

PENNY'S PIECE

Greetings and Blessings to all!

He Hears the Cry of the Poor

It seems so strange to be already entering the third year of the ministry of administration! The time has truly flown by. One may wonder truly what is next?

We have celebrated 175 years of the birth of the Society in 2008; we have celebrated 160 years of the Superior Council of Canada 2009, and now we move into celebrating 350 years of St Vincent de Paul's death.

As the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul we have good reason to celebrate who we are! Especially when we "come together as a family"! However, "What is the glue that holds us together so well?"

The essential ingredient, or the glue, that has kept the Society held together so well, and in full motion throughout all of these years has been the aspect of "personal contact with the poor" through home visits. Our president, José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha once commented that "who among us was not surprised, upon joining the Society, to discover that home visits are the conferences' main activity?" He points out that "home visits have gained so much importance within conferences that we have made them the main activity of our Society, if not the definition of our vocation".

However, the intent of our founders, our first Brothers, went much beyond that. In reality, the home visit was nothing more in the 19th century than the easiest way to personally meet the poor, in their own environment, not our own. The main purpose of our activity is, as stated in our mission and values: "to have personal contact with the poor" and in their environment, not our convenient locations.

At the time, when our founders were inspired to create the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, it was the custom for the poor to go ask for help in locations where charitable people gathered to protect them. The young Parisians who founded the Society wished to go further and, imitating our Lord who goes to those who suffer, "see Christ in those who suffer", they seek to share the needs, the suffering and the abandonment of the poor exactly where they occur, and not in the often frigid environment of charitable institutions. As Vincentians, we wish to "personally" bring courage to the poor where they live: "at home", thus...home visits!

Dear brothers and sisters, we must convince ourselves that in our work, what really counts, especially today when it is particularly difficult in some parts of our country to maintain the home visit tradition, is that our service is based on a *personal contact* with those who suffer. It is especially significant to be in the environment where the poor feel

more at ease. It is this specific intent, and none other, that led our founders to start the tradition of home visits.

As well, never has the “one-to-one” contact realized among us at conference meetings been so important in this time of economic depression. We truly need to help support and feed each other’s spirituality. It becomes very difficult to try to meet needs when we know the cupboards are getting pretty low. We need each other to help us make Gospel based decisions about how we get through these times.

May your conference meetings and home visits be Spirit led and Spirit filled!

Faith in action: May the radiance of your charity be a beaming light.

Administration: we have moved into the new office/home in July and August. Much was accomplished through the efforts of Clermont, Germain, Sandra and myself to arrange for a number of items to be either moved, fixed, updated or replaced. Many local Vincentians and Knights of Columbus members contributed time and effort into assisting us to do what was necessary, either gratis or for cost. This saved the Society numerous dollars. Kudos also to Nicole Fortin for her assistance with cleaning and decorating. She has been a tower of strength in helping to get things done.

We have successfully rented the apartment to a very nice young gentleman as well. The garage is also rented for a nominal price to the Orlean’s Particular Council for the storage of furniture. Both of which assist in the offsetting of costs.

I think that each and everyone of you can be very proud of your new office/home. It is anticipated that we will have the grand opening at the board meeting in May. Pictures will then be taken for display at the AGA in June.

Sandra is now on a maternity leave until next October. We will manage the office with Nicole and Clermont. All call will be forwarded to the Montreal office for Nicole to handle. Clermont will visit the office twice weekly to look after the mail, faxes emails etc. and to oversee any maintenance.

On the Road Again

September

Labour Day Weekend: USA AGA, St Louis Missouri – as always such an enlightening and life-giving event.. The same issues that face us here in Canada are also facing our brothers and sisters in the USA. Common issues as depressed economy and the cupboards getting pretty bare are of grave concerns.

The one thing that I did promise myself about attending USA AGA is that I would bring additional members with me. Attending workshops and meetings such as Advocacy,

Education, Twinning and Youth cannot be done with one person. We should all be present and strengthen the ties that bind our two Societies in these common interests.

Ontario: St Catherine's Central Council – kind invitation from Sister Maureen Boland had Fr. Joe Quinn and myself attend their Mass and celebration of commissioning. Some absolutely wonderful Vincentians doing some very hard work. So glad to have the opportunity to visit with them.

Toronto Central Council – As you know Toronto is hosting the 2010 AGA. It was a pleasure to meet the planning committee. I think we will be in very good hands for this coming AGA. Many of the recommendations that were submitted are being reviewed and we are trying to accommodate as many as we can. Congratulations to Danny Bourne and his team!

Ontario Regional Council Meeting - Ottawa: great to be with members of my own home province. Many ideas shared, with much to look forward to. The commitment to the work of the Society was certainly evident in all that was discussed. Advocacy is also well under way in Ontario.

Quebec Regional Council Annual Meeting – Trois-Rivières: the dedication and support in the council was truly a heartwarming experience. Well attended, and a spirit of family networking and sharing was truly evident. Such a warm reception by the city of Trois-Rivières, who were also celebrating 350 years.

The launch of Saint Vincent de Paul week in the province of Quebec was an especially interesting endeavour. We will have Jean Claude present this idea at the AGA in June. Perhaps it may be something to consider for all of Canada!

October

Yellowknife NWT – we held our executive meeting in Yellowknife with the members of St. Patrick's Conference. We were housed at the Trapper's Lake Spirituality Centre. Many thanks to Pat Bennetto, President of Western Regional Council and Gerda Groothuizen, President of St. Patrick's Conference, NT.

One of the dearest ladies we met there was Sister Mary Jo. She met us at the airport and toured us around Yellowknife and saw to all of our needs. What a great lady!

I had the opportunity to speak for a couple of minutes to the parishioners at three Masses. Certainly to explain who we were and why we were there, but mostly to thank them for their support to the Conference members and their work. Most of the Conference members joined us for supper at the Centre on the Saturday evening. Truly a life-giving experience for all.

Victoria British Columbia – Victoria Particular Council – Victoria Particular Council will be hosting the AGA in 2011. We attended a meeting to help support the team and

allow them to ask questions. The AGA Planning Manual was reviewed with all of the team. An excellent attendance helped to empower the team. They are looking forward to hosting us. Congratulations to Mary Spencer and her team.

Gatineau/Aylmer Particular Council – had the pleasure of visiting with the members of this council. It is so meaningful for all of us when we do come together as a family. Even with my new language “franglais”, everyone understands each other as family members do. Great communications with the community in many of the council’s activities. The cooperation and participation from members of the community that are not Vincentian is the key to its success.

Ottawa – Advocacy Seminar – a wonderful educational experience for those who attended the day. Chair of the committee Clermont engaged everyone’s attention and participation throughout the day. Many came to learn and learn they did. However we now have our work cut out for us. We need to sound good and look good in our materials and facts when we present information and meet with legislators, ministers, the press and others whom we will come into contact with.

A National Advocacy Committee also needs to be formally assembled. This national committee will work with Clermont and Michael Burke. We require a representative from each region that is interested in addressing issues of advocacy and systemic change. This committee will be coming together to identify and formalize approaches in order to speak intelligently and accurately on behalf of the poor.

*We should strive to reciprocate the marks of
confidence and kindness we receive.*

Members to form National Council Public Relations/Media Committee

As I stated above, we need to present ourselves formally as a National body. I am looking for three or four individuals with this type of knowledge/experience who may wish to volunteer their time to assist the national council with these types of activities.

Experience/knowledge can include: journalism – writing of press releases, position papers, education materials etc; graphic design – to assist with the development of the look of education materials, public displays etc. If this interests you, please do contact me.

National Council Board of Directors Secretary

I am very sad to report that our National Council secretary has resigned. Her workload cannot accommodate her continued involvement with the national council. We wish Diane Pearson a great vote of thanks for the past two years, and we wish her the very best in her endeavours.

While I have tried to have a good representation from across Canada on my board, the distance is somewhat of a travelling hardship, especially if one is working.

I am looking for someone to act as secretary for the National Council. This will involve –attending two executive meetings; three board meetings and the AGA. This person works with the paid staff to arrange for meetings and circulation of minutes and agendas.

Most meetings will be held in Ottawa, except for the Executive Meetings of September and the AGA.

*Charity is the name you bear,
Charity it is the robe
In which you are clothed
With its three parts:
Love of God,
Love among yourselves and
Love of the Poor.*

I look forward to seeing and welcoming you at the AGA in Toronto!

“..all one in truth and charity!”

Penny Craig. President
National Council of Canada
January 2010