

Standing Together

A Publication of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Diocese of San José ■ Summer, 2002 ■

A Letter from the Executive Director

DEAR FRIENDS OF SVDP:

To all of our wonderful donors, thank you for your critical role in our mutual ministry of service to others. By sharing your gifts with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, **you are part of an organization that helped more the 87,000 people last year!**

That's a staggering number to comprehend, but it is through the combined efforts of hundreds of volunteers and our central services that the Society had such a significant impact. For instance, more than **23,000 temporary jobs** were arranged by our day worker program; **105 people benefited from ongoing vocational mentoring** by our Vincentians; and more than **11,000 took part in our special events** such as Easter Bonnets & Baskets, sleeping bag drive and KIDS giveaway. An additional **23,802 people were served by volunteers in one of our 30 Conferences** throughout the Diocese.

Whew! And your contribution helped make this good work possible.

As with any public benefit corporation, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul must use the resources it receives to help the community. As you can see from the numbers above we have a very expansive community. *Since "no act of charity is foreign to the Society" our programs help people with basic food and clothing, but we also respond to the needs most pressing in Silicon Valley life—housing, jobs, transportation, et cetera.*



Fortunately, *this is God's work and through the generous gifts of time, treasure and talent; God provides the resources for which we are merely stewards.* As we pray during every Vincentian meeting, "For all the benefactors of the poor, that God may reward them with eternal life."

God Bless

Steve Pehanich

...you are part of an organization that helped more the 87,000 people last year!

Mentoring beyond Emergency Service by Tom Kemnitz

...there are other sides of homelessness: the emotional hurt and mental stress that often go along with the physical problems, and the lack of know-how to change the situation.

“NO ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD. No toilets. No showers. No place to cook a meal. No bed to sleep in. No closets for your extra clothes, if you have any. No television, no radio. No books or place to relax and read them...” These are the physical problems of homelessness. There are many agencies that work to solve them. Vincentians, through Parish Conferences and the Council’s Emergency Services, find shelter, furniture, clothing and food for those in need.

But there are *other sides of homelessness: the emotional hurt and mental stress that often go along with the physical problems, and the lack of know-how to change the situation.* There is a great need for healing, hope, knowledge, and help managing life skills and negotiating the social system.

The Society’s mentoring program tries to bring this special ministry to clients and give them hope for the future. Vincentian mentors meet with individuals and families to discuss their personal situations, set goals and instill the self-confidence necessary to meet them.

Take the case of (a.k.a.) Linda. Evicted from her apartment, she and her three children spent six months living in shelters, in her car and on the streets. With the help of SVdP, the family

moved into an apartment four months ago. But the assistance did not end there. Linda was encouraged to examine her life and decide what she wanted for herself and her children and, with the mentor’s help, find ways to accomplish that goal. Regular counseling sessions helped Linda develop her self-confidence. Encouraged by her mentor, she realized she needed new skills to get work to support her family. Linda enrolled in data entry and computer operation courses at the Center for Employment Training. Her progress has been slowed by sickness but, with the strong encouragement of her mentor, she continues on the road to her goal. *Linda’s gratitude was shown by her volunteering to work at Easter Bonnets & Baskets, helping in the success of that celebration.*

We know that this “mentoring” is the “home visit and person-to-person encounter” that many Vincentians have been doing for years. But as *personal mentoring is the critical factor in bringing a person to self-sufficiency, we must all persevere in this tradition.*

The St. Vincent de Paul Society recognizes *the primary funders of this program: Hewlett Foundation, Packard Foundation, Grove Foundation, and K.I.D.S.*

Economics and Services

THE NEW YEAR BROUGHT hope and renewed help to the poor and needy served by Emergency Services after the depressed final months of 2001. Last summer’s economic downturn seriously impacted SVdP and diminishing funds forced serious cutbacks in direct financial aid, even as winter brought increased demand for financial assistance, clothing and furniture. But thanks to **Urgency Funding** from **Community Foundation Silicon Valley** and **Hewlett Packard**, clients were again helped with rent, deposits and utility bills, though motel shelter remains extremely limited.

Needy clients, including those of Conferences and other agencies, are traditionally given vouchers to our thrift stores for clothing and furniture; but economics also constrained our voucher program, limiting our service to other agency clients, and requiring sharing expenses with Conferences. SVdP has been a county leader in distributing clothing and furniture and household items to the needy, and hopes soon to restore our earlier distribution levels.

We are ever indebted to our funders – individual donors, City and County, foundations and corporations – for “helping us help others.”

Variations on a Theme: Easter Bonnets & Baskets

TWO HUNDRED PEOPLE jammed the Society's San José store to select "additional" new clothing provided by K.I.D.S. (Kids In Distress Situations) and the S.F. Clothing Bank. *This year, KIDS clothing was made available to everyone, and a volunteer crew was hastily assembled to ready more clothes for the day's distribution.* In between, the throng enjoyed refreshments hosted by Vincentian Conferences.

The event varied from earlier years in accordance with our mentoring efforts. Rather than SVdP Emergency Services delivering all services on site, the "bonnets & baskets" for client families were provided by "adopt-a-family" sponsors, that is, Conferences and community groups, many having served their same family at holidays as well. *Eighty client families, assisted on a one-to-one basis, were also invited to the store for a reception and additional giveaways from Easter donations.*

The message of Easter was celebrated by all who attended. Volunteers from *SJSU's Business Fraternity, Notre Dame and other high schools, and our regular volunteers and staff kept the event running smoothly.* Children were delighted with balloon animals twisted into shape by *Matt Smith*, our "Jesuit Volunteer Clown." A



storewide sale also benefited customers and clients who were given \$50 gift certificates funded in large part by the *American Legion Santa Clara Post 419.*

Bonnets & Baskets was started five years ago to bring the Easter spirit to those in need and to give donors a special way to help others during this season; it has continued to be the greatest of our seasonal events.

San José Just Cause Ordinance

San Jose City Council recently approved stronger guidelines for tenant eviction, to protect families from unjust evictions that were reported increasingly during the escalating housing market. This act of social justice was accomplished through grassroots efforts of the "Rent Relief & No Unjust Eviction Campaign," a democratic group of citizens, community organizations, and Church members. St. Vincent de Paul, in solidarity with those working for social justice, contributed ideas, statistical data and case histories to support evidence of the need for "just cause." As Vincentians, we must remember that in addition to our works of charity, we are a Voice for the Poor and advocate for social justice.

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Reflections from the Chair

It isn't often that we are allowed to profess our faith and confirm our service to the poor as Vincentians. So it was with gratitude that I offered thanks to the Mountain View City Council: thank you for forcing the closure of our St. Joseph the Worker Center last November 1.

"I am a Vincentian, one of many volunteer Catholic lay persons who follow the Gospel of Matthew 25. Because of your actions I have seen the face of Christ in the poor, each winter morning since that day, as I join the displaced workers on the street, offering what little comfort and service we might provide to ease their hunger, their cold and their mistreatment from police and uncaring public."

The City Council rescinded their ordinance, but only in the face of a lawsuit from our friends at **Morrison & Foerster** and the **Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund**.

Now we are fortunate to have a new center in space made available by **Calvary Church**. Though small in size, the workers enjoy it greatly and are reluctant to leave at the close of the day. Through generous donations from **Albertsons** and **Safeway stores** we are able to keep the pantry stocked and the refrigerator full. **Meyer Appliances** kindly donated a refurbished stove, and two microwaves came from our thrift store. These donations cannot come close, however, to matching the donations of time and energy by volunteers such as **Beatrice, Gonzalo, Maria, Mateo, Paul and Laurie**.

As Vincentians we have been asked to look for miracles in support of the canonization of Frederic. Well I witness a miracle each time a judge releases one of our workers to perform community service in lieu of a fine, or another volunteer steps forward to offer ESL or AA classes. As I exclaimed to our Center's new director, **Maria Marroquin**: *"A miracle a day, that's all we ask!"* And miracles pour forth.

These efforts have not come without a price, however. Diluting the president's available time has meant that no new conferences have been initiated, that the schedule of regular District Council meetings has not taken place, nor reinforcing the spiritual growth of each of you. *These issues can be addressed* ... vote in a new President at election time this September! And consider participating on the Board of Directors where openings are abundant!

In closing, please continue to offer your prayers and support of our overwhelmed staff. It is truly unbelievable what **Steve and his staff** are able to accomplish with such a thin administrative structure. Of necessity, please pray for the health of our dear spiritual leader, **Father Pedro**, who has undergone an angioplasty. *May God bless each of you and your families as we continue to seek the face of Christ in the most deserving of our sacrifice.*

Blessings,

John F. Rinaldi, President



District Council Re-Commencement

“I REALLY BELIEVE that the strength of the St. Vincent de Paul Society is in its local parish conferences. If we can we build activities that support the work of the conferences, it can only make us a more effective district council” ...

Kevin Krave, President, Resurrection Conference

“At a time of renewal for our church community, we want to rediscover in our Society the joy and the excitement of conversion. Let us see the things we do in a new light. We are volunteers: let us recall how the Lord called us to serve. In addition to assisting a client, or working on a case, let us stretch our hand to serve the needs of a friend. In this light, our recruitment campaign is nothing but the sharing with our community of our joy in service” ...

Bruno Bontempi, President, Oscar Romero Conference

“The Conference is the basic and essential grouping of the Society... (it) engages regularly in the person-to-person service of those in need. Our District Council needs to realize its critical role in support of the Conferences and Vincentians. It is Vincentians who directly bring charity and justice to the poor” ...

Jim Miller



To this end, Kevin, Bruno & Monica, Jim Miller and Dick Perrin formed a steering committee to direct activities of the Council. An Ozanam School was hosted by Joe Murray and Art Lorenz of Queen of Apostles Conference. The reformation of conferences into regions that match Diocesan deanery align-

ments was decided, as well as our support for the pastoral plan, *Renewing the Church*. This meeting and committee work was instrumental in a reconfiguration of the Council and Board, better integrating the two. Election of the Council president and appointments to the Board are being conducted prior to the Annual Meeting.

Let's recommence to come together and work together to grow in spirituality and in service. Please support the reorganization, the call for leadership, and please attend upcoming Council activities.

Peace and God Bless.



“In addition to assisting a client, or working on a case, let us stretch our hand to serve the needs of a friend. In this light, our recruitment campaign is nothing but the sharing with our community of our joy in service.”

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Tech Wizards in Our Myst

IF YOU REMEMBER playing *Frogger* on an Atari computer, then student volunteers at SVdP have a deal for you. Students from **San José State University's Management Information Systems** classes are wading through a stockpile of donated computers, inventorying and evaluating what they find. One item they have discovered is a 1982 Atari computer complete with the *Frogger* game which senior classman, **Kris Rushing**, remembers playing when he was seven years old. Got a strong lap or a sturdy computer table? They also found a 50-pound laptop and a hard drive five inches thick.

The inventory project is one of several undertaken by the students from the **College of Business** under the leadership of **Professors Malu Roldan, Arthur Walton, Steve Kwan and Tim Hill**. Students provide the technical support for our offices, stores and services—maintaining and troubleshooting the computer network, and training staff and volunteers in using computers, many built from donations.

Austin Mao, now a graduate, has worked full time coordinating the student efforts; while **Mike Religioso** advises on networking and website development. One project created a new Name and Address Book database system for donors, members and volunteers. Another project looked into the strategy of selling select store items on the Internet using E-Bay to determine fair prices.

Students typically spend several hours a week keeping our systems running. The technical support is invaluable to SVdP and provides students with practical experience — as well as some interesting looks into computer history!

Editor's Note: *St. Vincent de Paul Society is in formal community partnership with San Jose State University. The resulting "Community Service Learning" benefits both the Society and the students. Management believes that service organizations have a social obligation to educate servant leaders of tomorrow. Let us not forget that Frederic Ozanam was a college student when he founded the Society. And note that our newest conference is the Oscar Romero Conference of SJSU Catholic Campus Ministry!*

Where Have They Gone?

A NEW SET OF CHALLENGES faces **Kristin Simms**, who served as office manager before moving her ministry to Guarjila, El Salvador. One of her projects is to work with small groups of children on catechism and spirituality. "It takes a lot energy," Kristin says, "to be self-motivating, to keep up self-confidence and to be creative. Some days I do well with this and some days I need a bit more help from God. I am learning tons, though, about working with young people, about ministering, about my own faith journey, and about listening to the Spirit."

Kristin also spends time reading to the young people who, she says, listen attentively for two hours at a time. She tutors, plans liturgies, and spends Sunday afternoons playing hockey—Mayan or Aztec style, on roller blades!

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM, meanwhile, furthers her ministry of massage to the poor (but is open to all clientele as well). She supplements her practice working part-time with Shared Housing of Catholic Charities. And she continues to minister through her religious order.

"It takes a lot energy," Kristin says, "to be self-motivating, to keep up self-confidence and to be creative. Some days I do well with this and some days I need a bit more help from God."

Indebted to Volunteers

PRESIDENT JOHN RINALDI referred to the overextended and overworked staff. But if it weren't for both the service and the inspiration of volunteers past and present, central Council could never accomplish what we do in this ministry. We are grateful and indebted to our volunteers, to name a few: **Tina, Edna, Pat, Gary, Gisella, Gloria, Johnna, Stu, Sam, John, Frank, Paul, Vic, Tom, Kara**, and those who drop by and quietly help without name recognition.

Out with the Old, In with the New

THE SIGNS OF SEASONAL change are all around us outdoors: flower blossoms, green hills turning brown, warm winds. How about indoors? Doing any spring to summer to fall cleaning yet?

Our Thrift Stores can bring a new season to your old items, giving them new lives in the homes of our client families or turning them into cash to fund our Emergency Services to the poor.

Upholstered furniture is in demand. How about that old brown couch that clashes with the new blue wallpaper? Give us the couch and we'll find someone with wallpaper to match.

Did you try to seat a twelve-member family around an eight-person table for Mother's Day dinner? We have eight-person families to fit your table and twelve-chair tables to fit your family. Call 408-993-9500 for our truck to pick up the couch and table and whatever else you don't need anymore.

If our truck can't back into your driveway, it's time to donate that extra car blocking the way. We need good, clean cars to stock our lot, and you'll need a documented tax deduction next April.

Doesn't it feel great to have all that extra space? Or does it seem a little too empty here and there? The Thrift Stores are full of quality items for the gaps in your décor.

Fill your car with your smaller donations, drive to one of our stores, check the offerings and drive away with lots of new and exciting items for your place.

Don't delay; start cleaning today — and then call us!

*Can you
hear it?
... that
whisper ...
"Feed my
sheep."*



Special acknowledgement and appreciation to **Sam Winklebleck**, volunteer, for researching, coordinating and writing many of these articles. Thanks, Sam!

Voices for the Poor by René Robinson

WHAT IF ... instead of hearing on the radio the repeated story of the hungry poor, we instead heard the sweet voice of Jesus saying lovingly yet firmly "Feed my sheep?" What would happen inside us? Would courageous folk hear the call and answer "Yes, I will, Lord?"

Marian Eldermen Wright saw a need for children, children who do not vote, who were not valued consumers, who have no wealth, power or prestige. Her lobbying group gave birth to **The Children Defense Fund** and planted the seed for a powerful Headstart program, a common sense approach for needy preschool-age children to receive not only education readiness but also nutritional meals, support for socioeconomic needs, and love. For this there is a crown in heaven for Ms. Wright.

In Oakland, all are familiar with **Mother Wright** and the daily soup kitchen she runs for the poor. (She's not related by blood to Marian but definitely in spirit!) "Mother" is like any mommy who loves to feed her children, 200 hungry men, women and children. And in Harlem, how about **Mother Hale** who abated the growing crack epidemic fallout by taking in drug-addicted babies and showing them love so powerful it broke the cycle of drug abuse for that next generation.

These are not stories of superwomen, they're like us—of flesh, blood and bone. Yet deep down inside they had the courage to say, "YES, I WILL" to Christ. Now "yes" can be any size or shape—from donating the cost of dining out to the local St. Vincent de Paul, volunteering with your kids and filling boxes of emergency food at the SVdP pantry. The little sacrifice you give is a big "YES" to our Lord and to "these least brothers and sisters of mine."

Listen, deep down inside, listen ... **can you hear it? ... that whisper ... "Feed my sheep."**

“King and Story”

by Bellarmine student volunteers

Here's a real life **story**,
That takes place every single **morning**,
Even if it's raining—**pouring**,
Of unrecognized “**heroes**,”
Also known as “**Day Workers**”
Whom the government considers “**illegal zeroes**.”
The story starts off each morning at **6 A.M.**,
With over 200 immigrant **men**.
Wondering if “*la covija de los pobres*” will rise from the **East**,
The street curb serves as a comfy **seat**.
“*Muchos duermen a los cuatro vientos*” —exposed to the 4 winds **outside**,
but the hope of work today wakes them before they **die**.
When I go drop off food here and there — “*a los tantos*,”
The first words out of their mouths is: “**Cuantos!?**”
Which translates into “how many workers do you **need?**”
The desperation in their voice, because they have children to **feed**.
I do not hear: “do you have any spare-**change?**,”
Like those who hold out their soft-skinned palms—refusing to **change**.
Nor are my “*paisanos*” like the “**American**”
man by the freeway holding the sign without **fear**:
“**WHY LIE, I WANT BEER.**”
Yet, people gave that fool money — his smile still **growing**.
In contrast the “*trabajadores*” receive daily police harassment
for the sin of “**loitering**.”

Editor's note: the poem, seemingly incomplete, unfinished — reflects the incomplete, unfinished lives of our day workers, seemingly, always on the edge, waiting for a job — employment to make their lives whole and settled.

Renewing the Church, Renewing the Society

“**R**ENEWING THE CHURCH” is a pastoral plan for the Diocese of San José, for the Catholic Community of Santa Clara County. Critical issues for address are:

- recruiting and developing **lay leaders** to meet the changing needs of our Church;
- engaging **youth and young adults** in the life and leadership of the Church;
- **living out social justice** in areas such as the dignity of human life, housing, immigration and labor; and
- organizing in ways that support participation in **the mission of Christ** as priest, prophet and shepherd.

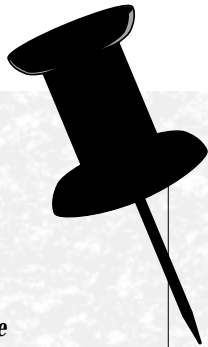
Ask yourself, as we evaluate the needs and vocations of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, do we not share the same vision, are we not presented the opportunity to collaborate and lead our community forward in these ways?

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 Gilroy, CA 95020
 (408) 842-5524

San Jose Store

Teresa Bravo, Manager
 2040 S. Seventh Street
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 (408) 993-9500

Calendar

August 24 **Back-to-School Mentoring**

September 9 *Feast of Frederic Ozanam, Founder*
September 21 **Council Election of President & Board**
September 27 *Feast of St. Vincent de Paul, Patron*
September 30 **Annual Conference Report Time**

October 5 Annual Appreciation Dinner
October 14 **Sleeping Bag for Homeless Drive**