

Dear Vincentian Friends

It is now about a week and a half after the close of the 34th AGA of the National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and I would like to offer the following reflection, comments etc.. From all reports, this meeting was a huge success. We are very pleased with the attendance (325 for the banquet) the largest attendance in at least ten years. We had 16 attendees from BC, 4 from WRC, 113 from Ontario, 56 from Quebec, 98 from Atlantic Canada and 6 American guests.



The committee wanted the AGA to be a celebration; as well we wanted to have a good spiritual content – with daily Mass and a special closing celebration. The “vision” was to provide comfortable accommodations, good meals, and social activities with a maritime flair, good liturgies and spiritual content, a solid selection of workshops and presenters and keynote speaker and meaningful program. We wanted the delegates to sample what it is like to eat at a soup kitchen, and to allow you to get to meet and get to know some of the people we serve every day. The closing celebration was certainly enhanced with the installation of Atlantic Regional President Maureen MacIsaac by Archbishop Prendergast.



First of all I want to talk about the reactions of both Vincentians and the people we serve, to our Bar-B-Q on Friday night at St. Patrick’s Church. This event was rated the “best thing we have ever done” by a number of delegates who filled in our evaluation forms. I also want to point out that the people we serve are still (two weeks after the event) talking about the Bar-B-Q and how happy they were to be included. This is very important – ***they felt included*** – not “put on display” but included in a celebration with the people who serve them.

We wanted meaningful and instructive/educational and challenging workshops – again the committee hit the mark, with every workshop being very well attended, more than half being sold out. The social program was intended to be enjoyable and to reflect our maritime heritage, thus the Lobster dinner, the fish chowder at Hope Cottage and the Salmon at the closing banquet. At this time I want to thank all those



who were responsible for the preparation of the meals, and in particular Kevin Connors of Hope Cottage who took on the huge task of preparing the meals at Hope Cottage and St. Patrick’s (they served over 425 at the Bar-B-Q and 325 Thursday evening for Lobster)

as well as Maxine Wagner and Ed Hollett from Hope Cottage who cleaned the cottage prior to our arrival and served over 300 people on Friday lunchtime. The committee also wanted delegates to experience eating at a “soup kitchen”. You had to line up for your meal, standing in line outside in plain view of the passing traffic, then eat quickly (because there are many more people waiting behind you) then get back on the bus – but isn’t this what the people we serve do every day – the big difference of course is that many of these people travel farther than we did in the bus to Hope Cottage, but they have to walk, in all seasons, rain, shine, snow, wind ! Did any of you grumble because we had to wait for the air-conditioned bus?? Then we went to St. Patrick’s Church for our Bar-B-Q, we had to line up with the people we serve, be served the same food, sit and eat at the same tables with them, talk with them, sing and dance with them. Did you mind waiting again for the bus ? Did you mind standing in line to be fed ? – Like the people we serve do every day. This move takes move take us to a new level of Vincentian outreach work. We all feel comfortable serving the poor from our side of the counter in soup kitchens and stores. This time we “served “ the poor by being with them, being with them, sharing with them, including them, those we previously “served”. We invite Councils and Conferences to step out into this new vision of “being one with” our fellow human beings in service.

One of the most interesting sights observed on that evening was a conversation between Patrick (a regular at Hope Cottage) and Yvon Babin from Quebec City. This conversation lasted at least 35 minutes and was very animated, Yvon taking at least three digital photos of Patrick – but the remarkable part of this story is that Yvon Babin does not speak a word of English, and Patrick not a word of French but they shared and enjoyed each others company through the meal and beyond !!!



We wanted a special “Keynote Speaker” to start our meeting on Friday, and again the Spirit provided – Judge Gradon Nicholas was truly an inspirational giant, I particularly was taken by his reference to his “elder Brother Jesus”.

We do hope you enjoyed the experience and we thank all those who attended this AGA.

While I am thanking people, I would like to point out a few people who were in Halifax – John Staley and the youth from Windsor, John and the youth sure appeared to be having a good time, Sheila Barnes who came to the meeting from Grand-Falls Windsor NL and reported on Badger, Fernand Drolet from Chicoutimi, President of the Central Council of Chicoutimi (M) attending his first AGA. We also had Gene Smith, President of the USA National Council and his wife Nina, Joe Mueller, First VP International and his wif Nancy, and Jack Bosley and wife XX from Pittsburgh.



Probably the only unfortunate note was the attendance of our International President General Jose Ramon Diaz Torremocha fell victim to SARS. The IPG sent a note on Wednesday before the meeting explaining that the Spanish Immigration are looking very closely at people returning from countries like Canada and he was concerned that he may have difficulty getting back into his own country. He explained that he had the plane ticket in his pocket, and that it is useable over the next twelve months so he still hopes to visit Canada this year.

So what else is happening ?

A small group of the executive will be meeting on the July 4th weekend to review the latest draft of the International Rule. We will be joined by US National Council President Gene Smith and four members of his Rule review team to prepare a joint Canada USA response to the International Rule. We are delighted to have this opportunity to work with our friends and colleagues from the USA on this very important project. The next step in this process is an International Assembly in Rome in October 2003 to ratify the new International Rule. It is anticipated that once the International Rule is ratified, a Canadian National Rule Committee will be struck to review the Canadian Rule.

I will be attending an International Twinning Workshop in Rio de Janeiro at the end of July. This workshop will develop international twinning recommendations which will help the development of twinning worldwide.

Finally our plans for the fifth Ibero Americano meeting to be held at UBC in August 2004 are coming along very well under the guidance of Rose Morin and Shelia Coutu. This meeting will attract about 80 people from Central and South America as well as about 30 people from North America. We are now working on the program which will concentrate on global issues facing the western hemispheres (NAFTA, FTAA etc.) and develop workshops to discuss global issues facing these countries culminating with motions and recommendations.

In our continuing effort to develop our Society and meet Vincentians in developing areas, we will hold our September Executive Meeting in Edmonton Alberta. This area now has seven Conferences and a Particular Council and has the potential for a few more Conferences this year. Much of the credit for this recent growth must go to past WRC President Don Hunter. Don worked diligently for five or six years and retired before he could savour the surge in Conferences, we do appreciate your work Don, thank you. Lynn has now picked up the mantle and is also making great strides, go Lynn.

I would also like to comment on the Committee reports, particularly for those members who did not get the opportunity to attend the Halifax AGA. Kathy Weswick now has a working plan for Twinning and continues to make contacts internationally with potential international twins. As Kathy pointed out, twinning is not so much about money as it is about solidarity and camaraderie with our brothers and sisters in the third world countries in our hemisphere. A Conference in Canada can be twinned with a third world Conference for \$240.00 per year, \$60.00 per quarter, (less than a Tim Horton coffer per

day). It really is about solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters in Central and South America. Thank you Kathy.

Our Youth committee is progressing well under the direction of Vice President Clermont Fortin and National Youth Delegate Martin Thompson – big congratulations to Martin who will be admitted to the Ontario Bar Society on July 11 and will be married in August. Coincidentally I met with representatives from the Canadian Catholic Campus Ministry organization in Saint John NB the week before our AGA, and made a presentation on behalf of the Society. This presentation was very well received, and I encourage all Regional/Provincial Presidents to make contact with their local Campus Ministers to discuss the Society and the potential for a Conference on their Campus. Thank you Martin and Clermont.

Thirdly we had an excellent presentation from Vice-president Penny Craig on our Strategic Plan. Penny outlined our goals as well as our Mission Statement – which was ratified at the Statutory Meeting, the Mission Statement is:

To live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

We encourage all Councils and Conferences to make use of this statement on their stationary, business cards etc. Thanks Penny and I encourage all Regional/Provincial representatives to cooperate with Penny in completing the Plan.

I want to thank Sheila Barns for coming from Grand falls-Windsor to present a report on the situation in Badger. I want to assure all Conferences and Councils who contributed to the Badger relief that every dollar contributed will be available to the Badger relief effort, and any funds not required in the Badger effort will remain in the Emergency Relief Fund for future disasters, none of the funds will be used for operations of the National Council. Thank you Sheila and keep up the good work.

Extension continues to be a top priority at the National level. I am very encouraged by the response of the Regional/Provincial Councils in this endeavour, and I encourage all Regional/Provincial Presidents to appoint a person whose prime responsibility is Extension in the region. Extension is a time consuming task which requires a dedicated person at the Regional/Provincial level to achieve maximum results. I also encourage all regional/Provincial Presidents to set extension goals which can be measured and to report these goals/results in their annual reports next year.

I will be in Montreal on the July 4th weekend for an International Rule review meeting, then back to Montreal on the weekend of July 11 for a “Male Bonding “ weekend with my son and son-in-law for a baseball-golf weekend, then to Rio on July 25 for the International Twinning Meeting.

In closing I want to wish everyone a very happy summer, filled with relaxation and recharging, please pray for me and I will be praying for you.

Peace
Michael