



## Making A Difference

*The Society of St Vincent de Paul is present in 29 churches and has over 700 members in Singapore*



*A Vincentian lends a helping hand to a Friend-in-Need during an outing.*

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) was set up in Singapore on 19 July 1883 at the Church of the Good Shepherd. The first office bearers were — George S Reutens (President), C P Richards (Vice President), P A Reutens (Treasurer), and Edwin Tessensohn (Secretary). There were 12 other active members in the fledgling Society. The newspapers of those days reported that the Society did commendable charitable work in the early days. However, there is a gap in official records right up to the 1950s.

In 1951, the late Monsignor H Berthold encouraged the

formation of an SSVP Conference at the parish of Sts Peter & Paul. Among the pioneers was the late Joseph Ee Peng Liang, who after being persuaded by Msgr Berthold, assumed the task of establishing the Society on 8 December 1951. Msgr Berthold was its Spiritual Director.

Over the years, the Society in Singapore has grown, and today it is present in 29 churches with more than 700 Vincentians serving in the 29 Conferences (a Conference is a unit of SSVP in a parish). These Vincentians care for more than 3,000 families across Singapore, regardless of their religion or race.

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## Message from the President



**S**INCE the Society of St Vincent de Paul was revived in Singapore in 1951, it has helped thousands of poor people on our island.

Initially, the Society helped by providing them with food rations and money. Today, while we still assist the poor financially, we try to also help them improve their lives in many other ways so as to make them self-sufficient and independent.

This newsletter, which will be published twice every year, will tell you more about the work we do. It will also highlight areas where you may help contribute in making this world a better one for Christ's poor.

We are very grateful for your monetary contributions, without which SSVP would not have been able to help so many people. But more needs to be done and we hope that some of you will find inspiration to join us in trying to make this world a better one for the disadvantaged.

Florence Tan  
President, SSVP Singapore

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In addition to supporting needy families with rations and cash aid, SSVP Singapore helps provide tuition to their children. Young mothers who find difficulty in raising their children are supported by SSVP's Milk and Diaper programme. SSVP's social workers help Vincentians manage complicated cases. The Society also assists needy families connect with other social service organisations and government agencies to get the necessary assistance.

The Society is part of the worldwide SSVP network of charity



700 Vincentians



29 Conferences



3,000 families under SSVP Care

who was then a priest at the Church of Our Lady Queen Of Peace. He advised me to join the SSVP.”

Still active in the Society, Peter recalled: “The most satisfying part

Ang, 33, who joined the Society in late 2014, said she enjoys the work she does with other Vincentians in serving the poor. Said Alicia, who is a member of the St Ignatius Conference: “The members are very inspiring in helping others even going beyond what they are supposed to do.” Alicia said she strives to help FINs to help themselves and become independent.

Another young Vincentian, Sean Lee, 30, joined the SSVP when he was studying in St Joseph's Institution. Sean, who is from the Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Conference, feels that in addition to providing a listening ear to the FINs, the SSVP must evolve and remain relevant to the needs of the poor.

Since 1951, the National Council of SSVP Singapore has had five presidents. One of them, Michael Thio, went on to become the President General of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Michael served as President General from 2010 to 2016. 



Members of SSVP in 1955.

started in Paris in 1833 by Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his friends. Today there are more than 800,000 Vincentians serving in some 150 countries worldwide.

Vincentian Peter Yee, 76, who joined the Society in 1967, has found his 51 years with SSVP fruitful and rewarding. Sharing his experiences with SSVP News, he said: “I grew up in Geylang on the outskirts of the squatter village. Going into some families' living areas, I noticed bare-bodied children running about, their meals were meagre consisting of preserved vegetables, peanuts and salted fish. Inspired by this, I approached Msgr Francis Lau

of our visit to the squatter area was the children's resounding cries of - 'the people from the Catholic church are here' - which brings everyone out to welcome the members of SSVP”

Times have changed. Yet the joy that Vincentians find in their work remains the same. Alicia

**National Council Presidents of SSVP Singapore**

Ee Peng Liang	1951-1987
Michael Thio	1987-2005
Lucas Williams	2005-2011
Paul Foo	2011-2016
Florence Tan	2016-Present

# A Gift of Love

*Bequest from anonymous donor leads to the setting up of the SSVP Shop, a social enterprise to help the poor.*

**I**N late 2017, the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) received a significant bequest from an anonymous donor. SSVP then started Project Bailly in response to executing the proposed plans of the Society as agreed with our benefactor. The plans involved the setting up of a social enterprise, consistent with the mission and values of SSVP. These included the acquisition of a building to house the enterprise, consisting of a shop, a social office presence to assist our poor, a meeting venue and a café for Vincentians, parishioners and FINs. In short, a headquarters for SSVP Singapore.

The social enterprise has been named “SSVP Shop” and it will open in the second half of this year. It will specialise in selling pre-loved and new items. Donated by parishioners and well-wishers across Singapore, these items will be offered at affordable prices. The proceeds will be used to help the poor in Singapore. In addition, SSVP Shop gift vouchers can be purchased by patrons and well-wishers to be used as gifts to individuals and families in need. A small and intimate café within the shop, serving affordable and delicious food, will be open to all visitors who visit the shop. SSVP will be launching “A Pay It Forward” initiative whereby donors or Vincentians may pay for another meal which will be given to the next person-in-need.

The social enterprise is the first national mega project of SSVP Singapore. Said Florence Tan,



*Artist's rendition of the SSVP Shop*



*Members & volunteers helping with the “Gift of Love” collection drive.*

SSVP national president: “We have 30 volunteers who have generously signed up to help out in our SSVP Shop. We need 60 to 80 volunteers to help at the shop as we plan to keep it open six days a week. They may choose to volunteer one day a week, or more, or alternate weeks – it’s flexible.”

How can volunteers help? “Volunteers can help with unpacking, sorting, displaying and

sale of the donated items. They may also help to serve at our café and they may support us in transport and logistics activities,” she added. The SSVP Shop will be open from Tuesdays to Sundays, 10am to 6pm.

If you like to become a volunteer at this social enterprise, have queries about the SSVP Shop or would like to donate to the SSVP Shop, do contact us at: [shop@ssvpsingapore.org](mailto:shop@ssvpsingapore.org) 

# Happenings In And Around Your Parish

*The SSVP Conferences at the 29 parishes in Singapore, have been actively working with their fellow parishioners and parish Ministries to provide not only financial support, but also spiritual and moral support to their Friends-in-Need (FINs). They are striving to fulfill the SSVP Mission of attaining holiness through Service in Hope to all persons-in-need, through their example.*

## Christ the King Conference

The Lunar New Year of the Pig came early for the FINs of the Christ The King Conference (CTKC). The church was decorated with red lanterns and ribbons and many FINs arrived for Ration Day on 2 February, dressed in red. They settled down to feast on noodles, kong bak pau, etc. The parish's Chinese Choir entertained them, belting out favourite evergreens. After all the excitement and fun, they calmed their hearts for prayer and hymns.

Rations and cash aid were distributed to the FINs together with mandarin oranges and BBQ pork (bak kwa). Home deliveries were made for those unable to be present due to physical infirmities.



*CTKC members celebrating the Lunar New Year with their FINs.*



## Divine Mercy Conference



*DMC and partners reaching out to Pasir Ris residents.*

Members of Divine Mercy Conference (DMC) joined forces with the Pasir Ris Family Service Centre and Catholic students from the Singapore University of Technology & Design in a Chinese New Year outreach programme targeted at some residents in Pasir Ris. For the Lunar New Year celebrations, they presented oranges and gifts to the elderly and taught them to make lanterns from angpow packets. The elderly also participated in fun exercises and a game of bingo and are now looking forward to the next such event in July.



## Holy Cross Conference



*HCC pushcart warriors.*

The Holy Cross Conference's (HCC) St Joseph's Home Pushcart project benefits residents who are unable to do their own shopping due to various mobility issues. Using a fixed budget of 'pretend' currency residents purchase goods from the pushcart. The project brings the retail experience to the residents who are unable to go out shopping.

Birthday celebrations for the FINs are organised during the monthly ration lunches and homebound birthday FINs are not left out. Every month, a team is rostered to celebrate the birthdays of FINs who are over 70 years old. To spread more joy, the age was recently lowered to 60 years.



*HCC birthday FINs' happy faces*

## Immaculate Heart of Mary Conference

The Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Conference involved parishioners in its Lenten Outreach Project. Volunteers and members came together on 24 March to fill ration bags with household essentials such as detergent, soap and biscuits. After a prayer of blessing by the parish priest, Fr Adrian Yeo, the group made their way by foot to a block of 2-room flats in the vicinity to distribute the ration bags door-to-door. They also identified families that require further assistance and support. The Vincentians led the face-to-face interactions with the residents, allowing volunteers to catch a glimpse of the Vincentian mission. It was certainly a morning well-spent serving the poor and making God's love felt to those they met.



*Members & volunteers preparing Lenten ration bags for FINs.*



## Our Lady of Lourdes Conference



*OLL FINs and members at the Gardens.*

Nineteen members of the Conference together with 40 FINs loaded up two buses on 6 January to the Gardens By The Bay. FINs were surprised at how cool it was inside the two garden domes and took every opportunity to be photographed with the exotic plants in the interesting settings. The outing concluded with a lunch at the Red House Seafood Restaurant located at Clark Quay, offering a view of the Singapore River. Members and volunteers pitched together to help the elderly FINs move around during the trip.

The Gardens By The Bay sponsored the tickets to the Flower & Cloud Domes, and Red House Seafood Restaurant sponsored the delicious lunch.



*Members, Avelin & Joanne helped Mr Neo to get around.*

## St Louis de Marillac Conference



*Having breakfast with FINs and parishioners.*

On 10 March, the Conference of St Louise de Marillac of the Church of St Vincent de Paul, turned its parish canteen duties into a special one. Knowing that a good meal is always a good opportunity to bond and interact, members invited the Conference's past and present FINs to prepare delicious dishes and enjoy breakfast with parishioners. The FINs stepped up to the plate and the day turned into a happy occasion as they chatted and engaged with parishioners and members of other parish ministries.

SSVP members also used this event to spark interest in church-goers of the opportunities for them to be spiritually enriched through sanctifying encounters with the poor.



*Vincetian Dinah sharing the good news of SSVP activities with parishioners.*

# So Bazaar!

*Charity sale to raise funds for poor gets great response.*



**T**HE Conference of the Church of The Transfiguration (COTT) has been blessed with a very supportive Parish Priest. During the SSVP Feast Day dinner held at the COTT canteen on 27 September 2018, Fr Joachim Chang mooted the idea of organising a sale of pre-loved items with all proceeds going to the Poor Fund.

Taking him up on this novel idea, COTT Ministries together with SSVP members of all eight Conferences of the Serangoon District, spent the next two months planning Bazaar@COTT. Serangoon District consists of the Conferences of COTT, St Anne, Immaculate Heart of Mary, St Louise de Marillac, St Francis Xavier, Our Lady of Lourdes, Nativity of the BVM and St Peter.

All volunteers pitched in to organise the sale. These goods had been collected from earlier donation drives to stock the soon to be opened SSVP Shop.

On 20 January, members and volunteers manned 15 stalls at COTT – selling clothes, bags, accessories, DVDs, Chinese New Year goodies, coffee powder, home-made Nonya kuehs, achar, etc. There were even volunteers

on hand to do face painting to the delight of both adults and children.

It was very heartening to see all the Ministries come together with SSVP members to raise funds for the SSVP FINs. It was also a wonderful bonding experience for Vincentians of all eight Conferences to meet and work together. 

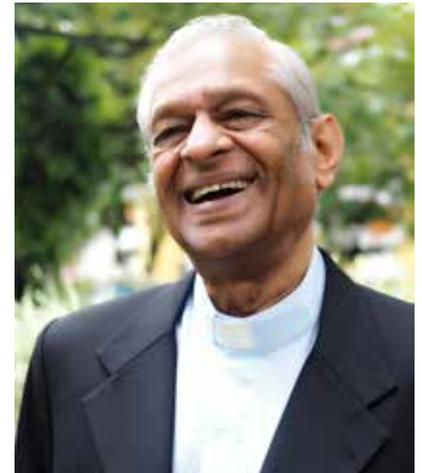


*Bargains galore and face painting for the adventurous.*



# Being Vincentian is Seeing Christ in the Poor

*SSVP's Spiritual Advisor, Fr Eugene Vaz, shares his thoughts on, "What it means to be a Vincentian".*



## God Lives in His People

Two bedrock beliefs are the foundation for Vincentian Spirituality:

- Firstly, God is the most real and the most precious reality there is
- Secondly, this precious God lives in His people

This is what gives us reason to metaphorically "take our shoes off" when we come into the presence of those we serve.

Anyone wanting the key to St Vincent de Paul's "great soul" cannot get much closer than meditating on these two convictions – two beliefs which, for Vincent, were wrapped one inside the other.

They are his answer to, "Why stop to help a crumpled old man who can't help you back?"

## Seeing Poor and Marginalised Persons in a New Light

St Vincent's metaphor is of a beat-up, dented, scratched, scarred, and very common coin, which turns out to have another side.

It is applied to the beat-up, dented, dime-a-dozen, mostly invisible ones – the poor people. "Why treat that common nobody on the ground as if he is a

somebody?"

Here is Vincent's answer: I shouldn't judge poor peasants, men or women, by their surface appearance, nor by their apparent mental capacities. And this is hard to do, since very frequently they scarcely seem to have the semblance or the intelligence of reasonable beings, so gross and so offensive are they. But, turn the coin, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by just these people. (XI Conference #19, p.32)

## The Poor, Our Treasure

As followers of St Vincent de Paul, we are "People of the Scarred Coin."

We are God-touched individuals

who have been awakened to the worth of everyone around us – especially the ones who most easily get pushed off the screen, the poor. We see their value – the treasure on the other side of that scarred coin – and respond to it with deep respect.

We honour the preciousness of people and the face of God in them all.

## Friends of the Poor

We see the poor as "our Lords and masters," and we learn to become their servants.

God also invites us to experience those who are poor as our friends.

The poor help us to understand the relationship we should have with Jesus, in which our Lord and Master becomes our friend. 

## When a person is invited to join the Society

is it in terms of humanitarian service, not very different from an invitation from Lions or Rotary

or is it in terms of an invitation to grow in the life of Christ?

How are you growing in your intimacy with Christ?

How is your life in Christ expressed as a Vincentian?