

Penny's Piece

May the peace of Christ be with all of you!

CELEBRATING 175 YEARS

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

It has been only one week since the AGA 2008 began in Quebec City. Yes indeed, the Spirit was moving all over this AGA!! It was truly a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led AGA!

As we all know, time just flies by. I cannot believe we have again come together for another family reunion! This of course is wonderful, especially since we had an anniversary celebration tied into it! 175 Years!!

That was quite a birthday party! And as a group we sang “happy birthday” to the Society.

Our invited guests included our International Council General President José Ramón Díaz Terremocha, his interpreter Juan Tirrado, Père Yvon Laroche, the ICG Spiritual Advisor, and Fr Teodoro Barquin, the co ICG Spiritual Advisor. All of these individuals brought the whole world closer to each one of us. The spiritual advisors' messages were ones of hope and basic spirituality, of genuinely answering God's call to serve His poor in His name. They were both such dynamic speakers. Jose Ramon brought the Council General into reality for all of us. He brought a message and vision that encompassed the whole world. His vision is to serve the poor without borders and without closed spirituality. He let us know that we have the good wishes and blessings of all our brother and sister Vincentians all over the world and that they look to Canada as a leader in developing strategies and programs to meet the needs of those we are called to serve.

As a special event all the past presidents of National Council of Canada assembled for historic picture taking: Mme Marie Clair Letarte, Bob Martineau, Ellen Schryburt, Michael Burke and myself. Mme Letarte was “so happy” to be with us. Bob Martineau was ecstatic to see everyone and Mme Letarte also. Old friendships renewed!! It was really like seeing brothers and sisters again after a very long time. What an event!

We were also honoured by the author of the book “Ozanam”, Madeline Des Rivière. She came to have lunch with us and celebrate this wonderful event. She was so pleased to see such a great many Vincentians together. I know that many have read her book with great admiration for its historical content and evident spirituality. Mme DesRivière signed copies for those who wished to have a souvenir.

Of special note was the attendance of 24 youth members from Windsor and Kitchener, Ontario. Their presence was duly noted by the President General. He was so pleased to see them in attendance. He was also truly impressed with Caroline's participation at the Youth meeting in Spain.

I cannot say enough about the great organizing team from the Quebec Central Council. What a group! They had everything down to a fine science. It did not matter what was needed, it appeared. The hotel staff group was also so very accommodating.

Smiles, smiles, smiles everywhere!! Jose Ramon remarked to everyone about the accommodating smiles, he just loved it! He considers Canada the example of what the formation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul intended and should be. He was truly impressed with all aspects of the AGA. We had 69 of 139 voting members present!!! How wonderful!

As always, our staff did a marvelous job of ensuring that all aspects of meeting requirements were attended to. All staff were invited to the AGA. We got to meet José Laforest our graphic artist who designs the layout for our magazines and other material, Ghislaine DuNord had to work and sent her regrets. It was very nice for the members to meet the faces behind the scenes.

A very special thanks to Ellen Schryburt who acted as the “protocol person” and “go between” to the AGA planning committee.

The parade of banners, to begin the Friday morning session, was a new innovation, followed by the Quebec welcome song, “ C’est à ton tour de te laisser parler d’amour” led by M. Gerard Dion of Montreal. Everyone participated with enthusiasm whether they could speak French or not. The parade consisted of each regional president carrying in their regional banner when they were called as the St Vincent de Paul song was being played over the loudspeakers. Our thanks to Cathy Mahony and her choir from the Church of Our Lady Parish in Guelph for the recording of the song. The organist was Joe Carrier.

Another new application was the president’s round table discussion with voting members. This was a time to share, ask questions, and develop new ideas without the formality of a meeting. We visited the questions, “What is strong about what we are doing?” and secondly, “What are the strengths yet to come?”

Overall, everyone was very pleased and had very positive things to say regarding the VincenPaul magazine. They have found the articles interesting and informative. The latest issue that contained the article regarding the \$240.00 contribution and its process was deemed very informative. A request to have the process for Aggregations and Institutions as an article in a subsequent issue was noted and shall be forthcoming.

It will be a tradition that we will carry forward from year to year.

We paid attention to special events in member’s lives as you would in a family. These included Lucille Bienvenue, wife of Jean Claude Bienvenue, regional president Quebec. Lucille is in terrible pain and awaiting hip surgery, Agnes Martineau is also very ill. We have to understand how much it took for these two men to leave their wives at home in order to attend this AGA. Conversely, these two ladies also knew how special it was for both of their husbands to attend. We thought about our brother in the USA – President Joe Flannigan, who is battling cancer and is recovering from surgery, as well as a number of others whose names were mentioned at the time.

We celebrated 50 years of ordination of Msgr Andre Drouin; and 50 years of profession of vows of Fr. Joe Quinn, who will celebrate 50 years of ordination next year. There were numerous 50th wedding anniversaries. All of this to share in the lives of our brother and sister Vincentians as a family would do. A moment for deceased members was shared by all as well.

The excursions to Quebec City, the opening ceremonies at Mount Ste Anne and the Friday night dinner at the Sugar Shack were very rewarding experiences.

As always, we brought the AGA to a close with our special Mass in Ste Anne de Beauvre church and followed that by our traditional commissioning ceremony. The Mass featured the installation of Dave Grant as the new president of Atlantic Region.

The final activity was the banquet on Saturday night. Again what a great time everyone had! I am sure the photos in this issue will certainly speak for themselves. Enjoy!

All in all, everyone came away feeling very energized and hopeful. I know I certainly did. I cannot thank everyone enough for all they did to make this AGA the best ever!

I have just received the following message from José Ramón:

Penny Craig, President
National Council of Canada

Dear Penny

Coming back to Europe the first thing I want to do is to send you all my gratitude, firstly for your invitation, and secondly for the experience I have lived thanks to this trip, meeting all the Canadian Brothers and Sisters during this plenary in Quebec.

I have seen, my dear friend, a strongly united Society, involved beside your leadership, and I have appreciated very much the wonderful, efficient and discrete team you have. All these good points let me think that we can expect exceptional fruits in the service of the Canadian Society and for its future development.

You know that the Council General and especially I are at your entire disposal for all you may need in a personal or Vincentian aspect.

Congratulations my dear friend! I am so happy to see the important and exigent direction you have defined for the Society in your wonderful speech during the closing ceremony.

Thanks for being so close to the Council General. It is proof that you are open minded and that you have the ability to see further than today.

Keeping you in my prayers and with all my affection,

José Ramón Díaz Terremocha