

Penny's Piece

It has been a very interesting and busy time since the wonderful Annual General Assembly in Quebec City. I am still receiving such positive comments about the great job that was done. Kudos to all!

OnThe Road

In July, I had the privilege of attending the FamVin meeting and World Youth Days in Australia. There were four youth, Sara, Ryan, Josh and Aiden, along with Carmela, the youth coordinator for Ontario and myself attending. I have to say, you can be very proud of our youth!

The first week was the FamVin program held in Bathhurst. It was held at St Stanislaus College for boys. We were warmly greeted and cared for. Of course, July is wintertime in Australia and the weather was rather cold. Temperature ranged from 8 degrees at night to 12 and 14 degrees during the daytime. The youth from the warmer countries really did have a hard time dealing with the cold. Hats, scarves and gloves or mittens were donated by the wonderful Vinnies of Australia. We had plenty of warm jackets, heavy shirts and sweaters to keep us warm: most especially, the great warmth provided by our Vincentian spirituality!

We had 336 Vincentian Family members from 32 countries in attendance. There were Young Vinnies, Sisters of Charity, Daughters of Charity, Vincentian Fathers and of course Society of Saint Vincent de Paul members. The ICG Vice President, Michael Theo, attended, as well as, the National President from Singapore, China, Canada, Australia, and John Campbell, President of Queensland.

ICG President Brother Jose Ramone joined us a little later.

There was an opening ceremony held which included lighting candles from each country. Unfortunately, we arrived at midnight the opening day. The closing ceremonies and Mass included participation by our Canadian youth.

The days spent in Bathhurst were such a spiritually nurturing and life giving experience. It helped many to understand and know the face of Vincentianism, as Sr. Catherine, from Salamanca, pointed out, "to know that as Vincentians we understand it to have meaning and significance when it related to service – especially service to the poor and deprived of society". She also added that "our present and our future are justified when it validly seeks to be of service to others". This indeed gives us our reason for being. Most saliently, "this is where we find genuine happiness".

There were Masses each day that embraced many cultures, songs and activities. One evening was devoted to each country conducting a presentation of music, song, dance or an activity....a veritable multi cultural night. Our Canadian youth, as a group, proudly sang the national anthem led by Sara, and followed this with the "Squirrel Dance" led by

Josh. The “silly” activity was a hit! Everyone participated and laughed till their sides hurt! They thought it was such a wonderful little activity...Kudos to Josh and the group! This multi cultural night displayed the real meaning behind the phrase “we are one, though we are many!” Some very talented youth! I am sure Carmela has this on video tape, which she will share at the AGA in Kitchener next year. Any time I looked for Carmela she had the video camera up to her eye capturing what she could on tape.

One of the presentations held during each day was conducted by Sister Catherine of Salamanca. Her presentation concerned “charity” and “social justice”, and understanding their respective roles and the Vincentian approach to these roles. The basic understanding can be summed up thusly. To hand out food and clothing, operate soup kitchens is really not enough if we do not work toward correcting the causes of poverty. We cannot simply devote our time to one and not the other. Charity has one role and social justice is altogether different. There are critical elements to both. As we know, Fredric was a great proponent of social justice. He wrote many articles in the Tribune about injustices. However, he did not have all the answers and Sister Rendu didn't either, but what she did have was the experience. The poor need help now. The poor often thought that it was their fault that they were poor. We need to add “work” to the “talk” of helping the poor and their situations.

Remember, that our deep and personal sharing in the needs of others suffering becomes a sharing of our very self!

On the last night of Fam Vin, the Canadian Vincentian group, were asked to do a 5 - 7 minute presentation to the whole assembly regarding helping to build a “youthful” society. So, Sara and I conducted this presentation. There were 5 other countries asked to present as well.

Sara spoke first about the youth and activities that she is engaged in with the Windsor Essex youth, as well as, some activities in the Kitchener/Waterloo area. She had prepared a well done power-point presentation depicting these various activities. When she concluded and was leaving the stage, I brought her back with me to do my segment of the presentation. We basically presented as a team. The crowd applauded that move! I wanted everyone to witness the togetherness, the team, I was to speak about. The youth and the “older”?, “Gray”?, “experienced”? working together. What she had to say was as important as anything I had to say.

The points of my presentation:

As the National Council of Canada president, I am very pleased to have accompanied our young members here to Australia. Of course, it has been a delight to meet all of you! I would like to share several important points for everyone to consider in helping to build a “youthful Society”.

These are:

a) We have to see the younger members (youth members) as part of the Society, not as a separate entity.... they are indeed a part of the “family”, the Vincentian Family!

(I did emphasize that our strategic planning identified these very same concerns throughout Canada and that we are striving to lower the average age of members.)

b) We have to be ready to provide opportunities for exposure of our young members to the public and to those with whom the Society comes in contact.

These opportunities provide venues for valuable exchange of ideas and motivation. Seeing things through younger eyes!

c) Presidents at all levels of the Society need to see the value of inclusion and integration of youth as contributing members of Conferences and Councils...that they are not the “kids” that do fundraising activities, or do the “joe jobs”, but that they need to be seen as “members”, decision making members of boards, Councils and Conferences. As members, we do home visitations and have personal contact with the poor...there can very well be young poor! Who better to relate to the young poor than the young members? We have to have “confidence” in the youth of the Society.

I highlighted the fact that in Canada we have a 22 year old young lady, who attends university, on our National Council Board of Directors. I also highlighted our young ‘21 year old’ Inuit president of the Conference at the Arctic Circle that I had had the privilege of meeting just recently.

d) Presidents at regional levels might want to consider appointing youth coordinators that will assist to recruit, to form and to advise youth members as they move forward with new ideas that creatively seek out and serve the needs of those less fortunate.

In closing, the message I hope all of you take away is that as much as we talk about wanting to see young people respond to the call to serve the poor with love, respect, justice and joy, we cannot expect success if our young members are only to be “seen” and not “heard” in a meaningful and purposeful way. Each and every one of us has a part to play in helping to encircle the world in a conference of charity!

As you would expect, there was a resounding clamour of support. Afterwards I had many young Vincentians approach me to say that they wished that it could be “like that back home”.

World Youth Days

The World Youth Days followed in Sydney. We travelled to Sydney by bus. It was of course songs and music in the bus for the first hour. By the time we arrived everyone was sound asleep. Very friendly people ensured that everyone was taken care of. The city closed certain streets to allow for everyone to walk safely throughout the areas. City buses were free for pilgrims to travel as well.

Learning and Sharing

Catechesis was held in the mornings and Mass at all the sponsoring churches for the pilgrims to attend. There were some excellent presentations by speakers and the youth. Some were plays, some were songs and some discussion groups.

Opening Ceremonies

We were excited to attend the opening ceremonies. We walked and walked and walked, then stood and stood and stood! However, it was wonderful to see so many young people there to share their love, joy, their prayers, their food and their songs. Sitting down for them was not a priority.

We were some distance from where the Pope's cavalcade was entering the area. We could see very little. We could hear very well when he did speak, and there were large screens all around the area. However, there were so many country flags flying we could not see the screens. Just hearing the Pope's voice over the loud speakers got the crowds excited even if they could not see him. Loud cheering everywhere! After walking and standing for over 8 hours, I really discovered just how much the old bones can take... there were people everywhere!

Of course bands were playing and there was dancing and plenty of entertainment when the Pope left for the next part of his agenda. (You guessed it...I left for home...my hotel room. Actually, I think I "crawled" out of the area to find a taxi...just could not get the old bones to move anymore.) I was told the youth had "a ball"...Carmela too!

The Opening Mass

What a magnificent display of culture mixed with liturgy, it was indeed fascinating to watch!

The Pope's Message To Youth

Essentially the Pope's message centered on the sacredness of each youth. His warning to the youth not to be so enmeshed in worldly trends and fads that they lose who and what they are. Living in harmony and for God has to be their top priority. There are so many challenges that youth face that it is easy to be lost in a life of turmoil and sin. He urged youth to hang on to their Christian Catholic values and not be swayed by the fads of the day. He urged them to be defenders of their Christian values. Youth are precious in his sight and they are the hope for the world. He did enjoy being among the youth.

The way of the Cross

The youth and I were separated by this time. But, I had the opportunity to go downtown with John Campbell, the President of Queensland in Australia to see the Way of the Cross played out. Now that was a very moving experience indeed! We had the good fortune to be at right the right place at the right time when the "soldiers" and "Christ" were moving along the walkway to Calvary. Christ was being "dragged" along the pathway. The

temperature outside was rather cool, however, the actors were dripping with sweat! How touching and real it was!

The Closing Mass

Again, very impressive and meaningful! The Saturday night before the Mass on Sunday July 20th, was the “sleep out” under the stars. What an event! I had promised the youth I would be with them all the way if I accompanied them....and I was almost! Saturday, July 19th was my 65th birthday, and I was bound and determined that I would join them on the field! I bought my sleeping bag, tent, chair, and ground sheet, I was set! However, if you remember what I said earlier about the bones that would not move!!!

As it happened, there were two youth from St Stanislaus College that made friends with our little group. They contacted Carmela to see if there was any way she could find two admission tickets to Randwick Park. They really wanted to be with our Canadian Vincentian youth. Carmela, the dear soul, called me at the hotel to ask about any possibilities of obtaining such tickets. If I knew anyone who would be willing to “sacrifice their admission ticket” for these boys.

I “really, really” hesitated, and finally I responded, “ well Carmela, if it is that important to them, I will give up my pass into Randwick. Now, John Campbell who happened to be sitting with me also offered his pass. The boys were absolutely delighted! So were we!!!

The other presidents that were from the area had been warning me not to go to Randwick, unless I really, really want to. “They will be up all night, they will be singing and laughing, and coughing etc. They will also be serving box breakfasts and lunches. For security reasons, no one can leave Randwick to go out to buy anything. They have cleaned out the pharmacies of cold medicine. Not wise for you to be there. So, of course I had no other choice but to watch the closing Mass on TV in my hotel room!

I cannot say enough about the whole experience of Australia both for the Fam Vin days and the World Youth Days. The youth were indeed elated and infused with such graces that even though the weather was cold, the atmosphere was indeed very warm! The President of Australia and his team made our stay so enjoyable! Certainly Canada thanks them, and we hope we can return the hospitality someday. By the way we did celebrate the 43rd wedding anniversary of Syd Tutton and his wife Joanne during that time too.

PS. I have a brand new sleeping bag, tent, chair and mattress...not even opened...for anyone who needs it!

USA Annual General Meeting

I had the pleasure of attending the USA annual General Meeting in Louisville, Kentucky. The meeting theme was “Living the Mission – Achieving the Vision”. Also celebrations around the 175 years of the Society. It was a pleasure also to see that President, Brother Joe Flannigan was doing quite well. He announced that he is “cancer free”.

September 27th saw the parade of banners and the attendees walk to the Cathedral of the Assumption an uplifting Liturgy, celebrating 175 years of service, celebrated by Archbishop Joseph Kurtz. with a banquet to follow. As always they were indeed gracious hosts.

Aggregations and Institutions

As requested I have prepared information related to the process for aggregations and institutions. You will find that article in subsequent pages.

New Staff

As of October 6th 2008, we welcomed Sandra Melo as our new administrative assistant in the Ottawa office. She has been diligently working toward setting up the office, creating filing and electronic systems. I find her a most capable individual and a pleasure to work with. Please welcome her when you call the Ottawa office.

May the Peace, Love and Joy be with each one of you and yours!

Penny Craig, President
National Council
December 2008