

**Humble Beginnings:** This is a brief history of how the Society of St. Vincent de Paul took root at St. Timothy parish and grew.

In the spring of 2003, Fr. Weymes called on the congregation at St. Timothy to establish a St. Vincent de Paul conference, as in his former parishes. From the pulpit, he shared his vision of God reaching out to those in our community, who are less fortunate. One spring morning in 2003, Mary Carter was moved from the pew to respond to this calling; her first step toward spreading the light and peace of Christ to those suffering in the Chantilly and nearby areas.

Mary Carter had moved from Kansas in 2001 to be closer to family, following the death of her husband. She became the first president of the newly formed St. Vincent de Paul conference. She remained at the helm for several years before serving as spiritual advisor, then secretary, and later helpline coordinator and database administrator.

The first charter meeting occurred on April 12, 2003 in a small meeting room at the church. Seven people were there to embrace this mission – to form a new branch of a Society founded in 1833 by Blessed Frederic Ozanam, named after St. Vincent de Paul (the Apostle of Charity whose feast day we celebrate on September 27<sup>th</sup>). The three core elements of the Society were introduced: spirituality, fellowship and charitable service. The names and initial roles of the first Charter Members appear below:

Mary Carter (President)  
 Pat Marshall (Vice President)  
 Tom Harshberger (Pantry Manager)  
 Alice Harshberger (Treasurer)  
 Greg Patricio (Caseworker)  
 Trudee Ratliff (Caseworker)  
 Eileen Smith (Caseworker)

The first order of business was to seek guidance in setting up the conference. The members

recognized the need to consult with established St. Vincent de Paul conferences in the diocese, to learn how they operate. All Saints parish in Manassas, St. Leo's of Fairfax and Our Lady of Good Counsel in Vienna shared their wisdom and passed on the fundamentals. They learned that the two most common requests for financial assistance would be for rent and utilities, they received a tour of the St. Leo's food pantry, as well as numerous tried and true management principles and procedures.

The group launched an ad in the parish bulletin, put donation boxes in the church and made plans to open a food pantry on parish grounds. An early parish bulletin announced:

*St. VINCENT DE PAUL Society is starting a food pantry for the poor. NON-PERISHABLE food and toiletries needed. When you visit the store, take advantage of those specials, and bring the surplus to church next weekend, August 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. There will be a large box in the church foyer for your donations.*

By October 9, 2003, the attendance list had grown to 28 active and associate members.

Maria Ansanelli, Peggy Bingle, Grace Breighner, Mary Carter, Eileen Chambers, Mary Connor, Mary Dunahay, Sandy Early, Bob Fells, Irene Gill, Tom Harshberger, John Kane, Greg & Shirley Kazdal, Ann Marie Leberknight, Pat Marshall, Terri Miller, Ken & Mary Murphy, Greg Patricio, Martha Perez, Mary Quinn, Bill & Trudee Ratliff, Diane Rickard, Eileen Smith, Larry Watson, and Pat Wilson.

#### **Ozanam Orientation and Training:**

The fledgling conference received guidance from the District Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as well as sharing mutual solidarity with the National Council of the United States, as defined in the Rule and Manual of the Society. Ozanam Orientation training sessions were conducted to foster the spirituality of its members and preserve the heritage of the society as established by Frederic Ozanam. The

Vincentian Rule, Part 1:1.8 states: “Vincentians serve the poor cheerfully, listening to them and respecting their wishes, helping them to feel and recover their own dignity, for we are all created in God’s image. In the poor, they see the suffering Christ.” The core work of the National Society includes, but is not limited to: operating food pantries, providing emergency financial assistance, joining in disaster relief efforts, twinning/lending monetary support to fellow St Vincent de Paul conferences in less fluent areas, managing thrift stores, networking with churches and agencies, providing prison ministry, household needs, etc.

Conference meetings were established on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of each month and would begin and end with prayer. Vincentians would soon travel in pairs to the homes of the poor to provide compassion, comfort and assistance.

**Spiritual Reflection:** The first spiritual advisor was Irene Gill, a woman of great faith and charm. Irene had a background in engineering and terrific sense of humor. Eileen Smith recalls this story about Irene from earlier days.

*“You had to know Irene, she was a lovely pious woman. One Saturday after mass, (my daughter) Clare, Irene and I were putting away the food pantry items. Someone had donated Men’s hair dye for beards. That was when Fr. Beres was experimenting with a beard. So Irene grabbed the hair dye, put a note on it “For Fr. Beres” and she walked to the Rectory, left the hair dye on the front porch and rang the bell and ran off. Clare & I thought it was hysterical!”*

Irene always carried her own hand written spiritual notes to share at the opening of meetings. Members have described her reflections as succinct, profound and inspiring. Several of her reflections from 2005 reflect the tone and mission of the Society:

Reflection#1 “During this year of the Eucharist, we might meditate with Teresa of Calcutta on the sameness of the real presence of Christ in the bread of Holy Eucharist and His real presence in the suffering poor. We serve Jesus, in the distressing disguise of the poor. Our work is a continual contact with Christ. The same contact we have with Him in

the Blessed Sacrament. There we have Jesus in the appearance of bread. Here in the slums, in broken bodies, in the children, we see Christ and touch Him. Let us pray with Mother Teresa for help to be brave and cheerful in spite of obstacles as we reach with God’s joy to touch those broken in spirit and desperate for help. May we find Him in them. Amen.”

Reflection #2 The Katrina disaster and the ongoing needs of our neighbors calls Vincentians to action. While doing our charitable acts, it is important to remember that what counts with God is not just what we do, but how and why we do it. The important thing is motive. Do we do it to have a good conscience? Then it is for our own pleasure not God’s. Is it because we love the beneficiary? This is a little better. Only that which reaches God is done through love. If we sacrifice something, we make it sacred, we make it God’s, we make it love. All the rest is pretense. Lord, may we offer you only upright hearts with pure motives so we may love You well and justly. Amen.”

The Vincentians, members of the Society, are characterized by the Six Core Values of the Society: 1) Holiness of Life, 2) Service of the Poor, 3) Humility, 4) Simplicity, 5) Community of Faith and 6) Charity.

Members strive to imitate Our Lord in the gospels and see the face of Jesus in those they serve. Vincentian virtues include Gentleness, Selflessness, Zeal, Patience, Kindness, Passion, and Integrity. Members rely on providence, grace and prayer for self discipline, patience and good judgment in making decisions and resolving issues.

**Building the donation box:** There is a funny story behind the wooden collection box in the church for parishioners to drop off food items for distribution to the poor.

President Mary Carter realized that a permanent collection box would be needed in the narthex of the church to hold the increased volume of food donations. She decided to take on this project herself and build the box at home. The local Sears store helped cut the wood to her specifications and then she built a box that would fit exactly within a large alcove at the back of the church. She even added wheels under the box for easier transport.

However, when the box was finished, it was much larger and heavier than expected and she couldn't imagine how she would get it to the church! She had to call the maintenance office at the church for assistance and they arranged a delivery. The box still remains in the back area of the church today and holds up to three or four full shopping carts of food. Members routinely move items from the box to stock the pantry shelves.

**Early Operating Funds:** While the conference was figuring out how to best serve the needs of the local poor, their obvious concern was how to acquire the necessary funds. In the beginning, early operating funds were only two or three hundred dollars per month; limiting the amount of service provided. In one of the first recorded cases, a Centreville woman was assisted with \$75 for rent, \$20 for gas and \$4 for milk.

Conference members conducted a special collection after mass, standing outside the church doors with coffee cans bearing the St. Vincent de Paul logo. Ken Murphy brought various ideas to the table and established contacts with local outreach groups. In answer to prayer, parishioners began making regular donations earmarked for St. Vincent de Paul, thus enabling the Society to take root and grow. In appreciation, conference members are good stewards of those funds.

**Establishing the food pantry:** In answer to prayer again, Fr. Weymes donated a shed on the church property to be used for the food pantry. It was a simple shed, without heat or electricity; yet members set about clearing it just prior to the parish garage sale on June 22, 2003. Bill Ratliff came on board to assist Tom Harshberger with setting up and monitoring the food pantry, as well as Trudee Ratliff, a member of the Charter group. With their quick wit and wry humor, this trio was efficient as well as entertaining.

While stocking the pantry, a few obstacles were encountered. The food items that had been collected were sorted and neatly organized on the wooden shelving inside the shed. After surveying the work, Fr. Weymes

advised that all foods in bags or boxes should be removed until cabinets or bins were procured for safe storage. While the pantry manager acquired metal cabinets, much of the food was hauled to President Mary Carter's home and back until the cabinets arrived. Now the cereals, pasta, rice, flour, baking goods, etc. were free from critters. Another difficulty was trying to decipher all the expiration codes on donations prior to distribution.

After much scrambling the Food Pantry opened its doors in November of 2003. To everyone's surprise, only **three** families arrived for food that day! There were many prayers that the pantry turnout would increase in proportion to all the efforts that had gone into it.

Ten years later, the pantry continues to operate on the third Saturday of every month from 10:30 am to 12 noon and serves up to one hundred and fifty families per month. Pantry Manager Barbara Shugrue runs the operations with a multitude of pantry volunteers coordinated by Wendy Barboza, Pantry Volunteer Coordinator.

**Helpline/Case Management:** There was a helpline set up for those needing assistance and calls began to come in. It is noteworthy that from 2006 to 2007, Catherine Stephenson, assumed the sole responsibility of answering the helpline. This overwhelming duty was later rotated among members on a weekly basis due to the high volume of calls.

In June of 2003, Council President Dianne Jenkins addressed area conferences regarding the need to establish fundamental casework guidelines, such as establishing service boundaries, how often to assist, conducting home visits, monetary limits and referral procedures. St. Veronica's Church provided a copy of their procedure manual, which was revised and adopted by the St. Timothy conference. President Jenkins also encouraged new conferences to invite a speaker from the agency of Fairfax Coordinated Services Planning to learn more about their services and when to refer or collaborate on larger cases.

It was later established that the conference could provide financial assistance once per year to those within our boundaries, after a thorough assessment of their situation. The limit per case is adjusted to the amount of funds on hand, usually not more than three hundred dollars per case. Members bring up cases for discussion at general meetings. Clients are not limited to how often they can receive food or household items through the pantry. Grocery gift cards and gas cards are distributed as available.

Home visits are a tradition of the Society and always made in teams. A service area was established and clients beyond this area were referred to charitable organizations operating in their area. Procedures for dealing with local utility companies were implemented for ease in making pledges directly to utility companies. A Resource Guide for caseworkers was assembled and training sessions offered.

Mary Carter once quipped that what really launched the conference was the fact that members were always ready and willing to pitch in! Members were taking turns on the helpline, stocking shelves, distributing food and handling casework. By working together in unison, each member was sharing in the transformation of the lives of others. To this day a distinct camaraderie resonates among members –an outgrowth of sharing their time and talents in the spirit of warmth and fellowship.

By 2007 the membership list had grown to include:

Tina Andrea, Sabrina Anwah, Mary Barbosa, Wendy Barbosa, Bobbi Brennan, Mary Carter, Amado Coleberg, Susan Conrad, Lorraine Dolan, Patty Doyle, Mary Dunahay, Fran Furr, Regina McGrath, Sonia Hayes, Judy Helein, Edie Henderson, Yvonne Hettish, John Kane, Ann Marie Leberknight, Julie Maloney, Marianne Mason, Jose & Gwyn Mendez, Diane Michalke, Terri Miller, Anita Moutafakis, George & Shanti Parappurath, Shanna Phillips, Bill & Trudee Ratliff, Matt Sebastian, Elise Serrano, Barbara Shugrue, Eileen Smith, Tim & Sandy Smith, Catherine Stephenson, Mary Stuart, Mylinh Tran, Charlene Unterkofler, Joan Wang, and Larry Watson.

**Other special projects:** Various special projects began cropping up throughout the year. The most popular projects were the holiday meals and Giving Tree for gifts. The Thanksgiving and Christmas meals still continue, but the Giving Tree project was converted to the distribution of various gift cards. A few of the other projects include the distribution of baby clothes to needy families and the annual coat drive to provide adequate winter coats, baby clothes and children's items for those visiting the pantry around the holidays. Comfort backpacks containing hygiene items, small blankets, night shirts and stuffed animals were provided for foster care children in transit. Flowers or small plants were taken to nursing home residents as well as Easter treats for families and children visiting the food pantry.

Barbara Shugrue, Pantry Manager, coordinates with the Lamb Center – a daytime shelter providing showers and laundry facilities, computer access, meals and fellowship to the homeless. Our conference supplies small toiletry items, laundry detergent and cereal 3 or 4 times annually. In 2013, a Christmas tree was donated to the Oxford House in Chantilly, a group home for men in recovery from alcohol and drug abuse.

**President Ann Marie Leberknight:** In 2005-2007, new officers came onboard. Ann Marie Leberknight ran against Ken Murphy and succeeded Mary Carter as President. President Leberknight served with Terri Miller (VP), Tom Harshberger (Treasurer and Pantry Manager), Catherine Stephenson (Secretary and Helpline Coordinator) and Mary Carter (Spiritual Advisor). Ann Marie is noted for implementing a computerized database system, designed for quick access and record keeping for all clients. This system, designed and maintained by her husband Scott, is so successful that it is used by other local St. Vincent de Paul conferences. All helpline calls are logged on the website for retrieval by caseworkers.

**President Terri Miller:** From 2007-2010, Terri Miller served with Larry Watson (VP), Mary Carter (Sec.) Eileen Smith and

Charlene Unterkofler (Co-Spiritual Advisors) and Tom Harshberger (Treas/Pantry Manager). When Tom moved to Pennsylvania in 2009, Sandi Smith served as Treasurer and Barbara Shugrue became Pantry Manager.

President Miller is noted for her organizational skills in setting up holiday programs providing meals and gifts - in conjunction with local ministries and county services. She led the conference through incorporation as required by the diocese and started the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Friends of the Poor Walk in 2008 and again in 2009, at the parish.

**President Judy Helein:** From November 2010-2013 Judy Helein served as President. Although a relatively new member, she brought valuable experience with her as a missionary in Cambodia and a volunteer coordinator for AARP. The conference grew significantly in membership and resources under her leadership. She fostered greater spiritual formation of members with the Serving in Hope series in 2011.

**President Charlene Unterkofler:** Was installed December 12, 2013 after serving as Spiritual Advisor since 2007. Those serving with her are Eileen Smith and Diane Michalke (Vice Presidents), Emily Baker (Secretary), Sandi Smith (Treasurer) and Spiritual Advisors Virginia Connell and Mary Beth Koch. She plans to strengthen existing programs and keep members informed and engaged. Her goal is to increase the key elements of spirituality, friendship and charity among all members.

## Prayer for Systemic Change

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**We praise and thank you,  
Oh God, Creator of the Universe.  
You have made all things good and  
given us the earth to cultivate.  
Grant that we may always use created  
things gratefully, and share them  
generously with those in need.**

**Give us creativity in helping the poor  
meet their basic human needs.  
Open our minds and hearts  
so that we might stand at their side  
and assist them to change whatever  
unjust structures keep them poor.**

**Enable us to be brothers and sisters  
to them, and friends who walk with them  
in their struggle for fundamental human  
rights. We ask this through Christ our  
Lord.**

**Amen**