



# Vincentian End of Year Reflection

## What is a Welcome Worth?

My good friend Bess and I are discussing charitable giving over cups of tea at her kitchen table. Her small congregation of Mennonites has decided to donate thirty brand new box fans to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

"Box fans?" I am puzzled.

"Yes," she nods. "We wanted to do something this summer to prevent child abuse."

I sip my tea and ponder for a while. Eventually I say, "I'm not really following your thinking on this."

She waves her hand through the muggy Michigan air. "Hot nights, crying babies, sleepless parents—and we didn't have a lot of money so—box fans."

"Ah."

This is not just a sign of Mennonite practicality; it also shows their faith in St. Vincent de Paul's ability to reach the people who need help the most. Bess and her husband, Will, have contributed in countless ways to the Society's work since I have been volunteering there. Why not box fans?

Bess has been good for my spiritual growing pains. She listens sympathetically when I describe the frustration of my attempts to better organize the St. Vincent de Paul group. She nods, laughs, pats my hand and gives generously to the cause. Due to support from friends like her, and from my family, I have continued volunteering despite many frustrations.

Another reason I keep going is that we have been strangely successful in recruiting new volunteers. The store is now open five days a week all year round with a different crew working each day. In addition, we visit the local Catholic high school a couple of times a year to tell our stories of battling poverty. The teenagers have become a regular source of muscles and enthusiasm. This influx of new blood has been inspiring for all of us.

Yet, invariably, new volunteers take one look around and offer to help get us organized. They have no idea how much I have laboured to get the place looking and running like an efficient organization that deserves the title "organization." Most of our newcomers voice serious doubts about trying to run a charity with nothing but constantly rotating volunteers, one phone line, fluctuating hours of operation, a leaky roof, and prayer.

I wonder about all that too.

It's not only that we've been known to sell the same couch to three different people, or that we forget to pay the sales tax to the government, or schedule too many clients for the same interview slots. All of that happens pretty regularly. The main reason I have my doubts about our competence to be running a charity is that we are so obviously flawed.

Some of us, for instance, don't like dealing with poor people.

Some of us don't like to be addressed in any language but English.

Some of us want nothing to do with alcoholics and drug addicts.

Most of us are wary of recently released prisoners.

Some of us are prejudiced.

Some of us become openly irritable with donors who give us junk.

We have been known to argue with each other in front of the clients and to argue with the clients as well.

The cash register doesn't always balance, and neither does the checkbook.

The store shelves are in a state of perpetual flux between too much stuff crammed onto them and "throw everything into the dumpster!"



The volunteers who know how to change the light fuses, and the ones who know how to change the cash-register tape, are never the people on duty when the store goes dark and the paper receipts turn pink.

Most days it seems as if we are going about helping the poor in the most inefficient way possible, and yet it works. Every week we are paying utility shut-off notices, preventing evictions, chipping in for prescription meds, helping pay for funerals, clothing people, delivering furniture and appliances, and attempting to reintegrate former prisoners into the community.

Pondering all this over our cups of tea, I ask my friend Bess, "What does it mean to be charitable? Sometimes, in the middle of the stress of running the store and helping people with overdue bills, it feels like we are just bumbling along without a clear goal."

Bess is an organized thinker. It doesn't take long before she gives me three categories into which she splits this intrinsic Christian virtue.

"Well, first," she says, "there is the 'recycling' type of charitable work. This is when I give away something I don't want or need. For instance, when I give my old clothes to St. Vincent de Paul, it is because I don't want them anymore. I feel better giving them away than throwing them out, and there is the chance that someone else can use them."

I think about that definition and decide that a lot of what we do at St. Vinnie's is actually recycling.

"The second type of giving is what we could characterize as 'sharing,'" she continues. "For instance, we have extra money so we give thirty box fans to help people who can't buy one for themselves. When we donate money to the church, or any other charity for that matter, we've shared our resources, but we haven't impoverished ourselves to the point of suffering."

Okay . . . Sharing accounts for the rest of what we do at St. Vincent de Paul.



"And the third type of charity is like this; all I have is one box fan for myself on a very hot day, but—here, take it—it's yours."

"But," I protest, "that's like Jesus' poor woman who gave her last two pennies, or like what he said about 'the greatest love is to give up one's life for another.' We don't even come close to that at St. Vinnie's."

"Yes," she agrees, "I think true charity is very rare. And it can appear in the least likely people."

I realize that she is absolutely right about this.

(Jane Knuth Thrift Store Saints p71-74)

Above is one Vincentian's reflection on her experiences as a Vincentian. How does this story connect with your experience?

Spend some time(10-15 mins) reflecting back over your experiences of home visits this year. Allow your mind to wander back over the year, there will be many faces and people who come to mind, perhaps choose one or two to reflect on.

How was God revealed to you in the people you served and in your fellow Vincentians this year?



## THANKSGIVING

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Give thanks to God for the warmth of each other.

Give thanks to God for the generosity of benefactors.

Give thanks to God for the gentleness of those who care.

Give thanks to God for...



# RE-COMMITMENT CEREMONY

Let us begin by praying our Mission and Vision statements together.

## **Our Mission**

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

## **Our Vision**

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering a hand up to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

## **A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 28:16-20**

The disciples made their way to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus summoned them. Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of time.” After, speaking to them, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven.



# Reflection

When Jesus ascended into heaven and left his disciples they must have wonder what they were to do without him there. How could they continue to be disciples, to reach out and care for others without his presence? Then they remembered and shared stories....

## Disciple I:

I remember when Jesus told us the story about the “man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell prey to robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and went off half-dead. The priest and the Levite saw him but went on. It was a Samaritan who was moved to pity, and he dressed his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and then he took him to an inn where he cared for him. He even gave the innkeeper two silver pieces telling him that if there was any further expense he would repay him on his way back. Then when Jesus asked, who was neighbour to the man, they answered “The one who treated him with compassion.” Jesus then said, “Then go and do the same.” (Luke 10: 30-37)

**All:** Lord help us to grow in love, as we show compassion to our suffering neighbours. Give us the patience, courage and resilience we need to continue each day as your disciples.

## Disciple II:

I remember when Jesus told us, how through our service of the poor, at the last judgment we will hear the words, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father. For I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me... For whatever you did for these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” This is the reason for all of our service and advocacy for the poor. (Matthew 25: 34-40)

**All:** Lord give us the grace to show respect to your people as we remember that when we serve them we are serving you.



### Disciple III:

I remember how one day, “we had been in the boat all day when a large crowd came around us crushing us back near the sea. Jesus cured as many as he could. I remember his look as he turned, and said unexpectedly, ‘Who touched me?’ How could we see with that crowd? But there was a tiny woman trembling, begging. The look that Jesus gave her was one of such love, such respect, there was such humility in his eyes as he cured her.” (Mark 5:1)

**All:** Lord, may we have eyes that see the hidden needs of those we serve as we strive to bring justice to our world.

### Disciple IV:

There was a time when some people brought their paralysed friend to see Jesus and they couldn't find a way into the room. Their hope in what Jesus could do for their friend led them to climb onto the roof and let him down for Jesus to heal him. (Mark 2:1-12)

**All:** Lord, give us hope in your presence in us and the grace of meeting your people.

### Disciple V:

“I remember that night when we at supper and Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, live on in my love. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. I no longer speak of you as servants...instead I call you friends. It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit.” (John 15: 9-17)

**All:** Lord may your love be with us so that we may be people of joy who spread this joy to each other and those we serve.

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**love** /lʌv/ *noun* **1.** a strong liking someone or something  
*his love for his children*  
*felt true love like this before*  
**love** to love someone or other  
*They seem to be*

**Leader:** The providence of God has been with us throughout this year as we have lived out our Vincentian vocation. We are part of a 183 year old tradition and our times of challenge give us a particular environment in which to live this out. We are all asked to give of ourselves for the good of people in need.

*Do you promise to fulfil the responsibilities demanded by the Mission of the St. Vincent de Paul Society?*

**All:** We do.

*Do you promise to live the Core Values of the St. Vincent de Paul Society?*

**All:** We do.

*Do you promise to remain faithful to spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Blessed Rosalie Rendu and the many Vincentians who have come after them?*

**All:** We do.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for this year of service and re-dedicate ourselves to serving you in your most vulnerable people in the year ahead. May we show your love, compassion and hope to them. May we wrap these gifts in humility, respect and kindness as we prayerfully serve you, our God, through them. **Amen**

