



THE VINCENTIAN WAY

The Official Newsletter of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Long Island

We Help People...

ISSUE 2 ♦ 2020



COVID-19:

HOW OUR VOLUNTEERS, STAFF &
DONORS ARE RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS



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A MESSAGE FROM TOM ABBATE CEO & Executive Director



Dear Friends,

I hope you are well and beginning to enjoy life again as we continue on this journey with COVID-19. The Society remains committed to providing critical assistance to Long Islanders in need. We are experiencing a dramatic increase in telephone calls and emails for assistance. While simultaneously losing all of the income generated by our thrift stores. I could not be prouder of our Vincentians, supporters and staff for their part in helping our neighbors.

This newsletter is a snapshot of what has been happening with the Society during the last few months. Working on it allowed us to reflect on how important our mission is and how blessed we are to be able to help our neighbors especially now, as more people than ever are finding themselves struggling financially and emotionally. Our neighbors reaching out for assistance represent all socio-economic demographics.

I hope this newsletter will provide a glimpse into the important work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. If you are so moved to help us with a financial gift, there is a donation envelope enclosed. To those that have previously supported our COVID-19 works of charity, thank you.

My prayer for all of us, is that we emerge from these tumultuous times, physically, mentally and spiritually stronger, and as a community better united.

If there is someone you know that would be interested in the mission of the Society, please pass along this newsletter or let us know and we will be happy to send them a copy.

Yours in the Spirit of St. Vincent de Paul,

Thomas J. Abbate

CEO & Executive Director

LIFE LESSONS IN A TIME OF ADVERSITY

Good for the Soul: A Reflection from Monsignor Gerard Ringenback, Spiritual Advisor to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Long Island.

Father Jerry's weekly Spiritual reflections have been a source of comfort and inspiration to our Vincentians throughout this difficult time. We thought you might welcome this one.

Life Lessons in a Time of Adversity

The often-quoted phrase, "***We take a lot for granted,***" comes to mind as we slowly begin to open our churches for worship and join our fellow parishioners in prayer. Only a few weeks ago that was not possible. We were left with virtual Masses at best or perhaps we entered church by ourselves for private prayer and looked cautiously at anyone else who might be there. Now we process together and receive Holy Communion, a precious gift that we so appreciate. We are in the physical presence of parishioners and priests whom we are glad to see even at a distance (6 feet please). There is now scheduled confession and the opportunity to partake of other liturgies such as weddings or funerals. These are important steps on what appears to be a long path toward normal church life. And, as I mentioned last week, there are still many unknowns associated with this pandemic.

While we realize how much we take for granted, there are also many lessons that we can learn as days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months. Some time ago a columnist, Yvonne Abraham, writing for the Boston Globe newspaper, reflected on life lessons that all of us might learn during this unique moment in our lives. It was not taken from a faith perspective, but there is much food for thought. She was asking her readers to consider what the world would be like if the things that are now most important to us during this pandemic remained so. She listed many things from all aspects of life. Here are a few:

- We would do a lot of things differently
- We would pay teachers as much as big financiers
- We would have more respect and money for low-wage workers
- We would leave bigger tips
- We would make sure that everyone had access to the health care they need
- We would cook more at home and throw less of it away
- We would spend less money on things that serve no purpose but to impress
- We would own fewer shoes
- We would spend more time with family and friends
- We would spend less time with our faces in our phones and more hours facing each other
- We would care less about sports and more about conversation
- We would love our neighbors – even the ones who are a pain
- We would set aside ideology and recognize the ways government can and must keep us safe and whole
- We would elect leaders not for the best of times but for the worst
- We would go on fewer cruises
- We would slow the heck down
- We would be more grateful for what we have and more outraged at what others do not

We cannot go back in time and create a world free of a deadly virus. But we can learn what this world might look like in the days to come and help to create it. Jesus commissioned us to build His kingdom on earth, a kingdom of peace and justice, a kingdom of truth and love. He has given us a vision even beyond those ideals written by a secular author. This moment of adversity in our history can be a great teacher, if we are willing to learn.

Fr. Jerry Ringenback
Diocesan Spiritual

RAISING FUNDS & AWARENESS

SPEAKING WITH DONORS

Year in and year out, the Society has been blessed with donors that believe in the mission. From Corporations and Foundations to individual donors and sponsors of our Golf Outing and Friends of the Poor 5K, they fuel our motto "**We Help People**"!

Over the last few months, as the calls for help increased, they have not let us or our neighbors in need down. The Vincentian Way recently spoke to two of our very committed supporters, Board member, Bill Jennings and Golf Committee Chairman, Marc Hiatriides, about their relationship with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Long Island and the implications of COVID-19.



Bill Jennings
Board Member



Marc Hiatriides
Golf Committee Chairman

Vincentian Way: How did you first become familiar with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul?

Bill Jennings: I was introduced by several individuals already deeply committed to the Society, two of my wife's cousins were Vincentians. My wife and I would donate to the society from time to time. About 2 years ago one of the cousins, Al Messina and another friend of mine, Joe McCarthy suggested me for the Board. The more involved I got, the more impressed I was with everything the Society does.

Marc Hiatriides: A friend, Mickey DeMarco an avid supporter and advocate for the Society, invited me to serve on the Golf Committee several years ago. I have a lot of respect for Mickey's opinion, but there's nothing like being involved first hand. The more I learned, the more committed to the organization I became.

Vincentian Way: Why does the Society matter to you and what would you tell others about it?

Bill Jennings: What the Society does is real. The motto is simple, to the point but powerful: "**We Help People**". It's ordinary people, volunteers, helping people. There is more poverty than you might realize on Long Island. The Society is a great organization with 1,400 volunteers ready and willing to help. They need the financial resources to do so. We need people with those resources to step up and do their part.

Marc Hiatriides: It's the one to one connection, the real-life impact of helping people in need right here in our local communities I tell people, there is no other organization quite like the Society. They help anyone regardless of religion, race, ethnic background. It's a very personal approach, there is so much care and genuine love for the people they are helping.

Vincentian Way: The last few months have been very tumultuous; can you share one of your biggest concerns?

Bill Jennings: After the primary concern for those becoming ill and dying, it's the long-term financial implications. A complete sense of uncertainty for the future is a frightening thing.

Marc Hiatriides: The withdrawal we are seeing caused by sheltering in place. People keeping to themselves for so long and the long-term implications.

Vincentian Way: What is something positive you hope will come from what we are going through?

Bill Jennings: I hope people will stop being so focused on what's in it for them and be a good neighbor.

Marc Hiatriides: I've seen neighbors getting to know each other a little better and taking care of each other. I hope we will see that last.

VINCENTIANS AT WORK: CARRYING ON THROUGH THE PANDEMIC



St. Martin of Tour Conference Resumes In-Person Meetings with New Safety Measures

Because the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many elements of modern society to a screeching halt, it has catapulted the issue of poverty on Long Island to the forefront of many peoples' minds. In fact, a New York State Department of Labor bi-county report shows that **Long Island is on track to lose 28 percent of its jobs by the end of 2020** because of the coronavirus and the subsequent economic shutdown. The resulting unemployment, compounded with COVID-related medical expenses, has been catastrophic for our local communities.

In the words of St. Vincent de Paul himself, **"Love is inventive, even to infinity."** In that spirit, our Vincentian volunteers have been extremely creative in their approach to helping our neighbors in need. They have worked to safeguard themselves while also bringing financial, material, and perhaps most importantly, emotional and spiritual comfort to those who need it.

Our Vincentians have increased their distribution of supermarket gift cards for purchases of diapers and toiletries, delivered food directly from the Outreach, and have even advised neighbors on working with their landlords through rental arrears. Their message is clear: **we are doing everything in our power to give those in need a sense of security during these unprecedented times.**

Home Visit

As social distancing protocols went into effect, our Vincentians found their traditional approach to assistance directly at odds with these new safety measures. **"Not being able to conduct traditional home visits was a little like going to mass online and not being able to receive communion,"** says Norma Sanchez, Conference President at Our Holy Redeemer-Freeport. **"The home visit is foundational to being a Vincentian."** Nonetheless, the need in her community began to grow exponentially, particularly within the Hispanic community. Many in the Hispanic communities were employed in the hardest-hit industries, restaurants, hotels, healthcare, social services and retail.

Our Holy Redeemer Conference put their ingenuity to work, — transitioning the **"home visit"** into phone calls and emails with their neighbors in need. They also utilized video software like Zoom to conduct Conference meetings and determine the best ways to help those in poverty in their communities.

VINCENTIANS

Food Pantries

Food insecurity has quickly become one of the most urgent needs our neighbors have experienced during the pandemic. Because of this, our Vincentian got to work: securing our food pantries for contactless interactions. Mary Immaculate Conference (Bellport) used their resourcefulness to create a “***drive-thru food pantry***”. We asked our neighbors to remain in their cars while they placed the bags in the trunks and provided gift cards to help with some of the items, they did not have available. Given the fact that some pantries were not open, the Vincentians in Bellport agreed that individuals and families outside of the parish boundaries could access the pantry during these unusual times. They even recruited the help of Stony Brook University students, who delivered food bags to individuals who were homebound. Overall, the transition was a smooth one where Vincentians were safe and neighbors were still well-nourished



Mary Immaculate (Bellport) Drive-Thru Food Pantry.

Twining

For other Conferences, who have been fortunate to not experience the effects of COVID-19 as strongly as others, the pandemic has been an opportunity to extend their assistance beyond their parish boundaries. Frank Gunther, Conference President at Our Lady of Victory—Floral Park, had noticed an increase in demand for the food pantry at their parish, but did not experience a growing number of rental, mortgage, and utility requests.

Our Lady of Victory Conference was ultimately able to take advantage of the “***Twining***” program, which allows Conferences in communities with less need to partake in resource sharing with Conferences in communities with greater need. Frank recalls the immense gratitude he felt as part of this program, and the Conference plans to continue twinning as long as they have the resources to do so.

Stores

Our Garden City Park and Huntington thrift stores are far more than just consignment shops; they are instrumental to our mission, working hand-in-hand with our Vincentians to provide furniture, clothing and other household items to people in need at no cost.

While the pandemic temporarily forced the closure of our both thrift stores, as well as the suspension of furniture pickups and deliveries, we were delighted to be included as part of Phase II of the “***New York Forward***” plan and **resumed thrift store operations on June 11th.**

Our bin operations remain closed at this time. We look forward to reopening our bins when it is physically safe to do so.

COPING WITH THE CRISIS

For the formerly incarcerated, the process of returning to society is inherently challenging; for those returning to society in the midst of a global pandemic, those challenges can seem downright unsurmountable.

For more than thirty years, Dismas House has served as SVDPLI's transitional home for men who are reentering society from prison and would otherwise be homeless. Through a compilation of on-site and outsourced rehabilitation and techniques, including addiction/alcoholism recovery, sobriety maintenance and spiritual guidance, as well as budgeting, time management and conflict resolution, our residents are provided with the tools they need to reacclimate to everyday life.

We checked in with two Dismas House alumni to see how they've navigated the hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how their experiences in the program have helped prepare them for these unexpected challenges:



Steve

Like many across Long Island, Steve's experience with the COVID-19 crisis has been deeply personal. Celebrating five years of sobriety, Steve depends heavily on the support of his local Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) chapter to stay on this path, and worried about the future of these meetings as the world entered quarantine in mid-March. Compounded by three COVID-related deaths in his family and the recent loss of his mother, Steve admits that this time of crisis has been a particular challenge to his sobriety and caused him to grapple with the feelings of resentment and desire for retaliation he often felt in prison. Fortunately, Steve was able to resume his AA meetings over video-conferencing software, which he admits lacks the warmth of the in-person meetings, but continues to help keep his life on track.

A lifelong carpenter, Steve remains grateful that he has not lost a day of work to the crisis. He maintains a close relationship with the staff at Dismas House, donating clothing to residents and sharing his progress as he continues to adjust to society. Even when Steve isn't physically visiting Dismas House, his presence can still be felt in the backyard deck he helped complete when he was a resident: a permanent legacy of gratitude for his time in the program.



Ray

Ray recalls that the first few weeks of the COVID-19 crisis were something he'll truly never forget. As a Dismas House resident in the spring of 2018, he took a job at an accounting agency in Manhattan, where he still works to this day. As many of his fellow Long Island Railroad commuters shifted to a work-from-home model, he recalls watching the trains become a ghost town, and Penn Station, a beacon for the homeless. Ray was disheartened witnessing such high volumes of poverty and illness, and took the time to reflect on how his time in the program prevented him from potentially meeting a similar fate.

Ray's experiences have also renewed a longtime career aspiration; a recovering addict himself, Ray plans to begin taking classes to become a recovery coach in the coming months. He frequently reminds himself of two important lessons he learned at Dismas House: to humble himself and be grateful for everything he has, and to pay it forward whenever he can.

THANK YOU DONORS & SUPPORTERS!

DECEMBER 2019 - JUNE 2020

The generosity of private and public funders is essential to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as it fulfills its commitment as an international organization of the Catholic laymen and women who seek in a spirit of justice and charity to help the poor, the needy and the disadvantaged through practical works of charity.

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DECEMBER 2019 - JUNE 2020

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*Going the Distance
to Help People*

***This year our 5K is going virtual,
THE NEED OF OUR NEIGHBORS IS VERY REAL!***

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul invites you to join us to walk, run or ride 3.1 miles or make a donation to help.

WHEN: September 26th – October 3rd

WHERE: Anywhere

HOW: Walk, Run, Ride, Hike, Paddle, Swim

To register or donate:
runsignup.com
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For more information: info@svdpli.org
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IN MEMORY OF DECEASED VINCENTIANS

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

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