

Vincenpaul-Canada – Spring 2008 – Penny's Piece

Dear Brother and Sister Vincentians

***Blessed are they who mourn,
for they shall be comforted
Matt 5:3-10***

First and foremost, on behalf of my family, and myself I want to express our sincerest thanks and appreciation to all of you for the caring and support we received surrounding the death of my son Brian. The outpouring of prayers, Masses, flowers, cards and donation was indeed appreciated and comforting. It gave us the strength we needed to celebrate the 43 years of Brian's gift to all of us. His son, Tanner, who turned 16 the 27th of October, was very much a gentleman, caring for all who came to visit. He continues to do very well, and we are all very proud of him.

As per our Mission/Values, I can certainly say that we have exemplified what it means to "come together as a family". My dear brothers and sisters...thank you!

Board of Directors

In November we held our first two-day meeting. It was exciting to welcome everyone. The Friday was "Board Orientation Day". We came together to pray and be fed spiritually by Msgr. Peter Schonenbach who conducted a mini spiritual retreat that included prayer and discussion. This was followed by introduction of other board members and staff and then, presentation regarding the role and function each of us has in our capacity as a member of the board. Each committee chairperson outlined the role of his or her committee, and staff presented office functions. Everyone shared how all members of the board can contribute to the success of their work. Regional presidents shared their experiences and defined what the pressures were in their regional areas.

The board members also had the opportunity to meet the staff. As well, Nicole and Joanne had a chance to put faces to names. Staff also presented the functions of their roles as administrative assistants. Everyone had the opportunity to ask questions and receive feedback, all in the effort to make the flow of communications smoother and more efficient for all concerned.

As the day progressed, we took the time required to review parliamentary procedure to help meetings to be conducted efficiently. As we all know, with each new president comes a style of administration with which all members need to become acquainted. To that end, as the new president, I reviewed expectations that will enhance timelines and reports for meetings and facilitate communication.

The day was completed with small group discussions related to identifying and setting administrative goals for the coming year.

Everyone stated that they enjoyed the day and found the experience most worthwhile.

***Our lives begin to end the day we become
silent about things that matter.
Martin Luther King Jr.***

Saturday, the official board meeting was held. This day included guest speaker Joe Gunn from Ottawa who is well experienced in the role of advocacy. This is an important aspect of the Society's work that requires education and formalization. Joe assisted us with information related to the role of advocacy and how we, as an organization, can and should prepare ourselves to conduct advocacy. We learned what advocacy is and what it is not; how to choose the areas where we can make our voices heard effectively. We had the opportunity to share and ask questions.

National Audit

As reported previously, we have been conducting an audit of all of our conferences and councils in Canada. This is a very important aspect of our Society in Canada. Not only does it justify our standing at the International Executive level, but also helps to establish our credibility throughout Canada as a true representative and Voice of the Poor. Of course, it is always important for statistical purposes for government reporting and processing any grant applications. All regional presidents are hard at work on this project. It is hoped that a final report can be presented at the AGA 2008 in Quebec City.

***If love is a fire, then zeal is its flame
Vincent de Paul***

International Council General

In November, Canada was invited to attend the International Executive Meeting in Paris France. The invitation came from the international president José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha. This meeting provided the opportunity for both of us to meet, as well as for me to learn the process at the international level.

The International Executive Meeting brought forth reports from Vincentians all over the world. The depth of commitment by these individuals was truly awesome. Of course, the usual issues and concerns about reaching those who need us are evident from everyone. As we all know a lot depends on finances. The ICG is in the same position that all councils are in, dependent on conferences and lower councils for support. During the budget deliberations, in an effort to move toward a balanced budget, so many outreach line items were sacrificed. There were very concerned hearts regarding how to reach those who need us. President José Ramón will curtail traveling; coordinators will not be able to meet with the councils they serve. Administration will be streamlined, and the list goes on.

The most important message out of that session was that out of 144 countries, only 38 – 40 could offer financial support to ICG to carry on its functions. I think Canada must evaluate its level of contribution to ICG and assist our brothers and sisters in every way it can. It was interesting to note that small countries that can hardly afford to keep themselves going were sending their contribution. As I always say....like the loaves and fishes...if we give we will receive. Freely you have received, Freely give!

I have to say that traveling to Paris was an experience. I was accompanied by past president Ellen Schryburt. Ellen, of course, knew most people attending, so this was most helpful. It was so meaningful to witness the proceedings with brothers and sisters from all over the

world. To put names to faces and understand that there really is no difference in work among those present except for distance and the degree of poverty. There were presidents or representatives from places like New Zealand, Africa, Thailand, Brazil and even from China. There was some excitement at the report that there were two or three conferences working in China. While it is not advertised, they do work quietly and spiritually.

Mr. President was very spiritual in his proceedings with those present. He was very concerned about the significance and presence of the Society throughout the world.

We had the opportunity to meet Ernesto Balladares from Nicaragua. He wanted me to thank everyone for the generous support Canada gave for the repair of the X-ray machine module. They are so very grateful to each of you!

When there was time, both Ellen and I went to visit the church where St. Vincent de Paul is exposed in a silver casket. He is visible through the glass front where he is laid, high up in the front of the church above the altar. We climbed the stairs to the area and I took the opportunity to view his incorrupt body closely. What an experience! His heart is exposed high on the altar in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal. Again, what an awesome experience!

“Hunt down poverty in order to give humanity its dignity”
Sr. Rosalie Rendu

We also visited a good friend and collaborator of Saint Vincent, St. Louise de Marillac, (1591 – 1660) in the church of the Miraculous Medal. This chapel is located on rue du Bac. She is also exposed incorrupt in a silver and glass casket. Again, history came alive and again what an experience! I thought that this was a wonderful way to begin my own presidency. I hope that the graces of wisdom, understanding and strength would be mine to share with everyone back home.

The other exciting and historic moment was to see the chair in which the Blessed Virgin sat when she visited Sister Catherine Labouré (1806 – 1876). As you may know, Sister Catherine was a Daughter of Charity. She saw the Blessed Virgin, she saw Christ present in the Eucharist, she saw the heart of St. Vincent de Paul. But, more than anything, she lived the “Gospel Message daily and simply! The body of St. Catherine was found intact in 1933 and transferred to the Chapel, underneath the Virgin of the Globe.

“The poor people are dying of hunger and are damned”
St. Vincent de Paul

We had taken the time to also walk down the historic rue Mouffetard. One could just envision the activities of Sister Rosalie, Fredric and his companions. Sister Rosalie was a heroic and very significant woman in 19th Century Paris. She was loved and highly thought of by all the ordinary people of the Mouffetard District.

Finally, we visited Notre Dame de Paris church. We were truly impressed with its historic beauty while we attended Mass. Of course I will not say how Vincentian I was when someone stole my wallet while in the church!

AGA 2008

As we all know by now the Annual General Assembly will be held in Ville de Beaupré , June 18 -22, 2008. The theme is “ I will show you my faith by my works, let us go to the poor...”. Those are the famous words that got everyone excited and moved to action to serve the needs of the poor. The planning committee has been working most diligently to ensure that each of you attending will be most welcome. In order for this theme to be meaningful we should keep the words of Vincent de Paul uppermost in our minds:

***I should not judge the poor according to their exterior nor by their apparent capacities...but turn the medal and you will see by the light of Faith that the Son of God is represented to us through these poor people...He who hardly had the appearance of a human being in his passion.
St Vincent de Paul***

I look forward to welcoming you during this special celebration of the 175 years of the Society and its work with the poor. It is hoped that we will welcome our international president, José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha as well.

Please remember, accommodations are limited because of the Eucharistic Congress which coincides with the 400th anniversary of the city off Quebec. It will be a humming, and yet fun place!

Call for workshops: If there are any topics related to the theme that could be presented, please contact Nathalie for room and AV requirements.

Easter Message

The Easter season is a very special time for all Vincentians. It is throughout this period of the liturgical calendar that we have a unique opportunity to reflect about what it truly means to be “people of the water and the towel”.

We learn much from John’s gospel as Christ demonstrates exactly what he means by “serving”. When we can learn to shed the “old self” in favour of the new mantle, or the “new self in Christ”. This time can be viewed as a time of renewal and rebirth. A time for re energizing our spirit and commitment to the vincentian way of life so that we may serve “Christ in the poor” with love, respect, justice and joy!”

I pray that each and every Vincentians will have and take the opportunity to pray for the graces needed to take up your towel, pour the water, cleanse the spirit and smile with joy as you move through all of your daily activities as members of the Vincentian Family.

May each of you and your family have a blessed and healthy Easter season. Remember, as St Louise de Marillac pointed out “We must love them tenderly and respect them deeply”.

As your president, I ask that you leave everyone you serve with a measure of hope!
"...all one in truth and charity"

Penny Craig, President
SSVP National Council of Canada