



## Serving in Hope – Vincentians Celebrate Feast of St Vincent de Paul

*Every year, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul celebrates the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul on 27 September. This year, Vincentians came together for mass and dinner, for the first time since the COVID pandemic!*

Feast Day Mass was celebrated at the Church of the Sacred Heart by Rev. Fr. Jerome Leon, SJ, our newly appointed National Advisor with concelebrants Rev. Fr. Eugene Vaz (former SSVP National Spiritual Advisor), SSVP Conference Spiritual Advisors and representatives; Monsignor Stephen Yim (Church of the Sacred Heart), Fr. Paul Ngo (Church of Immaculate Heart of Mary), Fr. Michael Decruz (Church of St. Mary of the Angels), Fr. Robertus Sarwiseso (Church of the Holy Cross), Fr. Antony Kuttianickal, CMI (Church of the Transfiguration), Fr. Simon Ho (Church of St. Anne), and Fr. Luke Zhang (Church of the Holy Trinity). Sr. Janet Wang (Church of St Stephen) also attended.



During the homily, Fr. Jerome spoke about the importance of communicating with love and compassion. He said, “We are the ‘words’ God uses to communicate

love to others. We should be proud that we have been chosen to be part of this great mission of love, care and salvation. Not only for the people whom we serve but also for ourselves because in our service, we too encounter the Lord. Let us turn to the Lord and ask the Lord to shower us with the graces: the grace to continue to serve our brothers and sisters, our friends in need with great enthusiasm and also with great love.”

With over 400 Vincentians in attendance, we also welcomed 91 new Vincentians to the Society,



*Newly-pledged Vincentians and those celebrating 25 years of service received a warm round of applause from the congregation.*

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the highest number since the COVID pandemic. National Council President Ms. Lucy Cher led the Vincentians in reciting the Vincentian Pledge together.

After the Mass, Vincentians proceeded to the Feast Day Dinner at Qian Xi (Farrer Park) Restaurant. During her welcome address, Ms. Cher shared with Vincentians a brief glimpse of the Society's Strategic Plan, which will focus on six key strategic initiatives to be detailed during the town hall in October. She asked,

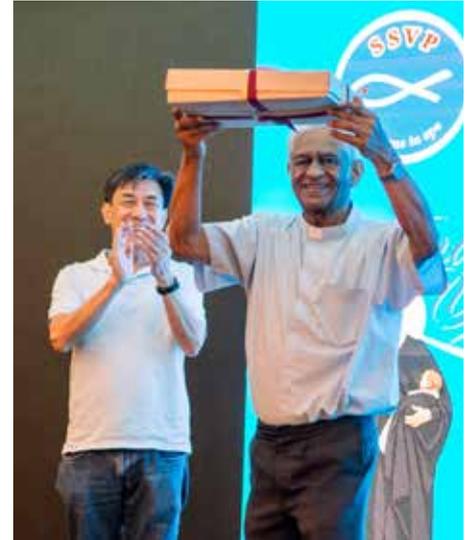


“Why do we Vincentians do what we do? Why do we give our time, effort, and energy to do this work? We cannot do this alone. Together, we grow in holiness, by loving and serving those in need. The Society belongs to you. Let us contribute together to bring it forward.”



*Celebrating SSVP's 140th Anniversary in Singapore with a cake-cutting ceremony.*

Vincentians also took the opportunity to thank Fr. Vaz, our National Spiritual Advisor who served for a decade, for his wisdom, guidance, service, and love. Fr. Vaz



was visibly affected as he watched a moving Thanksgiving video of SSVP members, committees and staff thanking him for his contributions through their songs and dance.

“I was so blessed to be able to delve into the richness of the mind and vision of St. Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam and to see how SSVP Singapore do our best to make that vision come alive. I see how the Society has grown and developed, where we find many ways to respond to the reality of poverty, need, and humanity. The challenges you face will increase.

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*Nine Vincentians celebrated 25 years of service and were presented with certificates of appreciation and commemorative plaques from Fr. Jerome Leon; (Left) Sam Kwek, Peter Wong, Mary Dass, Mona Ooi; (Right) George Koh, James Tan, Yvonne Choy and Joseph Rajendran.*



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I am so happy to be able to pass on the role to Fr. Jerome Leon. Thank you for all your support over the past ten years," said Fr. Vaz while receiving a token of appreciation from former National Council President Paul Foo.

The Feast Day Dinner, organised by the SSVP City Particular Council, was a ticketed event and Vincentians had the opportunity to enjoy the fellowship of members from the 29 conferences, the SSVP Youth Team, parish Spiritual Advisors, volunteers as well as staff from the Society and SSVP Ltd. 



Fr. Vaz with the SSVP Youth Team.

*This year, the Society welcomed 91 new Vincentians to the family. Here is the personal testimony written by newly-pledged Vincentian Geoffrey Lip from the SSVP Conference of Christ the King.*

"Go! Take him, he's very free!"

And with that, my wife had surrendered my time to Christ the King's Conference, giving SSVP 'license' to contact me at any time!

A kind gentleman called Joseph messaged me a day after the Conference's recruitment drive on 19 March, to invite me to their Ration Day.

To be fair to my wife, I had been discerning for some time for a way to serve the Lord. I just never considered SSVP as an avenue.

It was with a bit of hesitancy that I took off on Saturday morning, 1 April, for my first Ration Day. Before walking in, I said a quick prayer and offered the experience up into His hands. And in His hands, a slow miracle emerged, as the warmth of the members made me - and the dozen or so newbies/observers feel welcome.

There were also plenty of things to do and people to serve. The observers were tasked with packing rations and serving lunch to the Friends in Need (FINs). I realised that this was where our monthly second collection was going and how those funds were making a difference!

Even after lunch was served to the FINs, there was still more to do. Kind members, Marcus and his wife Charlene brought me on a round of home deliveries. This felt like faith in action, even before I had been properly introduced to the Society!

On Thursday, 6 April, President Teresa and members formally introduced us to the Society, its mission and the commitment required. We also interacted with several members, some of whom have been with the Society for more than 30 years!

Shortly after, we were introduced to the full range of activities that the Society engages in, from fortnightly meetings and reports to monthly second collections and visiting FINs to assess their cases.



The biggest event for us was the annual outing organised for the FINs - a city tour followed by an eventful lunch on 15 July. We witnessed the fruition of months of planning, discussions and hard work put in by members with genuine selfless love for the people they serve.

On that day, I relished the opportunity to get to know our FINs and interact with them. We dined and enjoyed the games at lunch together.

It has been an eventful six months since my introduction to the Society. With the monthly ration days, individual FIN visits and big events like the 15 July outing, I am not as 'free' now as I was before I joined SSVP. But in answering that call six months ago, God has blessed me with a community that truly embodies what service in His name means: to treat each FIN with respect, love and dignity, while doing all of it with joy and charity in our hearts." 

# Building a Community of Love with our FINs

## Big Day Out for FINs

For most Singaporeans, a meal out or a visit to a local tourist destination may be just another normal weekend. However, for many of our Friends in Need (FINs) who are financially constrained and are often immobile and alone, our excursions are a highlight they eagerly anticipate and appreciate.

On 2 July, members of the SSVP Conference of the Holy Spirit meticulously organised a long awaited excursion for 29 FINs. The day started with a scrumptious eight-course Teochew lunch, a rare treat that our elderly FINs thoroughly enjoyed.



Accompanied by 18 Vincentians and four Level 9 student volunteers, the group headed to S.E.A. Aquarium next (left). The FINs experienced close encounters with sharks, jellyfish, stingrays, and other exotic marine creatures. Wheelchairs were provided for FINs who were unable to walk the distance. It was heartening to see Vincentians and the youth engaging in conversations and close interactions with the elderly FINs throughout the day.

With the opening of the new Bird Paradise, many SSVP Conferences have also been quick to organise outings for our FINs. On 23 July, SSVP Conference of Our Lady of Nativity organised a full-day outing for our FINs which included both families and the elderly. We enlisted the help of Level 9 student

volunteers, who enthusiastically assisted our wheelchair-bound FINs and entertained our younger FINs (above).

The outing left such a lasting impression that months later, one of our young FINs continues to ask when they can go back to the “Bird House”. Another FIN shared that it was a good opportunity for their family to spend time together in a different environment and is looking forward to future outings.

In collaboration with the Order of Malta, the SSVP Conference of Christ the King, also organised a visit to Bird Paradise for about 20 senior FINs on 21 October. It was a day filled with smiles as our FINs watched shows at the Sky Amphitheatre and enjoyed local hawker favourites at Food Central.

## Working Together; Strengthening Bonds

On 29 June, SSVP organised a nationwide carepack distribution for our FINs. With the support of Vincentians and volunteers including altar servers from the Church of Our Lady of Queen of Peace, we packed a curated assortment of biscuits, coffee, tea, rice, oats, sugar, oil, canned food, detergent, dishwashing liquid, and more for about 2,000 FIN homes

across the island. Our thanks and gratitude to Red Cross Singapore’s Project R.I.C.E. and their partners for donating the carepack items.

For the first time since the COVID pandemic, the SSVP Conference of St Ignatius (right) was joined by over 100 parishioners during



the monthly ration distribution at Blocks 89 and 90 Redhill Close on 27 August. The group comprised 83 Level 8 youth students and 24 family members. Divided into six groups, Vincentians briefed the students and guided them during house visits to get to know the FINs better.

Adonara Mucek, a Vincentian, shared, “Based on our youth’s reaction, it seemed like an eye-opening experience for them to see how the less fortunate in Singapore live, especially those without a strong support system. We at SSVP hope that this brief visit will ignite a spark of philanthropy within them to reach out and bring Christ’s Light and Love to those in need in our communities.”



On 10 September, the SSVP Conference of St Peter invited Cordelia Loong, a local illustrator, artist and art instructor, to conduct a charcoal drawing activity for our FINs. Under the artistic guidance of Cordelia and her assistant, Vincent, FINs and Vincentians tried their hand at drawing with charcoal to express their hopes and feelings from fun and encouraging themes including ‘Joy of living’, ‘Garden of life’, ‘Trials of life’ and ‘Love’.

“It created an opportunity for all of us to exchange ideas, work as a team and for the team members to showcase their hidden talent,” said our FIN Mr. Neo. Another FIN Mr. Lee shared, “Thank you for the Sunday art activity. It has been a

very long time. We have not mixed with the others (FINs) in months, and I have been keeping to myself.”

On Lay Apostolate Sunday, 20 August, SSVP Conferences of St Xavier, Our Lady Queen of Peace and Risen Christ set-up SSVP booths in churches to raise awareness about SSVP’s mission and recruit more volunteers to befriend and journey with our FINs. The Conferences also showcased their community engagement activities, which includes stepping up outreach efforts to people who are in need and continuing to provide our FINs with various types of assistance including monthly rations, financial aid home decluttering projects and many more.

From 30 September to 1 October, the youths of the SSVP Conference of St. Mary of the Angels, set up an SSVP Shop Pop-Up featuring a wide range of shop merchandise including home items, personal accessories, and clothes (below).

The event helped to raise funds and awareness for SSVP and also served as a useful platform to attract new donors and volunteers. The youths effectively engaged parishioners and did a great job fundraising through merchandise sales and raising awareness about the Society’s mission to help the less fortunate.



Similarly, the SSVP Conference of the Divine Mercy’s SSVP Shop Pop-Up was part of the parish’s first Eco-Fair from 23 to 24 September, as part of Season of Creation of Laudato Si. The Pop-Up focused on our signature Upcycled with Love items made by our talented SSVP Shop volunteers.



On 27 October, 26 staff volunteers from Roche Singapore Technical Operations Pte Ltd with their collaborated contractor I-Electric Engineering Pte Ltd transformed three homes of FINs from SSVP Conference of St Stephen. The massive makeover included de-cluttering, electrical and repair works, painting as well as removal and installation of new furniture (above). Volunteers and FINs alike were all smiles for a job well-done and felt ‘refreshed’ at the end of the day. 

# Giving Essential Aid with Dignity

This year, Pope Francis' key message for World Day of the Poor 2023 is from the Book of Tobit and asks us not to "turn our face away from anyone who is poor, but to keep it always focused on the human and divine face of Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Pope further asks us to take to heart the words of Pope Saint John XXIII: "Every human being enjoys the right to life, to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, including food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services."

This message is close to the heart of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, as it is aligned to our social mission to alleviate the hardships of the poor and to empower them to live a dignified life. To commemorate this year's World Day of the Poor, the Society and our affiliate SSVP Ltd. introduced two new programmes that addresses the changing and under-looked needs of the financially distressed in Singapore: Supplementary Needs Action Programme and EduFriends.

## Providing Essential Nutrition and Dignity with Supplementary Needs Action Programme (SNAP)

Since the establishment of the Milk & Diapers Programme in 2015, which caters to newborns and babies up to three years old from low-income families, we have received more requests for these essential items for other age groups and those with special



*Elderly SSVP FINs Madam Sim Goon Hwa (left) and Madam Jamiah (right), pictured with Vincentians from Conference of St. Peter. They live in rental flats in the Beach Road vicinity and spend more than \$100 on diapers monthly. SNAP helps relieve them of this financial burden and the money can be used on other essential needs.*

needs. The demand for these items from our Friends in Need (FINs) is also rising as we grapple with a greying population.

In response to this, we started a pilot for SNAP in June 2023 for our FINs. In five months, we onboarded seven FINs with special needs between the ages of four and 77 years old. Each of the FINs face unique medical conditions including enteral feeding, and conditions that require special formula to replace or supplement their diet. Some also require additional personal hygiene items such as diapers and disposable bedliners.

In November, SSVP also started distributing a combination of nutritional milk formula, adult diapers and bedliners to elderly

FINs, focusing first on those supported by SSVP conferences in the city.

During the introductory phase of SNAP, the Society will prioritise assistance to emergency/urgent cases from external agencies and partners, and existing SSVP FINs. Applicants will undergo an evaluation process to determine their eligibility, primarily assessing their medical needs for these items. Those deemed eligible will receive the essential items monthly, in addition to the befriending and support provided by our Vincentians. In 2024, SNAP will start to accept referrals from external social service and government agencies. For more information about SNAP, email [snap@ssvpsingapore.org](mailto:snap@ssvpsingapore.org).

## Excel with EduFriends

SSVP Ltd. has launched EduFriends, a new programme to provide educational support and tools to students from low-income families who desire to excel in their academic performance.

EduFriends' first sub-programme is an English Online Enrichment (EOE) programme to provide English classes via an online tutoring platform for children, aged nine to 13 years old. The programme is provided by TutorBuddy Pte Ltd and apart from weekly tuition classes, the programme's unique feature includes a "buddy" who spends four weekly sessions helping the students with revision.

Anthony Wong, SSVP Ltd. board member and lead of the Education Programme Committee overseeing EduFriends said, "Education is key to levelling the playing field for underprivileged students. EduFriends focuses on English because apart from the fact it is a key core subject, proficiency in English greatly aids the understanding and mastery of math and science. We hope to expand to other subjects in later phases."

During the introductory phase of the EOE Programme, which targets to enrol 40 students in 2024, priority will be given to SSVP FINs. For more information about EduFriends, email us at [edu@ssvpltd.org](mailto:edu@ssvpltd.org). 

*"I am deeply grateful to receive assistance from SSVP for the past two years. They have played a crucial role in helping my family face our financial hardships.*

*As a single parent, no matter how difficult it is, my most important concern is to ensure my two little kids have milk and diapers as basic needs.*

*We are grateful to have a helping hand from SSVP?"*

*– SSVP FIN with two children (a two- and three-year-old), who receives support from the MaD and SNAP Programmes*

# Milk & Diapers Programme Targets to Aid 450 Babies in 2024

SSVP Ltd's Milk & Diapers Programme (MaD), which alleviates the hardship of low-income families by providing milk and diapers to children, three years and below, has continued to expand. Growing awareness of MaD has resulted in a steep increase in the number of referrals from over 50 social service agencies.

In December 2022, MaD helped 317 children and this has increased by 20% to 379 children in October 2023.

With continued funding from our generous individual and corporate donors, as well as support of over 250 volunteers, we hope to raise \$800,000 to aid 450 babies next year. Since MaD's inception in 2015, we have supported 1,029 babies.

For more information about MaD, email [milk.n.diapers@ssvpltd.org](mailto:milk.n.diapers@ssvpltd.org).



# Overcoming Adversity

Ever since he was a young boy, Marius Madsen has been driven, athletic, dynamic and always knew what he wanted.

This 18-year old has always been a “do-er”.

A big Star Wars fan, even as a mere lad of 10 years old, he was “trailing” behind the many charity events showcasing the 501st Legion, (a global Star Wars costuming organisation by Star Wars fans), and understood the importance of helping others in need.

Marius dreams of representing Singapore as an athlete, studying hard to be a psychologist, and helping those in need around him. To make this a reality, his weekly schedule looks like this;

Archery: Daily except Sundays.

Taekwondo: Friday and Sunday evenings.

Gym: Tuesdays and Thursdays.

When he’s not busy training, his nose is in his books studying Tuesdays to Saturdays or he spends time as a Trauma Patient Spokesperson at NUH and Welfare Homes.



But Marius is no ordinary boy. All seemed to be lost when he became paralysed from the waist down at 15 years old during the COVID-pandemic. His parents spent every day and night with him at the hospital for six months and exhausted their savings on his medical treatments and rehabilitation.

Despite the adversity, Marius started to find hope again when he was introduced to Archery as part of this rehabilitative therapy.

And he’s on the right track.

Recently accepted as a ‘talent’ with the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC), the national sports body for persons with disabilities, he is one step closer to achieving his dreams and works relentlessly to meet his personal expectations. He expressed thanks to the generous donors who sponsored his training and is determined to ‘make history’.

SSVP Conference of the Holy Cross has been supporting the family since 2020, having first played an instrumental role refurbishing the rental flat so Marius could be discharged from the hospital, and the family continues to be our Friends in Need. 

*“I gain strength, courage, and confidence with every experience in which I really stop to look fear in the face. I am able to say to myself, ‘I lived through this dark time. I can take the next thing that comes along.’”*

– Marius Madsen

