twice a year.**

The sad reality is that far too many Conferences in both India and here at home do not correspond. It is the ongoing aim of both our National Twinnage (E&W) and the National Council of India (NCI) to enable correspondence between all Twins where possible.

The communication reinforces our Catholic (Universal) ties with our overseas Brothers and Sisters. Correspondence can draw different cultures closer over thousands of miles and “educate” each other with news of indigenous activities and problems. It also gives evidence of how the Twinning Grant is spent in India particularly on the Adopted Families.

In the last two years Bro Johnson Varghese, the Indian National President, has set up email addresses for all the 84 Central Councils in India, most of which do seem to work so an e-mail should get at least a postal address. Many Conferences in India do not have an e-mail address locally. At this point I should stress that from my experience there are probably as many of our Twins who do not write to their Indian counterparts as the other way around.

Some of the reasons that Twins do not communicate:

- The Indian Conference has no-one that can speak or write English (the alphabets are, of course completely different)
- The E&W address supplied by NCI is inaccurate or just wrong (I have seen some extraordinary variations down the years)
- The Indian address supplied by NCI is inaccurate or just wrong (a Pin Number is very important)

**What should you do if you either wish to enable correspondence or have difficulty obtaining a response?**

The action is quite straight forward – contact your CC Twinnage Officer whose responsibility it is to sort out these problems.

*Example of a recent success...*

One of the Conferences in my CC, Our Lady of Gillingham, Gillingham, had lost contact with their Twin in Thanjavur CC in Tamil Nadu. For about three years Yvonne Atkinson, the former treasurer of Gillingham, pressed me to solve this problem. After much confusion in the bilateral Twinnage administration, it was established that the Twin is the Holy Mother of Lourdes, Mettupalayam Village in Thanjavur. One of the justified concerns of Gillingham was to establish if the Twinning Grant was being received by the correct destination. In February 2017 I extended my official Twinnage visit with a private stay and managed a quick visit to Mettupalayam with the CC President. It was a long journey into rural Tamil Nadu to the village but this explained one point of confusion; Mettupalayam is a large city/town in Tamil Nadu but this village with the same name is so much smaller and many, many miles to the east in the same state. When I met the Conference in the gathering gloom they explained that they had suffered the misfortune of having two presidents die while in office. After the usual warm welcome I was shown the Conference Treasurer’s books which meticulously recorded every rupee and where it was spent particularly on the local Adopted Families. Now mutual correspondence is enabled. So my advice is “Never give up – try to be patient”.

We can assure our members that every Conference in India is regularly helping members of their “adopted families” who will be some of the 300 million in the country living below the UN poverty line.

## The Young Families Fund

The Young Mums and Children Fund was originally set up in 2007 as a result of a donation made to the SVP by the Union of Catholic Mothers. The original aim was to support young mothers and their children who were experiencing difficulties.

**The fund has continued to thrive since the original donation thanks to generous donations from SVP members.**

The fund has helped 31 families since January, spending nearly £6,000 on various aid including: purchasing beds, flooring a home, helping a family move into habitable accommodation and contributing to rent arrears to prevent eviction.

- We were able to help a blind child from a disadvantaged family by purchasing a braille bar, which helped her to continue her studies at home.
- We helped a terminally ill mother with six children purchase a washing machine to ease life's simple chores.
- A grandmother who was responsible for her grandchildren was offered financial support.
- A family who tragically lost their business due to fraudulent landlords were able to get back on their feet.

However, families come in all shapes and sizes and we would like to extend our help to more families, so the time has come to change the name to The Young Families Fund. The fund will aim to help any family with children of 12 years or under, who are



struggling and in need. The maximum grant will remain at £250 and conferences can apply by downloading the application form online. The fund is currently running low and it would be greatly appreciated if any Conference with surplus funds could make a donation to the Young Families Fund. Christmas in particular is a difficult time for families and this grant can help a family when they truly need it. As the most used Special Fund, please consider supporting a resource that is very much in demand.

## Principles of Fundraising

"Fundraising is a very rich and beautiful activity. It is a confident, joyful and hope-filled expression of ministry." Henry Nouwen in *"A Spirituality of Fundraising"*

**In recent years charity fundraising has suffered from a growing fixation on "technique". Some practices have irritated the public and raised ethical issues, prompting the establishment of the new Fundraising Regulator. This new environment is a timely opportunity to revisit the four basic components of best fundraising practice which have stood the test of time and are critical to success:**

- **A clearly articulated case for support** which appeals to the heart as well as the head, outlining the charity's vision and mission; how it is organised to deliver its mission; the local needs it has identified; how it can address them with additional funds and the benefits to people. This then acts as

the authoritative reference document and ensures everyone is on the same page.

- **Financial need:** An outline summary of the funds required to deliver the plan; how they break down into the main items of expenditure; what funds are already raised or expected and the shortfall that must be raised.
- **Constituency of support:** Who is likely to want to invest in our case for support? A careful and thorough evaluation of the potential constituency of support ensures efforts are channelled in the direction most likely to yield results.
- **Leadership:** Passionate and dedicated voluntary leaders are vital to any fundraising campaign. When they articulate the case for support, they command respect because they speak from the heart.

As the new Board of Trustees comes into place and the future needs of the Society are identified, plans are in hand to develop a fundraising strategy which will enable the Society's vision to be realised in the years ahead.

*Ken Madine, Head of Fundraising,  
Communications and Marketing*



## SSVP Scotland Celebrates the 400th Anniversary of the Charism

Raymond Daley, Board Member and Kendal Conference President, reports on the 400th anniversary celebrations of the Vincentian charism in Scotland at Carfin which he attended with Adrian and Mary Abel.



Mass in St Francis Xavier's Church



Rosary procession passes St Vincent de Paul's statue

**I managed to arrive early and park my car before the numerous coaches and cars carrying pilgrims from all over Scotland, Ireland, England and Wales arrived. I met my Vincentians in Partnership colleague Joe MacEachen in the car park unloading flowers from his car to be placed in front of the St Vincent de Paul statue in the grounds of the shrine before the Rosary Procession. It was a privilege to be able to help in doing this.**

The celebrations started with a Rosary Procession around the beautiful grounds of the shrine in which hundreds of people took part. Going into Mass we were welcomed by a piper by the church entrance. Every seat in St Francis Xavier's church was full within a short timeframe. At the start of Mass the piper accompanied the carrying of the 400th Anniversary Candle to its place by the altar, a candle I first saw in London last February at the first 400th Anniversary Mass in St George's Cathedral in Southwark, then again at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral in June at the end of our National Meeting. The Mass was accompanied throughout by a signing choir standing in front of the altar. Afterwards it was wonderful to meet so many devoted friends who are part of our large Vincentian Family.

Carfin has grown since I was last there many years ago but I will be back again and won't leave it as long next time.



Rosary procession

## Behind the Scenes at the National Office



**Thomas Gillespie**

*Regional Head of Community Support Projects, South East*

Thomas joined the SVP at the beginning of 2017. In his post he currently oversees our shop growth for this region and is leading on the set up of the South's first ever support hub project for isolated older people at St Vincent's Tower House in Brighton. In the last year he has also completed a strategic review of support hub models across the society and opened our second shop in Hove. In the last 10 years Thomas has worked at directorial level in the third sector and NHS in the field of business development and has a wealth of experience in winning contracts and mobilising projects. He has also been a senior operational manager in the field of homelessness, substance misuse and mental health provision, which he brings to the SVP. Thomas lives in Croydon and is a keen runner, cantor at his parish church choir and enjoys mountain climbing and swimming badly in outdoor lakes and seas in a bright rubber hat. In his spare time (for his sins) he supports one of London's most controversial and much maligned football teams... Millwall.

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### Tom Greenwood *Volunteer*



As part of the volunteer team, Tom has been responsible for assisting in the transfer of data from paper to digital and initiating new software tools. He has contributed towards SVP's objective to become more sustainable and efficient, thus improving the quality of its services. Tom has coordinated with the National Office IT department, helping ensure the continued smooth running of operations and suggesting insights for creating greater awareness of the SVP and its mission. Over the past few years, Tom has been regularly involved in several volunteer roles focused around urban regeneration, helping the environment, sustainable business practices and lobbying for universities to take a stronger stance against fossil fuel investment. Having studied Economics & Philosophy, Tom is keen to be on the right side of history when it comes to preserving our environment but is aware that there are many avenues to achieve this. By providing support for the vulnerable, dignity for those most in need, and friendship for those who require it, Tom believes the SVP enables greater progress for all those who inhabit the world. The ethos of SVP to be open-minded; equally appreciative of people from diverse backgrounds with different beliefs, strengthens all of our abilities to alleviate poverty and work towards justice.



**Catherine Kerr**

*National Safeguarding Manager and Camps Coordinator*

For the past two and a half years, Catherine has worked diligently with the support of management and the Board of Trustees to ensure that safeguarding continues to be embedded into everything we do. Initially, her work was focused on training and legal compliance matters around safeguarding adults. However, with the amazing growth of Vincentian Youth groups, ongoing conference support for children's summer camps and the spread of member's activities into direct contact with disadvantaged families, her safeguarding role has expanded to include an equal emphasis on safeguarding children. Before joining the Society in 2015, Catherine was the Managing Director for Unseen Tours, a non-profit organisation which employs homeless guides to lead walking tours of London. The tours are a vehicle not only for getting guides back into work, but also for raising awareness of the reality of sleeping rough in the UK today. Prior to moving to the UK, Catherine was a lawyer and immigration judge in Canada. Her clients included refugees, casualties of domestic abuse, as well as victims of international child abductions. Catherine has two children of whom she is equally proud: Alexis who is a surgeon in London and Jamie who is a snowboard and mountain biking specialist in British Columbia. Her five-year-old grandson is also an outdoor expert who strapped on his first snowboard when he was only eleven months old! Catherine is a travel addict whose next trip will be to Peru to climb Machu Picchu combined with a hiking tour of Patagonia.



**Beth Sorensen *Intern***

I have been helping my local SVP my whole life, waitressing at Christmas lunches and flogging goods at jumble sales. But in November I came to the National Office to do some volunteering, to see the work the SVP do, and how the charity operates beyond a local level. During my time there I have helped to write various pieces for the Vincentian Concern, as well as fulfilling administrative roles. I have learned so much whilst volunteering for SVP and it has given me a fresh new outlook on what it really means to turn concern into action. My favourite part of my role at SVP is the opportunity to use my words to spread the message of charity, and help to inspire others to take action to help those in need. I am a founding member of my local Youth SVP group, and an active member of my parish. In my spare time I enjoy baking, reading and travelling.



# CEO's Message

## The World needs the Vincentian Movement

I was lucky enough to attend the 400th anniversary Symposium in Rome. Hopefully the magazine has given you some flavour of the event.

**Before the event I was most excited about the papal audience as I find Pope Francis truly inspiring. The occasion did not disappoint, the audience was a wonderful experience, the sun shone, an early start meant that we got practically front row seats and there was real joy in the 10,000 plus crowd of Vincentians.**

What caught me by surprise however, was how much I enjoyed the other aspects of the symposium. The talks, which have been shared in the magazine in edited form, were truly moving and inspirational; while the sense of family and belonging when catching sight of clusters of Vincentians proudly wearing their yellow neck scarfs on seemingly every street corner, shop or café in Rome on our afternoon off was strangely moving. There was a wonderful image on Twitter of the Pope with the caption "the Vincentians are coming, how wonderful", and this is what it really felt like: a tidal wave of positive energy, a sense of joy in a shared mission and delight in a shared future.

In his welcome the Superior general of the Congregation of the Mission priests said "if a person dreams a dream alone, then it remains just a dream; but if we dream together, then the dream is transformed into a reality". Rome for me was about glimpsing this enormous potential of what Vincentians can do when they work

together. In Rome it was about an international family with many branches, but in microcosm it is about the Conference, the District, the Central Council, the SVP in England and Wales.

Do all our members and Conferences feel that joy of belonging, that excitement in our shared mission? If an SVP Conference really is alive with the charism then I believe it is so much more than just a parish visiting group. I would urge members and Conferences to use the symposium materials reproduced in this magazine and on the website. Read them, reflect on them, share them and discuss them. Fan the flames of your charism, infect others with it. At the final Mass on the Sunday the Superior General in his homily compared the Society to the parable of the mustard seed. He noted "If we remain simply with our thoughts on the past... and do not keep watering, trimming and fertilising the tree, slowly it will start to die. However, by watering, trimming and fertilising the tree, that is by being actively involved today as members of the Vincentian family, this tree with God's grace, can grow... spreading its branches to villages, cities and countries where it is not present." As much now, as at any time in the 400 years since St Vincent started the first Vincentian organisation, the world needs the Vincentian movement, it needs love, which is "inventive to infinity".

*Elizabeth Palmer, CEO*

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

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

**Bernard Brigham:** A very faithful and long standing member of St Thomas of Canterbury Conference, Sevenoaks, Kent.

**Roland Catlow:** Former President of St Anthony's Conference, Fulwood, Roland served as Preston District President for the past 4 years and was a loyal supporter of Preston North End.

**Geoff Chesworth:** A dedicated Vincentian, Geoff was a former Treasurer and regular reader at St Wilfrid's Conference, Preston.

**Anne Edmondson:** Active member of St Mary's and St Joseph's Conference, Worksop, for 15 years.

**John Fletcher:** President of the St Chad and All Saints Conference, Sedgley, Dudley, and a member since 1978. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

**Frank Grady:** A former President of St Vincent's, Altrincham Conference, who for many years helped organise trips to the Ozanam Camp.

**Peter Healey:** President and long standing member of St Joseph's Neath Conference, and a much welcomed visitor in many parishioners' homes.

**Dr Barbara Katic:** Former member of St Joseph Conference, Anderton.

**Mary McLoughlin:** Treasurer of St Joseph's Conference, St Neots. Mary passed away on 24th August after many years wonderful service. Sadly missed by her Conference colleagues.

**Harry Mellor:** Member of the Virgo Fidelis Conference, Upper Norwood.

**Anne Owens:** A member of the St Edward and Holy Spirit Conference, Runcorn, Cheshire for 13 years.

**Rory Sweeney:** Long serving member and Treasurer of St Luke's District Council, Corby. A true Vincentian of 30 years.

**Nick van der Borgh:** Member of the St Matthew's Conference, West Norwood.

**Peter Willis:** Conference member of St Joseph the Holy Child, Bedford. A staunch member and supporter of the Society over many years, and former National President.

**May they rest in peace.**

*Where provided by a family member, full obituaries can be displayed on the main SVP website.*





# St Scholastica's Retreat

An Almshouse in the heart of Princes Risborough

## Vacant Flats Available

St Scholastica's Retreat is an Almshouse for practising Catholics who are aged 60 years or over, who are of limited financial means, and who are capable of living independently in a self-contained flat. We have 36 modern self-contained flats in an attractive position with shared spacious gardens. The Retreat is in easy walking distance of the parish church and all amenities.

For more information, please visit our website: [www.stscholasticas.co.uk](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.chas-uk.org) or obtained from Noreen Villiers by post (46 Bradley Road, London SE19 3NS) or e-mail ([noreenvilliers@AOL.com](mailto: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.

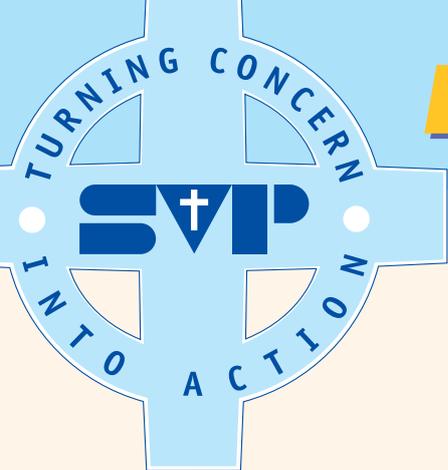
#### David Young's Charity

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 NYC. For further information, an application form or any guidance please contact: The Trustees of the David Young's Charity, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB. Visit the David Young's Charity website [www.davidyoungscharity.co.uk](http://www.davidyoungscharity.co.uk) or email [trustees@davidyoungscharity.co.uk](mailto: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 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.



## 2018

### Board & National Council Meeting Dates

#### Board Meetings

**Thursday 1st February** - London National Office

**Friday 23rd March** - Venue TBC

**Thursday 10th May** - London National Office

#### National Council Meetings

**Friday 23rd & Saturday 24th March** - Venue TBC

### Inviting content contributions for VC Spring Edition 2018

Next deadline for sending news and information for VC Spring Edition is 26th February 2018. Letters and articles for inclusion in the magazine should be submitted to: SVP, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB or email:

[comms@svp.org.uk](mailto:comms@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 the National Office on 020 7703 3030 or [kenm@svp.org.uk](mailto:kenm@svp.org.uk)

### Editorial Policy

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

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Letters and articles for inclusion in the magazine should preferably be emailed to [comms@svp.org.uk](mailto:comms@svp.org.uk) or submitted to: Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB.

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

