



# Overcoming Covid challenges

*Vincentians ensure help reaches the needy at all times*

When strict measures were announced to combat the spread of Covid, the immediate challenge for members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) was how to get cash aid and rations to the people under their care. Fortunately, before the Circuit Breaker measures came into force in early April, the Society made arrangements to transfer cash aid electronically and in many cases ensured rations were delivered to their Friends in Need (FINs).

Vincentians kept in constant touch with their FINs over the phone to make sure they were doing well and offered them advice and emotional support. One conference even arranged to send simple board games to some families with young children, who were bored while cooped up at home. Since then, SSVP has initiated several initiatives to ensure the well-being of the FINs. Even as Covid started to spread, SSVP distributed masks and hand sanitisers to all its FINs in April. SSVP then proceeded to obtain approval from the National Council of Social Service to distribute care packs to all its FINs. This distribution was done in the first week of June.

Later, SSVP teamed up with Temasek Trust's oscar@sg fund to distribute provision vouchers to its FINs. Along the way, other generous



*FINs with grocery vouchers and other essential items donated by SSVP in collaboration with Temasek Trust's oscar@sg fund. This is one of several projects undertaken by SSVP since the Covid-19 outbreak.*

donors pitched in to ensure that more help reached the needy. SSVP, along with volunteers of its Milk and Diaper (MaD) programme also delivered re-conditioned laptops from Engineering Good to some 150 children of FINs who needed them for their home-based learning. Another donor also prepared some 150 MP3 players with local Chinese dialects, Tamil and Malay songs for the elderly FINs.

SSVP's nationwide care packs distribution for its 2,300 FIN families on 6 and 7 June had to be distributed 'contactless' and this was

done during Phase 1 of Singapore's Circuit Breaker. The care packs were initiated and sponsored by an anonymous donor. Cookies, muffins and vitamin C tablets were included along with masks and bottles of antibacterial hand wash in each care pack.

While observing social distancing and other relevant Covid-19 guidelines, our committed members and volunteers worked hand in hand with all 29 SSVP Conferences and their teams to ensure smooth packing and distribution of the

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care packs to their FINs across the island, in a coordinated exercise.

Usually the distribution would see Vincentians interacting closely with their FINs but this time around, the former could merely pass the packs to each FIN/household, at their door. Nonetheless, this hardly deterred most FINs from expressing their gratitude. Said Peter Ng, a Vincentian from IHM Conference who delivered the care packs to numerous FINs: “The FINs were very happy to receive the care packs and were grateful for the items we delivered as at that point in time these items were expensive.”

Agape Village’s car park was designated as the goods collection and distribution point. Our teams started the process a day before, on 5 June, ensuring the receipt of the goods and then setting out to fill each care pack bag with the different items.

SSVP wishes to thank all its donors for their generosity in



*Care packs being readied for distribution at Agape Village during the Circuit Breaker period.*

making the distribution of aid and care packs a success. This includes Caritas and Agape Village for providing us the space for collection and packing. 

— With inputs from Gabriel Wee



*Vincentians in action, distributing care packs and essential items including vouchers to FINs.*



## You can help

If you wish to donate and help the poor served by SSVP, you can do so via PayNow (our UEN code is: S61SS0149BNCS) or you can go to our website <https://ssvpsingapore.org> to scan a QR code using your banking app. You can also issue a cheque to “SSVP NC Singapore” and mail it to the SSVP Office, 7A Lorong 8, Toa Payoh, #04-01 Agape Village, Singapore 319264.

# Laptops cheer up our children

*SSVP partners Engineering Good in its “Computers against Covid” initiative*

When students in Singapore schools and institutes of higher learning were required by the authorities to shift to home-based learning (HBL) in April 2020, many children from low-income families were affected. They were unable to participate in HBL as their families could not afford the cost of a laptop or computer. The Ministry of Education tried to provide each family with one device but there were not enough devices to cope with the huge demand, resulting in many children being compelled to use their parents' handphones and some even had to share them with their siblings.

When volunteers and members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul's (SSVP) Milk and Diapers (MaD) programme came to know of this situation among the many families they help, they got in touch with Engineering Good, a tech-based non-profit organisation.

Engineering Good had started an initiative, “Computers against Covid” to collect pre-owned laptops, refurbish them and distribute to students of low-income families.

“What we set out to do is to make sure that the kids have the tools to learn... because we don't want these kids to be losing out just because they don't have these simple tools that others have — people have spare laptops!” said Johann Annuar, Executive Director of Engineering Good.

When this initiative by Engineering Good was broadcast by MaD volunteers to the families under their care, the response was tremendous. Within three



weeks, more than 50 laptops were distributed. Some families even got more than one laptop as the aim was to provide one for each school going child.

By end of April 2020, the initiative was extended to all children in the families cared for by SSVP in Singapore. As word got around, there were more requests for laptops and by end September 2020, more than 150 laptops were given to children of SSVP's Friends in Need (FINs). Indeed, one of our beneficiaries, Muhammad Fazari bin Shahrin, was interviewed for a special feature by British Broadcasting Corporation on the distribution of laptops for HBL in Singapore.

The beneficiaries are extremely grateful to SSVP and Engineering Good for enabling them to gain access to laptops free of charge – something they would not have been able to afford, especially in the current difficult economic environment where even daily sustenance may be an issue for them.

Said MH, a student who received a laptop: “I'm very grateful. Thank you for the laptop that you give to my family. It (is) very useful to me and my family. (It) is very convenient for me to do my online homework and communicate with my teachers and also help my family

to send out online applications. Thank you so much for supporting my family.”

His father shared with SSVP that the laptop has not only helped his child in his HBL but also expanded his child's knowledge and interaction skills. He added that his child even helped him and his wife, who are from Indonesia and not competent in English, to send out online job and assistance applications.

One mother told a MaD volunteer that the laptops had eased hers and her children's stress as they did not need to worry about not being able to follow lessons in class. The children are now happy and motivated to do their school work on their own.

Another recipient of a refurbished laptop sent a photo thanking the MaD volunteers and said he will study hard to make his family proud.

We thank Engineering Good for this initiative and we are glad we could play a part in bringing cheer to many disadvantaged children. SSVP and MaD Exco also appreciate the work done by MaD volunteers and Vincentians who had gone out to seek families whose children have no laptops, doing the 'extra' for the love of God and neighbour. 

# When a baby cries

*SSVP's Milk and Diapers programme assists 180 little ones and their families across Singapore*

Five years ago, the Society of St Vincent de Paul launched the Milk and Diapers (MaD) programme. The aim was to ease the hardships faced by low income families with young children who were struggling to provide their babies with milk and diapers. Believing strongly that no child should go without basic sustenance and nutrition in their crucial growing up years, the SSVP set about to ensure this. Volunteers of the MaD programme not only deliver milk and diapers but also provide friendship and support. Many of these families experience hardship and loneliness in their personal struggles and this support helps in decreasing the social isolation experienced by families with complex needs. The volunteers serve as the 'eyes and ears' on the ground to assist social service agencies by looking out for the children's well-being. The MaD programme also assists babies and young children whose mothers have sought refuge at shelters. Today, a total of 180 babies are cared for by the MaD programme across Singapore.



## Covid-19 challenges

The Covid pandemic has greatly affected the way we work with the families we assist under the MaD programme. Milk and diapers still have to be delivered and it is done with little or minimal contact. Many of the parents have suffered loss of income or jobs. Some of the children did not have laptops for home-based learning and were stuck at home with no

activities to occupy them. Through the generosity of donors and in partnership with other volunteer groups like Engineering Good and Hopefull, we were able to alleviate some of the difficulties faced by these families and provide some activities for the children. Our

volunteers have also responded admirably and wholeheartedly helped with the challenges thrown up by the pandemic.

It was fortuitous that as an exception, two months' (instead of the usual one month's) supply of milk and diapers were delivered in the first week of April, just before the circuit breaker measures kicked in. Our MaD families were able to manage without running out of nutrition for their babies throughout the most intense segment of the circuit breaker period. When limited movement was permitted almost two months later, it was restricted to involving a greatly reduced number of authorised volunteers. Thus volunteers had to shoulder more than double their usual workload to ensure families did not run out of milk. Currently, our full complement of volunteers is allowed to make deliveries. Volunteers, in complying with social distancing requirements, have either ceased or kept contact to a minimum during their monthly visits at the time of deliveries. While physical contact is minimised, many have kept in touch with our families through messaging services.

Just before circuit breaker, a number of generous donors came forward and offered cash to assist families affected by Covid, either through reduced income or loss of jobs. Our volunteers were invited to recommend families who might qualify. Subject to an approval process, 63 MaD families successfully obtained cash grants of \$750 (in three equal



## 2021 TARGET

**230** babies

**\$110** per baby/  
per month

**\$300,000**  
(total cost)

instalments) from this group of private donors. Many of the recipients were very grateful for the additional help in meeting daily expenses, at the time when they most needed it.

### Challenges ahead

There are currently 180 babies under the MaD programme, 150 cared for by our group of volunteers in the West and 30 in the East. There are about 120 volunteers in the programme and we work with social service agencies such as Fei Yue Family Service, Kampong Kapor Community Service, Singapore Anglican Community Service, Care Corner and Reach Community Service. These agencies recommend families who have been interviewed and cleared by the relevant authorities to be eligible for aid.

Our target, in response to more recommendations from our partner agencies, is to increase the number of babies supported under the MaD programme to 230 for 2021. The monthly cost per child varies from \$80 to \$180, depending on the type of age-dependent milk formula. We estimate an average of \$110 per child per month going forward which means we will need \$300,000 for the 2021 programme. All the money that we get from donations are used for the supply of milk and diapers.

We had several plans to raise money for 2021 but Covid has disrupted those plans. In past years we used to hold a MaD Day at the Church of St Ignatius in September/October, a Chinese New Year cookies sale and a fund-raising collection drive in church.

So far, we have been fortunate to have generous individuals step forward to fund our activities.

The MaD programme is run by SSVP Ltd, an affiliate of SSVP. SSVP Ltd has run a campaign on giving.sg, and we have been blessed with donations from Hong Leong Foundation and Vena Engineering. We were also able to get funds from Temasek's oscar@sg fund. We continue to reach out to generous corporations and individuals to raise the required money needed for MaD next year.

**If you wish to donate to our MaD programme, please issue your cheque donation to 'SSVP Ltd' and mail it to their registered address at 501 Geylang Road, Singapore 389459. If you like to volunteer with us please contact us at [milk.n.diapers@ssvpsingapore.org](mailto:milk.n.diapers@ssvpsingapore.org).** 

## Sweet relief

*SSVP raises \$50,000 from sale of chocolates donated by The Cocoa Trees*

When homegrown chocolate retailer The Cocoa Trees came to know about the Society of St Vincent de Paul's (SSVP) efforts to raise funds for the poor, they kindly offered a selection of its exquisite chocolates.

The sales campaign was launched on 16 September. SSVP's National Council President Florence Tan said: "The response was overwhelming. The first 2,000 sets of chocolates were sold out within 72 hours." These included an assortment of Toblerone mini, Galaxy and Brookside chocolates combo sets.



The astounding response spurred Mrs Esther Tang Loo, Executive Director of The Cocoa Trees, to donate an additional 3,000 sets of chocolates for the charity sale. The chocolates included Milky Way mini, Toblerone White mini, Toblerone Almond Crunch, Milka Nut and Raisin Bar and Toffifee chocolate combo sets.

"In these difficult times, we thought this would be something meaningful on our part to do to help the needy," said Mrs Loo.

The chocolates included Milky Way mini, Toblerone White mini, Toblerone Almond Crunch, Milka Nut and Raisin Bar and Toffifee chocolate combo sets. By mid-October, SSVP had raised close to \$50,000 from the sale of the chocolates.

Reacting to the success of the campaign, Ms Florence said: "SSVP is deeply touched by the spontaneous help and generosity rendered by Mrs Loo and The Cocoa Trees. The project taught Vincentians to fish for the Society (selling chocolates to raise funds for the poor) and also promoted 'double gifting.' Many adopted the pay-it-forward initiative by gifting their chocolate purchases to essential workers such as cleaners and security personnel as a gesture of gratitude. While some donated them to vulnerable persons and other non-profit organisations in the community." 

# Feast Day with a difference

*Mass celebrated by Apostolic Nuncio streamed live from Church of St Francis Xavier*

The Society of St Vincent de Paul celebrates the feast of St Vincent de Paul on 27 September usually with a mass celebrated either by His Grace the Archbishop of Singapore or the Society's Spiritual Director. Conferences take turns to host the mass every year and Vincentians from all over Singapore attend this mass. The mass is followed by an enjoyable dinner paid for by members. Vincentians look forward to the mass and dinner as it gives them an opportunity to meet fellow Vincentians from other Conferences while enjoying the music and merry-making.

This year was different. Due to Covid restrictions, the usual gathering of Vincentians in one venue was not possible. The feast day mass was celebrated two days earlier, on 25 September as the actual feast day fell on a Sunday. The Church of St Francis Xavier stepped forward to host the mass and the volunteers and Vincentians of the church did a fantastic job of making sure everything was in order.

The occasion was unique in that it was the first time the feast day

mass was streamed live over YouTube and Vincentians could also watch it through Zoom. Another first was that the mass was celebrated by Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See, His Excellency Archbishop Marek Zalewski. Only 45 people were physically present for the mass as only Vincentians who were registered in the Church of St Francis Xavier were allowed in. But this did not deter nearly 500 Vincentians from participating in the online service.

In his homily, Archbishop Zalewski said St Vincent de Paul treated the poor as friends and family, as brothers and sisters. He considered serving the poor not only a command or an obligation of obedience from Jesus Christ, but rather a privilege. He brought them the presence of Christ with a charity that was genuine, gentle and joyful. He added that Vincentians are the Lord's workers and asked the Lord to bless their work.

This year 38 new Vincentians from 12 Conferences took their pledge online while the services of seven Vincentians who completed 25 years of serving the poor were acknowledged. Usually they are presented with a certificate and a commemorative plaque on the feast day but this year the certificates and plaques were presented to them on a later date.

In her address, National Council



*The Feast Day mass was celebrated by Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See Archbishop Marek Zalewski.*



*Vincentian Michael Zee from Holy Cross, one of the seven who completed 25 years of serving the poor, with the spiritual advisor of his Conference Fr Robertus Sarwiseso.*



*SSVP Spiritual Advisor Fr Eugene Vaz and NC President Florence Tan with the Apostolic Nuncio.*

President, Florence Tan thanked the parish priest of the Church of St Francis Xavier, Fr Benedict Chng for providing the facilities to celebrate the feast day mass and also the church members who volunteered to take on different roles for the smooth conduct of the mass. She also thanked Archbishop Zalewski for celebrating the mass and sharing words of encouragement with the Vincentians. 

# AGM held over Zoom

ON August 21, the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) held its 65th Annual General Meeting (AGM). The difference this year was that the meeting was held over Zoom. The AGM was scheduled to be held in May but was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for online arrangements to be set up.

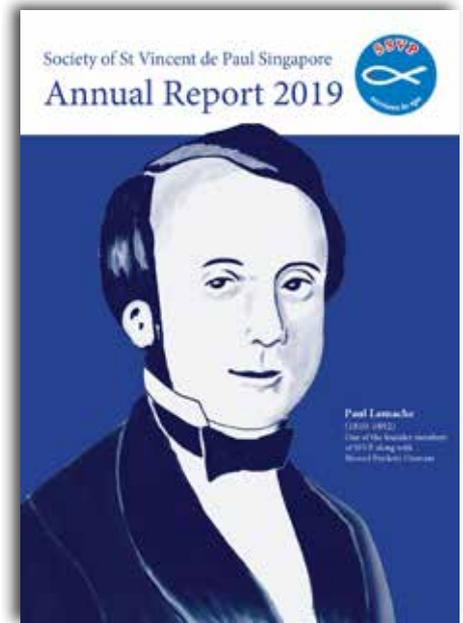
After the opening prayer, the Society's Spiritual Advisor Fr Eugene Vaz spoke about the teachings of Jesus quoting from the Gospel of St Matthew. Jesus had told the Pharisees that one should love one's neighbour as oneself and that it was, together with the love of God, the greatest commandment. Fr Vaz urged Vincentians to keep this in mind. The people in

need that we serve are also our neighbours whom we must love and serve as we would want to be loved and served.

The President of the National Council of SSVP, Florence Tan, in her address, spoke of the year gone by and the challenges ahead. She thanked all the members for their support and gave a summary of the Society's response to the needs of the poor in 2019.

Treasurer Gabriel Lok then shared the income and expenditure of the Society for 2019. By majority vote, the Statement of the Management Committee and Audited Statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2019, together with the Auditors' Report were accepted.

The meeting, by majority vote,



re-elected Florence Tan as National Council President for the term August 2020 to May 2022. She has been President since 2016. ∞

## SSVP National Council Members and Sub Committee Leaders 21 Sept 2020 to May 2022

Conference	National Council	Name
	Spiritual Advisor	Rev Fr Eugene Vaz
IHM	President	Florence Tan
SFX	Vice President	Noel Low
St Joachim	Treasurer	Gabriel Lok
QoP	Asst Treasurer	Martin Loh
IHM	Gen Secretary	Patrick Neo
DM	Asst Gen Secretary	Lisa Lim
St Stephen	NC Ordinary Member	Stanley Lim
SFX	NC Ordinary Member (SVH)	James Ang
Nativity	NC Ordinary Member (CSO Leader/ SVH)	Patrick Foo
DM	NC Ordinary Member/ Youth Coordinator	Anselm Vincent
SLDM	NC Ordinary Member	Thomas Lew
Holy Cross	NC Ordinary Member	Ben Liew
COTT	NC Ordinary Member (PCS / CSO Assist)	Michael Koh
Holy Cross	NC Ordinary Member (PCW)	Joey Goh

Conference	NC Roles/ Functions appointed by NC President	
St Ignatius	Faith Formation & Devt	David Lau
IHM	Media & Communication	Patrick Jonas
IHM	International Twinning	Adrian Cher
RC	Legal advisor	Lew May May
OLPS	Legal advisor	Chan Yuen Leng
CTK	SSVP Shop	Teresa Yeo
St Joachim	FIN Management	Pius Ong
QoP	Dying with Dignity	Paul Foo
St Joachim	Best Practices - Financial & Code of Governance	Gabriel Lok

# Bringing hope to a young mother

By AUDREY PHOON



Like many other brides, Shanti (not her real name) had looked forward to a fairy-tale marriage. She dreamt of having a loving husband, a happy home and leading a simple, contented life.

She got none of that.

The nightmare began after her wedding in 2013, the year she turned 24. That's when she found out her husband had married her only to prevent his Permanent Resident status from being revoked. He also turned out to be a drug addict who forced her to hand over any money she had to feed his habit, and who abused her at will – mentally and physically.

“He would never let me out of the house. My phone, my valuables, my ATM cards – everything would be taken by him. Even the keys. He sort of put me on house arrest,” says Shanti.

Having three young children did nothing to change her husband's addiction or temper. During Shanti's pregnancies, he frequently hit her, aiming at her growing belly, and accused her of sleeping with other men. Once the kids were born, he took the government baby bonuses the family received after each child's birth, leaving Shanti with no money to buy milk for her infants.

“I couldn't even get proper sleep because every night he would hallucinate and demand to know who I was having an affair with,” recalls Shanti. “I wasn't allowed out, how could I have an affair? I

was very disturbed and super tired ... I felt I couldn't take it anymore.”

At a low, she applied for a divorce, only to have her family members discourage it because of the children. So she withdrew her application, though she felt it was the wrong thing to do. “It was so frustrating. He was in prison at the time, and what he had actually told me was, ‘why don't you give the children to a foster home?’ I was like, as a father, why would you even say that?”

The last straw came when Shanti's husband beat her in public till she bled. After visiting a hospital, she contacted the voluntary welfare organisation PAVE, which helped her to apply for a divorce in 2015.

Still, Shanti's troubles weren't over. She managed to get a healthcare assistant's job, but had to quit to look after her children when her 8-year-old daughter was diagnosed as suicidal, and her 7-year-old son with ADHD.

The constant battle with life's challenges often left Shanti feeling despondent and lonely. “I didn't have anyone to talk to, and people tend to laugh at me when I share my problems,” she says.

It was during one of those moments, in 2018, when the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) entered her life. “At that point in time, there was no food to put on the table and I was very depressed. Someone I knew introduced me to SSVP and they started helping me with so many things.” Beyond arranging

for financial assistance, the Society also connected Shanti with lawyers to get advice of bankruptcy and helped her send appeals to HDB regarding her rental housing.

SSVP continues to help Shanti and her family with vouchers and a monthly cash allowance. The Society also assisted her in trying to fulfil her lifelong dream. She had joined an ITE to study nursing and SSVP supported her with materials, uniforms and the medical checks needed.

Shanti has also grown close to SSVP, in particular SSVP's social office manager Meera Ramachandran, who has supported Shanti with advice and a listening ear. For Shanti, the SSVP is much more than a lifeline – it's family.

“I am especially grateful to Ms Meera, who has been there for me to motivate me whenever I want to give up. She even helped me babysit my kids.”

In August, Shanti had to put her nursing studies on hold to take care of her children despite doing well in her mid-term exams. But she is filled with hope for the future. “When my kids are bigger, I want to go back to nursing school and eventually help dementia patients – my grandmother was one. I think these patients have lost their past, so it's quite sad, and a lot of people, even nurses, don't understand them.

“I want to upgrade myself and serve the community. And one day, I hope to be a Director of Nursing.” 