



THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL OF CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Helping People in Need for 52 Years

FALL 2016 NEWSLETTER



A Single Problem Can Cascade Into Many — How SVdP Helps Single Mom Get Back on Her Feet

When Stephanie lost her home in Richmond, most of her belongings went into storage—but money to pay for it was running out. Feeding her three children (two in grade school, one just a baby) came first.

Stephanie came to St. Callistus SVdP conference in San Pablo. Carol Brazil, a Vincentian (a SVdP trained volunteer), quickly had the conference pay for a month's storage. Then she took Stephanie shopping for necessities. Soon Stephanie found a Section 8 apartment in Walnut Creek; but it was far from her children's schools and potential employers she knew.

Also, Stephanie's license had been suspended for old traffic tickets she couldn't pay. That made it hard to get her kids to school and to find a job. Stephanie was really trying, Carol felt. So the Vincentian made an initial payment on the tickets. Carol then called the St. John Vianney SVdP conference in Walnut Creek,

where Vincentians Bill and Sally Clarke began helping Stephanie's family. They paid another month's storage rental, got bus tickets, food vouchers, later Christmas presents—and always-appreciated chocolate chip cookies!

With that help, Stephanie landed a part-time job working evenings and weekends.

But Stephanie's challenges were not over, as her car stopped working. Soon she was walking several miles to drop her children off at school, or take a series of buses. The Vincentians helped out again, finding her a used car in good condition.

Today Stephanie still has hurdles to climb. But thanks to the help of some Vincentians and her own hard work, she is caring for her family and can see a good future ahead.

It is Called Systemic Change - Helping Real People Get Back on Their Feet

As Vincentians, we help other individuals get back on their feet. Rarely is it a straightforward or simple journey. We recognize that problems associated with poverty often put people into a cycle of continued financial stress with little hope for escape. In order to make a difference, we believe it is our responsibility to address these problems at their core. And we recognize that it usually takes time to build a trusting relationship with clients to have an effect on "Systemic Change."



Helping Stephanie work through her individual hurdles can help her and her children climb out of the cycle of poverty. Providing reliable transportation opened important doors for Stephanie. Now she has the ability to get to and from work, even find better work. She can ensure that her children won't miss class; and that can help her children enjoy school and motivate them to reach academic success that will help them grow into successful adults.

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Dear Friends,

For 52 years, St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County has worked tirelessly to help those who do not have the ability or financial resources to help themselves. In fact, it is the Society's mission to bring aid and comfort to those in need.

Without devoted volunteers, otherwise known as our Vincentians, SVdP would never be able to fulfill this mission.

In the last fiscal year, we've had the blessing of about 700 Vincentians serving the members of their communities. That's 700 people from 27 conferences in the extreme west to the extreme east of Contra Costa County choosing to help their neighbors in need.

I want to take this opportunity to thank those who have dedicated their time and talents to fulfilling St. Vincent de Paul's mission. It is through you that we are able to make an impact. It is through you that we are able to make changes to a seemingly never-ending cycle of poverty.

God's light shines through each and every one of you, and it's been incredibly rewarding for me to witness. I'm looking forward to the mountains we will move together next year!

With Gratitude,



Melanie Anguay

Executive Director

A Day in the Life of a Vincentian at IHM Conference

Written by Melanie Benitez, Communications & Development Associate



I visited the exemplary Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) St. Vincent de Paul Conference in Brentwood to see what Vincentians actually do.

My heart was transformed seeing their good work in action! Talking with the volunteers, this is what I found:

Every Friday, IHM conference opens its food pantry. Starting at dawn, Brentwood's less fortunate line up outside the hall, hoping to take home enough food to feed their families that week. Vincentians arrive around 7:30AM to begin laying out donated groceries. Over the next two hours, they both unload trucks of food that had been picked up from the food bank and package items that they take to home-bound individuals.



I was surprised to see so much fresh produce. Unique to IHM is a community garden they run, dedicated to growing fresh fruits and vegetables for the food pantry. Vincentians Teri Spano and Marge Perez told me that 8600 lbs. of food--more than 4 tons!--were harvested last year. By this August, 5000 lbs. had already been harvested! Their rich bounty includes tomatoes, zucchinis, chili peppers, cucumbers, and onions.



Food pantry doors open promptly at 8:30AM. An average of 80 families are served each Friday. Vincentians check them in, efficiently giving each a number for their place in



line, another number for the size of their family so the volunteers know the amount of food each family should receive.

And they offer more help. Next to the registration desk is a table to help those needing rental or utility assistance. Those who need the extra help can speak to Vincentians about financial obstacles they face.



Apart from the food pantry, IHM Vincentians also conduct home visits to assess the needs of those who reach out to the conference for help. I spoke with conference Treasurer--and Tech-Guru--Butch Paredes who has been volunteering with SVdP for 3 years. He is one of IHM's 62 Vincentians. He serves on the board, conducts home visits, and manages their databases.

We also spoke about the importance of home visits, as I learned they aren't always required. But in truth, without home visits when permitted, you would never get to actually see the condition of the person in need and provide what can genuinely help them.



It is safe to say that a day in the life of a Vincentian volunteer is never ordinary, never routine. With loving and generous hearts the IHM Vincentians are open to helping people whatever their needs.

Systemic Change Cont'd

Each individual faces their own unique challenges. SVdP's Workforce Development Program (WFD) can help make systemic changes in the lives of individuals who need help. That one-on-one focus helps improve our whole society. By providing on-the-job training and soft skill employment guidance to those who face work barriers, SVdP helps address the problem at its core. We understand that if people cannot find work due to the lack of experience or related reasons, their lives will not improve.

Working one-on-one, WFD helps chronically unemployed individuals build their confidence levels as they

gain the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to find sustaining jobs that help them make better lives for themselves and their loved ones.

This is how SVdP tries to make an impact, a difference, in our world. It begins with clear understanding of the core problems each individual faces, our desire to help them address the problems and find solutions, and our courage to take action. Changing what may appear to be a never-ending cycle of poverty begins with us working with individuals, real people, in an atmosphere of compassion and trust.

Upcoming Events

9/10 Bocce Ball Tournament, (Martinez)

9/17 Friends of the Poor Walk, (Brentwood & San Pablo)

9/22 District Council Mtg. 6:30PM

9/24 Friends of the Poor Walk, (Danville & Concord)

Sign up for Bocce: www.svdP-cc.org

Sign up for FoP Walk: www.fopwalk.org

For more details, contact m.benitez@svdp-cc.org



Jane Streich has served as a Vincentian for 21 years. She sat down to enlighten us about how she's contributed to the good work of St. Vincent de Paul.

How did you first get involved with St. Vincent de Paul?

I have been a Vincentian at St. Francis of Assisi since 1995 when our pastor gave us two vacant rooms in the rectory for an office and food pantry. As a retired office administrator, my experience was put to good use in setting up and maintaining policies and procedures, a file system, database, etc. We quickly became a major food resource for low-income families and the home

Volunteer Spotlight: Jane Streich, St. Francis of Assisi

-less in the Monument corridor area. Special holiday programs were developed and improved over the years, including a Thanksgiving distribution of a turkey and food for 150 families, a Christmas distribution of a turkey and food gift card for 100 families, an "Adopt-a-Family" program for Christmas gifts for 50 families, a distribution of 90 Easter Baskets in the spring, plus 60 back-packs filled with school supplies in August.

Why'd you continue volunteering?

I'm most proud of our "Special Assistance" program. Over the years we have helped hundreds of people in desperate situations from rent or utility assistance, to getting a family in a motel for 2 or 3 nights, to arranging donated furniture deliveries. We don't have a large budget for this program, so I'm grateful to my fellow Vincentians at St. Agnes, St. Bonaventure, St. John Vianney and the HOPE conference for their financial help on some cases.

What did you find most fulfilling about your experience?

Over the years I have heard hundreds of stories from clients with special needs—some sad, some unbelievable,

some funny! My daughter once urged me to keep a journal of the situations I've come across at SVdP, -- unfortunately it's something I never had time to do!

However, it certainly has been the most fulfilling aspect of my years as a Vincentian, and although I am no longer going to be president, I will continue working with Special Assistance requests as long as I am able.

I have been blessed by God in so many ways and I feel an obligation to give back by continuing to help those in need through St. Vincent de Paul.

***Thank you, Jane for
your unfading
passion in helping us
help others. Jane is
retiring as
Conference President
in Fall 2016.***

Significant Tax Advantages *May* Occur When Remembering St. Vincent de Paul in Your Plans!

As a Vincentian or supporter of St. Vincent de Paul, have you considered making a charitable donation to SVdP in your long term giving plans? You care deeply about the mission and work of SVdP, you have volunteered countless hours to SVdP, and with a thoughtful gift, you can contribute to the long-term strength of SVdP for many years to come! Additionally, identifying a donation to SVdP may provide several tax benefits to YOU!

There are many ways to give, and thoughtful, charitable gifts to SVdP may include:

Providing a bequest in your will, (a percentage of assets or specific dollar amount)

Securities or stocks, (end-of-year tax advantages may be obtained by strategic stock/security donations).

Proceeds of life insurance or retirement plans

Real Estate

Items of value such as autos, jewelry, artwork, etc.



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul District Council of Contra Costa County, (2210 Gladstone Drive, Pittsburg, CA 94565, Employer Identification Number 94-1448577), is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization.

We always recommend that you consult your advisor or attorney when creating or revising your plans. SVdP is not qualified to give financial or tax advice, but we can connect you with trusted professionals to assist you if you are interested.

Contact Barb Hunt at b.hunt@svdp-cc.org.

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