



## Welcoming space for all

*SSVP House and SSVP Shop become a reality.*

After several months of renovation work overseen by a dedicated team of Vincentians, the Society of St Vincent de Paul's SSVP House was blessed and inaugurated on 21 September.

The building, located at 501 Geylang Road, also houses the Society's first social enterprise project, the SSVP Shop.

Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee inaugurated the building. Also present were Member of Parliament, Marine Parade GRC Prof Fatimah Lateef, Chairman of Charity Council and Agency for Integrated Care Mr Gerard Ee, Vincentians and friends and supporters of SSVP.



*SSVP House and SSVP Shop.*

Father Eugene Vaz, SSVP's Spiritual Advisor blessed SSVP House. Later, Minister Lee unveiled

a plaque together with Fr Vaz.

In his remarks, Minister Lee thanked SSVP for partnering the Government to help the vulnerable with "dedication and care, regardless of their race, religion or nationality". He also acknowledged the important role SSVP plays in strengthening Singapore's social safety net.

Ms Florence Tan, SSVP's National Council President, acknowledged that SSVP cannot carry out its mission by itself and thanked the Catholic community and other generous donors for their financial support. She expressed the Society's gratitude for the gift of a bequest from the estate of an



*A happy group of Vincentians posing with (4th from left) Fr Vaz, Minister Lee, Ms Florence Tan, Prof Fatimah Lateef, Mr Gerard Ee (extreme right).*

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anonymous benefactor which has made SSVP House possible. An executor of the estate was present at the function. SSVP has a presence in 29 parishes and SSVP House will be the Society's 30th outreach centre supporting its mission to help the poor and vulnerable in the community. SSVP House has been designed as a welcoming community space where anyone, regardless of nationality, race, religion or background is always welcome. Vincentians and volunteers will be there, ready to lend a listening ear to them. An



*Fr Vaz blessing SSVP House.*

SSVP social worker will also be present to extend assistance if necessary.

Visitors will also be able to purchase quality, new and pre-loved merchandise such as apparel, accessories, electrical and household items at affordable prices at the SSVP Shop, which is on the ground floor of SSVP House. Profits from the SSVP Shop will help fund and sustain SSVP programmes and initiatives for its Friends-in-Need (FINs).

SSVP Shop looks forward to your support and patronage so that SSVP can sustainably continue its mission to serve the poor and make a positive impact in the lives of its FINs. 

## COME VISIT THE SSVP SHOP

### SSVP Shop details :

Address: 501, Geylang Road

Singapore 389459

Tel : 69742480

Email : [shop@ssvpsingapore.org](mailto:shop@ssvpsingapore.org)

Facebook: [SSVPShopSG](https://www.facebook.com/SSVPShopSG)

Operating Hours : Tuesday – Sunday (10am – 6pm)

Closed on Monday



### Donation to SSVP Shop

#### What can I donate?

If you have pre-loved items that are new or in good saleable conditions, we will be happy to receive your donation. We accept :

1. Apparel for men, women and children
2. Fashion accessories (handbags, sunglasses, watches, jewellery, etc)
3. Children's toys
4. Electrical items (handphones, notebooks, etc.)
5. Handicraft items
6. Kitchenware and household appliances
7. Sports equipment and musical instruments

Due to space constraints, we are not able to accept bulky items such as furniture. We do not accept shoes, books, CDs, VCDs, DVDs or Blu-ray discs, or any soiled, broken and faulty items.

As a rule of thumb, if you would give the item to a friend or use it yourself, then, the item should be good as a donation to the SSVP Shop.

#### Where can I drop off my donations?

1. Call 69742480 to make an appointment to make the donation in kind every Tuesday between 10am to 2pm at the SSVP warehouse located at 122 Eunos Avenue 7, #06-20 Richfield Industrial Centre, Singapore 409575.
2. We also organise donation drives regularly for you to donate your items to us.

Details for an upcoming donation drive are as follows:

Date : 8 Dec 2019, Sunday

Time : 9am – 1pm

Venue : St Anne's Church

Address : 66 Sengkang East Way, Singapore 548593

# Walking in Faith

*Esther Tan, a 22-year-old polytechnic student, shares her faith journey and the helping hand she received from SSVP.*

When I was young, my dad who was a faithful Catholic, would take me to church. Although my mum is not a Catholic she was always very supportive. So, weekend masses were a must for us as we prayed together.

When my father passed away in 2012, I began to feel lonely and lacking guidance for my many doubts and questions, I stopped going to church. I became lost in my faith journey and we were also experiencing financial difficulties.

## SSVP support

In 2012, my aunt highlighted our plight to the Vincentians at SSVP Christ the King Conference. With their support we managed to live a better life and not have to worry all the time. While it is not a good feeling to be considered 'poor', we were glad to know that we could count on the SSVP as a helping hand when needed.

At first, I thought SSVP would just offer the cursory financial help, but I was totally wrong. On top of seeing to our basic needs, Vincentians also extended the hand of friendship and I witnessed first-hand their 'humanity'. They made an impact on our lives. They encouraged me to study hard and to live my life to the fullest. I received both encouragement and an educational bursary from the SSVP which motivated me to work harder in my studies.



*Esther Tan is happy to have found her way home to Christ.*

## Beginning a new faith journey

When my mum fell sick in 2018, I began to collect the rations for my family and was struck by the care and concern that the SSVP members had for us. They always followed-up on our care. In particular, Bernadette inspired me; she is humble, caring and a dedicated member who checked on us regularly. I was also touched and inspired by the Catholic songs played on monthly ration days and began looking forward to ration day.

The experience also inspired me to help serve the young and old

in SSVP when I started working. I now hope to create awareness about the wonderful work done by SSVP and inspire more people to help contribute to the community.

More importantly, these experiences started to bring me closer to Christ. Words cannot express my feelings. Songs and prayers at each ration day helped to cheer and inspire everyone. It made me feel great, filling me with joy.

So it was just natural that I decided to join the RCIA as I found my faith in Christ and I want to continue my faith journey with Him. 

# Light at the End of the Tunnel

*Vincentians journey with a struggling family to put their life on a better footing.*

By LAURA CHUA

The Pannerchelvam family comprises Mr Pannerchelvam, his wife Mdm Pusppa (both 60) and their sons Shanger and Karthikgeyan (22 and 21 years old respectively). They live in a two-room HDB rental flat.

SSVP has been providing financial assistance and support to the family since 2011, when Mr Pannerchelvam, the family's sole breadwinner, became unwell and was not able to work. He had been a cleaner at a fast food chain for 26 years. Mdm Pusppa also had to stop work as a cleaner because of health issues.

To help the family, Shanger who was then in secondary school started to work part-time. The situation soon took its toll and he did badly at the O-Level examination. Despite receiving financial assistance from various agencies including the SSVP, he dropped out of school and started to work to further assist with the family's financial needs. Shanger wanted to give Karthikgeyan the chance to complete his education.

Karthikgeyan was facing challenges trying to keep pace with his peers in school and was often bullied. However, he persevered and eventually enrolled in the ITE where he achieved significant success receiving the Director's List Award twice in a year. His success spurred him to encourage Shanger to pursue his education. Shanger who enrolled in ITE has not looked back since.

## Stabilised

Their lives are more stable now. The parents' health condition is



*Shanger (left) with the rest of the Pannerchelvam family.*

under control. Shanger is now in the final year at Nanyang Polytechnic and is working towards entering the university. Receiving the LKY-STEP Award in polytechnic was also a proud moment for him. Karthikgeyan is now serving his National Service and has plans to enrol in a healthcare related course in a polytechnic.

## Vincentian support

Shanger and Karthikgeyan are very grateful to the many Vincentians who have journeyed with the family through the trying years. They recalled fondly, the breakfast buffet provided by SSVP when their mother used to take them to collect their monthly financial aid at the Church of the Sacred Heart. It was a treat that they looked forward to each month as there were times the family had to make do with only biscuits.

When Mdm Pusppa was too unwell to make the monthly trip to the church, thoughtful Vincentians brought the financial aid together with the food packages to their home. Vincentians would even take the boys out for an

occasional meal and drive the entire family to attend the church carnival.

The boys are grateful to the SSVP for the help of basic necessities including the rental for their flat in the early years.

The SSVP even helped them to manage and settle the arrears in their water bill.

In 2014, when they moved to a one-room rental flat in Hougang, SSVP seamlessly transitioned the case from Sacred Heart Conference to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Conference, without disruption of aid or care for the family.

## Kindness

The thoughtfulness and kindness of the Vincentians have left a deep impression on the boys. Acknowledged Karthikgeyan: "Vincentians also have their own lives to lead and are busy too. They did not have to visit the family so frequently, but they did. This meant a lot to us." He was referring to the time when his mother was sick and in hospital.

## A listening ear

When Shanger was juggling school and part-time work he experienced stress and frustration but did not want to burden his mother with his problems and issues. Support came from Robert, a Vincentian, who was there to lend him a listening ear and counsel him. "It helped me

# A Mission Rooted in Love for God

*SSVP celebrates annual Feast Day mass at the Church of the Holy Family.*

**F**ifty-five new Vincentians gathered before the altar and took their pledge in the presence of Archbishop William Goh on 27 September, the feast day of St Vincent de Paul.

The pledge-taking was at the end of the mass celebrated by the Archbishop at the Church of the Holy Family.

In his homily, Archbishop Goh told Vincentians that they are privileged to have St Vincent de Paul as a teacher and model from whom they could seek inspiration for their charitable mission.

He asked Vincentians to follow in the footsteps of their patron saint who was able to gather the rich, the nobility and the poor for the mission. Likewise,

***“I feel that being a Vincentian is God’s will for me. I am excited to do God’s will. My RCIA journey leading to my baptism in 2017 made me realise that we are all children of God. I have been blessed and I hope as a Vincentian, I can reach out and help those who are in need.”***

*~ Sharon Cheu (left), a new Vincentian from the Conference of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*



*New Vincentians taking their pledge.*

Vincentians could work with various collaborators to advance their mission.

The feast day celebrations continued with dinner at a nearby restaurant. 

***“It is humbling to be welcomed into the Vincentian family and to have the opportunity to serve the disadvantaged for the glory of God. I wanted to be a Vincentian because of my desire to develop a closer relationship with God and to serve Jesus in the poor. I hope through my mission as a Vincentian, I can contribute towards a better community for all.”***

*~ Adele Tang (right), another new Vincentian from the Conference of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

## Recognition

*Thirteen Vincentians were honoured during the annual feast day dinner for their long years of service to the poor.*

50 years – **Joseph John** - Conference of Our Lady of Lourdes

25 years – **Jenny Chew** - Conference of Christ the King

**Bernadette Kam** - Christ the King

**Doreen See Yoke Khuan** - Our Lady of Lourdes

**Helen See Yoke Mui** - Our Lady of Lourdes

**K Sivamalar** - Our Lady of Lourdes

**Gilbert Lopez** - St Louise de Marillac

**Stanley Lim** - St Stephen

**Jenny Chua** - St Ignatius

**Pauline Woo** - Sacred Heart

**Joseph Ng** - Sacred Heart

**Doris Phua** - Sacred Heart

**Andrew Heng** - Sacred Heart

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a lot just to talk to Mr Robert,” said Shanger. Engaging in martial arts-related classes in ITE, he was often going home bruised and sometimes badly hurt. Robert made him see how this was undermining his efforts in achieving his life’s dreams. “If not for Mr Robert I would not be

where I am today”, Shanger said candidly.

## Paying it forward

A Vincentian once told Shanger that one does not need financial means to be able to help others. Help could be in the form of one’s time or talent. Shanger decided to pay it forward by offering to help

the SSVP move boxes when it was setting up its SSVP Shop. He was overjoyed to be able to return some of the kindness his family received.

The family has definitely come a long way. Although their issues and challenges are not totally behind them, they are now a picture of stability and contentment. 

# Happenings In And Around Your Parish

*The SSVP Conferences at the 29 parishes in Singapore provide not only financial aid but also spiritual and moral support to their Friends-in-Need (FINs). They also work actively with their fellow parishioners and parish ministries for the benefit of the larger parish community.*

## Holy Family Conference



*Helping to feed a resident at a Home.*

**T**he Conference of the Holy Family Church serves the needs of the poor typically within the Marine Parade district.

In addition to visiting FINs in their homes, members also work closely with social service agencies to provide the FINs better support. For eg, when certain FINs had issues with bed bugs in their homes, members were able to quickly tackle the problem with the support and resources of the Family Service Centre.

But the Conference's work is not limited to the adopted FINs. Members also visit the old and sick in various Homes. The Conference sponsors food and gifts to the residents and sometimes even cook for them. This year, the Conference facilitated the donation of 100kg of rice to a Home and another 50kg of rice to the Marine Parade Family Service Centre. More efforts are ongoing.

## Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Conference

**M**embers of SSVP's IHM Conference demonstrated their commitment to their parish by taking the lead in organising this year's parish feast day celebrations. They came up with the theme of 'Around the World' for the festivities that followed the feast day mass on 9 June. In addition to selling tickets in the weeks running up to the feast day, setting up the various food and entertainment stalls, SSVP members also helped other church ministry groups to set up stalls focusing on food from various countries around the world. The Conference also ran the Indian and Philippines stalls. The concept was a big hit with the priests and parishioners who attended.

Later, on 7 September, the Conference organised a picnic in the park for 42 of its FINs. This gave members an opportunity to interact with the FINs in a relaxed atmosphere as they shared a simple meal with them. As the sun went down and the park was lit up with lanterns of the mid-Autumn festival, the FINs were treated to a feast of durians, rambutans and mangosteens, sponsored by a Vincentian.



*A picnic in the park for IHM FINs.*

## Queen of Peace Conference

SSVP's Queen of Peace Conference actively involves parishioners and other parish ministries in its work. This is done with an eye to increasing the community's understanding of the Society and its mission, as well as to serve as the bridge between the community and its FINs.

On 13 July, SSVP members together with 17 youths and young adults from the youth group, Eden, visited the homes of two FINs who reside in rented flats along Cassia Street. Equipped with cleaning materials and filled with God's love, members happily set to work to spruce up the homes of these two families.

Although not professional cleaners, the youths and young adults eagerly undertook their cleaning tasks with a sense of camaraderie and a lot of positivity. They cleared choked sinks, cleaned dirty toilets and even employed their persuasion skills to convince the FINs to de-clutter their homes.

## St Ignatius Conference



*Children enjoying arts and craft.*

Since 2014, FINs' children under the St Ignatius Conference and girls from the Ahuva Good Shepherd Home have reaped benefits from its 'Kids Project' initiative.

These monthly activities range from career talks to craft sessions and even self-defence classes which offer exposure to different skills and values. This gives Vincentians a good opportunity to interact with the children. These girls are generally from families that face special challenges. As such, many of the activities planned are aimed at providing meaningful distraction for them, from their daily worries they might have back home and to build their confidence.

In May, the children got to unleash their creativity through watercolour art. Vincentians and volunteers joined in the fun and together they created beautiful masterpieces. The session ended with light refreshments and the children are already looking forward to their next session.



*The QoP Conference cleaning crew.*

Then on 31 August, spurred by the success of their first home-cleaning efforts, a group of young people came together to clean and repaint the unit of one of their FINs.

While the FINs benefitted from cleaner homes, this exercise also served to improve their spiritual well-being, by providing a form of companionship to them.

For the youths and young adults, these are opportunities to understand SSVP's work and hopefully encourage them to do more charitable work in the community and/or join the SSVP cause.

## Risen Christ Conference

The Risen Christ Conference holds its Ration Day once a month. On one such ration day on 31 August, Conference members and volunteers turned up to distribute cash aid, rations as well as snacks to their FINs.

While some members distributed the cash aid, others interacted with the FINs. They gave out snacks and helped manage the food ration distribution point. There is usually a choice of more than 10 different items for the FINs to choose from, and there's usually something for each family to take home.



*SSVP members distributing rations to FINs.*

# Touched by the poor

*Journey of Michael Thio,  
the first from Asia to  
head SSVP globally.*

By PATRICK JONAS

The many poor he saw in the community while he was growing up left a deep impression on the young Michael Thio. He was also influenced by his mother who instilled in him the need to help these people. Years later, he happened to be present in the Church of the Sacred Heart when members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) were distributing rations. He felt a “calling” and at the comparatively young age of 22, Michael joined the SSVP.

It was the start of a journey that took him from Singapore to Paris. As President General of the Council General International (CGI), the headquarters of SSVP from 2010 to 2016, Michael became the first Asian to hold that post.

Michael became a Vincentian in 1967, and was elected President of the National Council of the SSVP in 1987, 20 years after he joined the Society. He served in that role for 18 years. He faced many challenges, juggling the work of the SSVP with the demands of his own professional career. An accountant by training, Michael progressed in his work and became the Managing



Director of British Telecom for South East Asia (SEA). He never let the pressures of his career force him to give up his work as a Vincentian.

He had his share of sorrows too. He lost his only child, Kenny, to cancer at the age of 30 in 2003. But Michael held on to his faith in God and drawing deep from his Vincentian spirituality, continued to work for the benefit of the less privileged. He also took on more responsibilities globally for the SSVP. Seeing the work that he was doing, the then President General of SSVP appointed him first as the International Vice-President in 1999 and then as the International Vice-President General in 2005. Five years later, Michael was elected President General of the Society. That same year, he was conferred a doctorate, Doctor of Humanities by the Adamson University, Manila.

During the six years he was at the helm, Michael visited about 60 countries to witness at first hand the work of Vincentians in those countries. And what he saw warmed his heart. In some countries Vincentians, who were themselves poor, would share their food and other produce they

cultivated with the needy in their community. “A touching situation of the poor serving the poor,” he observed.

As President General, Michael succeeded in getting the SSVP admitted as a member of the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations (UN).

During his tenure, Michael reorganised and expanded the global footprint of the international structure of SSVP.

After Michael was elected President General he was appointed to the Pontifical Council Cor Unum (an advisory council to the Holy Father on promoting integral human development that also addresses global humanitarian and charitable issues). This saw him attending meetings with Pope Benedict and later Pope Francis as a member of this Vatican body from 2010 to 2017.

Now 74, Michael admits that he needs to slow down but he is busy as ever. He continues to be an honorary Advisor to the CGI and is involved in several church related organisations. In October, he was appointed chairman of the Catholic Welfare Services. He is a member of the Archdiocese Finance Commission, chairman of the Catholic Kindergarten Management Board and a Counsellor to the National Council of SSVP. He is also a Knight of the Order of Malta and an animator-cum-lector at the Church of the Sacred Heart.

He credits his wife Rosalind, who he married in 1971, for supporting him in his Vincentian work. The youthful-looking Michael keeps himself fit by going for brisk walks, gardening and a weekly round of golf. 