



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
of Contra Costa County

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The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
of Contra Costa County

Spring 2021 | Newsletter

"A network of friends, inspired by Gospel values, growing in holiness and building a more just world through personal relationships with and service to people in need."

Helping People In Need For 57 years!

SVdP Feeds, Clothes, Shelters Neighbors During Pandemic



Stephen Krank helps load food during a SVdP Free Food Distribution event in Richmond, CA.

Upcoming Events

June 5 - SVdP Drive-up Food Distribution at St. Paul's Catholic Church - 1835 Church Lane in San Pablo, 9 AM - 1 PM
June 8 - SVdP Drive-up Food Distribution at Catholic Charities East Bay - 217 Harbour Way in Richmond, 10 AM - 1 PM
July 19 - The Knights of Columbus #9206 15th Annual "Swing for Charity," Golf tournament benefitting SVdP
September 11 - The 9th Annual "Big La Bocce," Bocce Ball Tournament at the Martinez Bocce Courts hosted by St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County, and Loaves and Fishes of Contra Costa

Spirituality, Friendship and Service – The Essential Elements of St. Vincent de Paul "Vincentian" Volunteers



Claudia L. Ramirez
Executive Director

The passion evident in the hearts of St. Vincent de Paul's (SVdP) volunteers, "Vincentians", has never been more visible than in the past year. Volunteers are the core of our existence at SVdP, without them we could not do what we do to help our neighbors in need. I believe that the three essential elements of being a "Vincentian" – Spirituality, Friendship and Service – make the experience so meaningful.

the words of our founder, Bl. Frederic Ozanam, "Do not be afraid of new beginnings. Be Creative. Be Inventive." While living our mission of service, the other two elements, Spirituality and Friendship, have not been forgotten. It is through sharing our dedication to serve alongside friends, and doing so to also grow our faith, that makes the Vincentian experience so unique. We never serve alone.

Many of our volunteer meetings have gone virtual, but we still always begin with a prayer and reflection. Often, before meetings or trainings get started, we sign on early just to "see" everyone and catch-up. Who might need a special prayer? Who finally gets to hold a new grandchild? We all crave the bonds of friendship and we look forward to soon being able to hug or high-five fellow Vincentians. I don't know about you, but I just don't get the same feeling from an elbow-bump!

I'm sending out a hug to all of our volunteers, thanking you for all that you do and grateful for your dedication to service, friendship and deepening your spiritual lives.

Your Friend & fellow Vincentian,

Claudia

P.S. If you are interested in joining our volunteer team, please contact me at c.ramirez@svdp-cc.org

My association with SVdP began with family. My aunts became Vincentians after retiring and moving from Bogotá, Colombia to Naples, Florida. They joined a St. Vincent de Paul conference (branch) there and dedicated themselves to helping others. My grandmother had passed a love of serving others to my aunts and my mother, and they in turn, passed it to me. My remaining aunt has been a Vincentian for 33 years now, and not even the pandemic could dissuade her from helping others.

This is the spirit of Service that I see in Contra Costa County Vincentians.

Vincentians of Contra Costa County have been finding creative and safe ways to help the vulnerable this year. They are living

Things are beginning to return to something resembling normal, as more and more people receive the vaccine and have protection from the COVID-19 virus. At St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County, (SVdP) we are proud to be front-line workers, helping our neighbors in need in the county - and the need has been great.

In a normal year, SVdP distributes approximately \$400,000 in rental and housing assistance funding, which helps keep roofs over our neighbors' heads. In the last year, however, the need has grown significantly. Our Vincentian volunteers have helped distribute nearly \$1 million in rental assistance funding from individual donors, foundation and government grants. California passed the COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act on January 29th, 2021. This act will provide much needed protection and relief to beleaguered renters and landlords in California, but it comes far too late to prevent many families from having their lives changed by economic devastation. Thankfully, through your support and compassion, SVdP has helped protect thousand of families from destitution.

SVdP has continued the large-scale food distribution events that started in March, 2020. Since we placed our first box of food in a family's car, we have been able to feed over 110,000 people in Contra Costa County through these large-scale, drive-thru distribution events. Food insecurity increased dramatically during the pandemic, with many families having to seek help for the first time. These distributions continue thanks to the generosity of our donors, the collaboration with the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, Catholic Charities Easy Bay, our conferences and the dedication of volunteers. We want to make sure that families in Contra Costa County do not need to go to bed hungry.

During the pandemic, with an eye to the future, SVdP has partnered with Dentists on Wheels (DoW) to break ground on a brand-new 3-chair free dental clinic serving those without dental insurance at the SVdP Family Resource Center in Pittsburg. The clinic is currently under-construction, and is scheduled to be finished in June. From the free dental clinic, SVdP and DoW will provide preventative and restorative care, with the goal of reducing the pain, suffering and economic impact for those without dental insurance and improving the lives and smiles of our neighbors in need.

To get help from SVdP or to donate, please visit www.svdpc-cc.org.

SVdP Helps Landlord Living On the Street



Lisa became homeless when the pandemic hit and her home burnt down.

When a family in need approached a St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa branch for rental assistance, it started a journey of compassion no one saw coming.

“They had all had COVID-19 and then lost their jobs,” Steve Krank, Vincentian Service Manager at SVdP said. “They were terrified of ending up on the street.”

Fortunately, protections are in place for families facing eviction during the COVID-19 pandemic. A family impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, that submits a letter to their landlord, and pays 25 percent of their back rent, cannot be evicted.

“At SVdP we work with the tenant and the landlord,” Steve said. “I called the landlord and she burst into tears. She’s living in her car.”

Lisa Chen, the landlord, thought she had done everything right. No stranger to hardship, Lisa survived the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake in China – which claimed 242,000 lives. Her family immigrated to America and became citizens. Lisa worked hard to earn her master’s degree in software engineering.

Lisa said, “I’m homeless but I own two houses. It feels like I worked hard for nothing.” Lisa retired young. Taking her savings, she invested in 2 rental properties to provide her a stable income. Yet in December disaster struck.

“In December my home burnt down,” Lisa said. “My plan was to move into one of my rental units, but with the COVID eviction moratorium, I wasn’t able to move tenants out of the rental unit I own.”

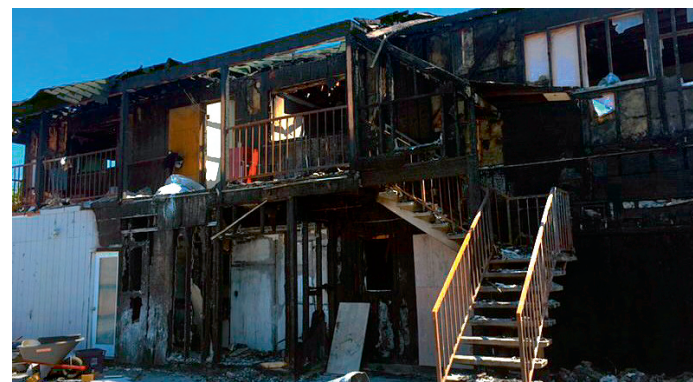
Without the income of her rental properties, Lisa has little to rely on. She sold her small sedan, trading it for a minivan to use as a bed. While legislators debated

how to react to the economic impact of COVID-19, Lisa adjusted to a life on the streets.

“I’ve been lucky, I have friends who will let me sleep in their driveways for a few days, but you can only impose yourself on someone for so long,” Lisa said. “I spend my days finding places with public restrooms with someone nice enough to let me use it.”

California approved the COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act in January. Landlords can now receive 80 percent of their owed rent if they forgive 20 percent. For many, this comes far too late to prevent their lives being forever changed. SVdP has provided rental assistance to one of Lisa’s tenants. SVdP is helping Lisa go through the process of receiving State aid by forgiving 20 percent of her owed rental debt.

“I’m so grateful for all the kindness SVdP has shown me. I’ve felt like I was losing my mind, that no one cared. It felt like I was being forced to live on the streets,” Lisa said. “Knowing there are people helping is a relief. I don’t want to see what I’m going through happen to anyone else.”



The remnants of Lisa’s San Mateo home after a fire raged through the house.

SVdP Free Dining Room a Necessity During Pandemic



Jason enjoys a hot lunch and pantry items from SVdP’s free dining room in Pittsburg, CA.

“I was working in plumbing when everything shut down,” Jason Lusero of Pittsburg said, “My boss was hopeful things would pick back up, but he just hasn’t been able to bring me back.”

Jason said he is really familiar with economic downturns. Jason’s father moved to California in 2008 to find work, and in 2009, when he was 22, Jason followed him.

Jason said, “I lived in Baltimore, and things got really bad there during the last recession. When my dad moved it just made sense to follow. You have to go where the work is.”

Jason has been coming to St. Vincent de Paul’s Free Dining Room (a partnership with Loaves and Fishes of Contra Costa), since work dried up for him last March. He said the food he gets from the free dining room has gone a long way during his job search.

“My family had some bad luck,” Jason said, “The free food has helped a lot. They give you a ton, and it really helps when hunger isn’t a concern anymore.”

In January, Jason’s father suffered a stroke. While he is recovering, Jason said finding work is a lot harder while helping his father.

“I tried Amazon for a bit,” Jason said. “It wasn’t that bad, but they post a list of available shifts online and you compete for work. Within a few minutes all the shifts are gone. I lost power one night and was out of work for two weeks.”

Jason recently found a job that pays him well. He said he is getting food aid, because of a wait period that keeps him below full-time.

“I have a good job now,” Jason said, “This factory I’m working at only gives you 24 hours for the first few months, but I look forward to being full-time soon. I just wish I knew how to thank everyone who helped me.”

SVdP Volunteer Partners with Homeless to Distribute Aid

Standing in her kitchen, you can feel Olivia Mejia’s love for people. This single-mother provides for her family, and helps her community.

“I’ve been where you need to ask other people for help, so I know how hard it is,” Olivia said. “That’s why I feel like I have to help.”

At a homeless encampment nearby, Olivia is no stranger. With help from an encampment member, Olivia brings aid to the homeless each week. One man, who asked to stay anonymous, said Olivia is a blessing.

“New clothes, and food? It’s like Christmas comes every week,” he said.

Olivia said, “I have a friend who became homeless and it hurt so much to see them suffering. When you see people suffering, how can you not help?”

Olivia found St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa in 2005, when she went back to school. One of her classes required her to volunteer for a non-profit. Olivia has been volunteering with St. Vincent de Paul ever since.

“My professor asked us to volunteer,” Olivia said, “I chose a SVdP food pantry in Richmond. They were so kind and wouldn’t judge you. They helped me and let me volunteer helping others. It’s hard to go to school, work, and be a single-mom. SVdP made it possible to keep going.”

In January of this year, Catholic Relief Services recognized Olivia with their Outstanding Service Award for helping the people of Richmond.

Olivia said, “Hard times are easier when you have people around you who care, and I think it’s important to pay it forward to help others.”



Olivia proudly displays her Outstanding Service Award at her home.



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County
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 Pittsburg, CA 94565-5101

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The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
of Contra Costa County



**Help us end poverty -
 one person, one family,
 one community at a time.**

“A network of friends, inspired by Gospel values, growing in holiness and building a more just world through personal relationships with and service to people in need.”

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Where Most Needed | <input type="checkbox"/> Free Dining Room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Free Medical Clinic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jobs/Job Skills Program | <input type="checkbox"/> Free Dental Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day Shelter for the Homeless | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Housing Support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conference Support/Formation | |

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- Please send me information about monthly/yearly giving opportunities.
- Please send me information about volunteer opportunities.

To donate furniture or vehicles, please call 925.439.5060

You can also keep up with news on SVdP in Contra Costa County or donate online at www.svdp-cc.org

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Account No: _____ Exp. Date: _____

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My Gift is Given in Honor of, or Memory of _____

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**Thank you for your partnership that helps us ensure that SVdP will be here to help in the future.
Please remember SVdP in your will or trust.**

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