St. Anselm SVDP Newsletter, Nov. 5, 2017, Issue #1

ST. ANSELM PARISH
SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

ARCHDIOCESAN COUNCIL OF ST. LOUIS

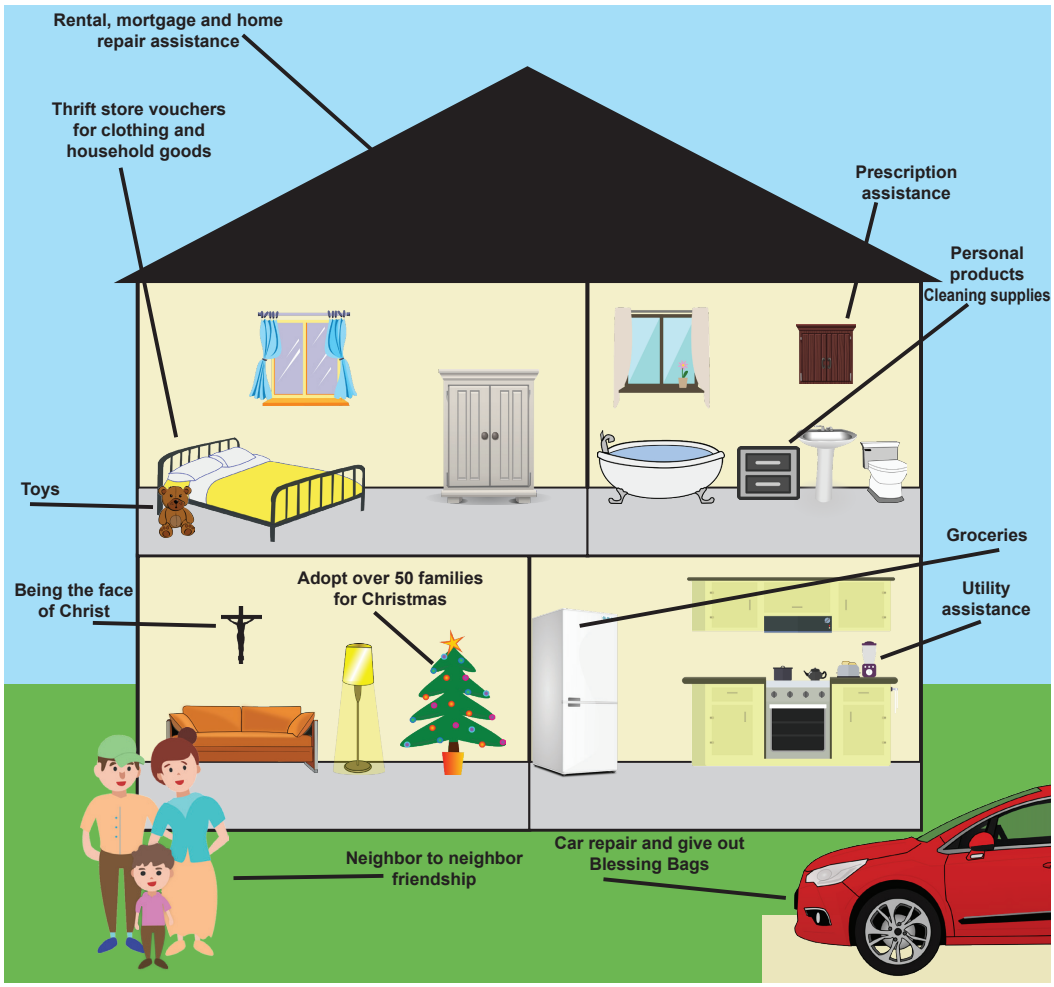
··· HELPING NEIGHBORS STARTS AT HOME ···

Three Pillars Of Saint Vincent de Paul
Spirituality, Friendship, Service

Take a look at the diagram to see all the ways you help families overcome crisis and poverty through Saint Anselm's St. Vincent de Paul Conference.

In the first nine months of our fiscal year (since October 1 of 2016), your love, prayers and financial support have enabled us to serve 310 families and 587 children. St Anselm Vincentians have traveled more than 19,215 miles and worked more than 5,640 hours to bring relief to families in need.

You, the members of our parish family, make it possible for us to bring your love to our neighbors in need. SVDP is a labor of love. THANK YOU for making love a verb!



Getting Involved is Easy and Rewarding!

If you are looking for a volunteer position that provides spiritual enrichment, abundant gratification, and a tremendous amount of fun, consider becoming involved in your St. Vincent de Paul conference at St. Anselm.

Ways you can help:

- Pray for the poor, the neglected, and the homeless
- Help in Food Pantry or donate food/personal products during monthly food drives (3rd weekend of the month)
- Make a financial gift to our conference
- Consider joining the SVDP Conference at St. Anselm. Contact the St. Anselm Parish Center at 314-878-2120, and Edie Varley, current president, will contact you.

Volunteer opportunities:

- Attend meetings
- Visit clients; Participate in pre-call ministry
- Supply toys or prepare toy bags for Saturday visits
- Donate clothing or help with bi-annual clothing drive
- Assist with a variety of tasks for Christmas Breakfast
- Help in Parish House kitchen on Donut Sunday

Blessing Bags Bring Hope

We first heard about blessing bags from a local food pantry, and we thought it would be a great idea to try instead of giving cash to homeless people. Blessing Bags (just a common zip lock bag) contain a variety of healthy snacks, water, socks, band aids and other useful items valued at just a few dollars. We also include a $5 McDonald's gift card so that the recipient can visit the restaurant when weather is inclement. When we gave our first blessing bag to a young man we encountered at a traffic light in Brentwood, he took the bag with a doubtful look on his face and took a few steps. With his back to us, he examined the bag and turned to us with a radiant smile, walked over to our car, and said, "Thank you and God bless you." We were truly moved by his response.

With the countless blessing bags our Vincentians have since handed out, we have learned that not only were the recipients blessed, but we are truly blessed every time we take the opportunity to help someone in need. When blessing a needy person, we can experience the Holy Spirit at work through us, and that is indeed the real blessing that accompanies the "blessing bag." If you would like see a sample of the Blessing Bag, please stop by the food pantry in the Parish House.

The Blessing Bag is available to all parishioners. Please keep your Blessing Bag handy in your car for those occasions when in plain sight you see a neighbor in need.





Toy Story

Toys became a part of our mission through a single generous toy donation four years ago that has grown into a regular part of our service. Along with the food and household items we bring to those in need, we also bring smiles to the kids. What a joy it is to see the faces of the little ones when they see the toys, games and books we bring… all because of your generosity.

Kids may not understand the difficulties that their parents are facing. We know that SVDP support of a family is more than helping with utilities payments and rent. That's what we do. But for those without electric and with children about, we bring relief with small toys, games (Yahtzee & Jenga), crafts (Spirograph), coloring packets and stickers. We include items not covered by food stamps, including personal hygiene products, diapers, seasonal items and sewing kits. Generous parishioners host parties, which supply special items such as make-up, hair bands & brushes and men's grooming products. Ready Readers assists with book donations for all ages. Area businesses donate overstock and gift certificates to redeem for merchandise at their stores.

We consider ourselves "The Brief Relief" for families overwhelmed by their circumstances.

The Rewards of Home Visits

St. Anselm Vincentians will make home visits with over 500 families by the end of the 2017. We travel in pairs, usually on Saturday morning. The families we visit are typically screened and forwarded to us by social workers from almost a dozen organizations like Cardinal Glennon Hospital, St. Louis Children's Hospital, Wellston Center and Little Bit Foundation. We also receive helpline calls from the Parish and United Way.

Our home visits are key to us understanding the family's situation. We bring food and basic supplies to every family. We bring toys for the kids. But mostly we listen and learn about their needs and their circumstances. We do our best to address their physical needs and understand their emotional needs. The visit may last 15-20 minutes but often lasts longer as the conversation leads us in unexpected directions. We ask about beds for the kids. We can help. We ask about prescriptions that may be draining the family's limited income. Again, we can help provide free generic prescriptions. We bring them your love, and we conclude every visit with a prayer. In every case, we leave the family with a list of additional support services and agencies that may have gone unnoticed.

As much as we may be able to help those families we visit, we receive so much more. The joy of seeing smiles. Their relief. And our knowledge that we are doing God's work by visiting those in need with open arms of our faithful supporters at St. Anselm.

A Memorable Visit to South St. Louis

A few years ago, we visited the home of a family right before Christmas. At the top of a wooden staircase, a pretty, black-eyed young girl of 7 or 8 opened the door to their South St. Louis second floor flat in response to our knock. Her mother was right behind her. We Vincentians had come to help her with a threatened electric cutoff and accepted her offer to sit in two well-worn chairs near the front window, the only source of light in the apartment. Three other children, two boys close to being teenagers and a girl of about 10, crowded around their mother. She did not speak English, so the oldest of the boys had been summoned from rummaging through the groceries we had brought to translate.

Scanning the room, we first noticed the obligatory shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe, a constant in Hispanic homes, before we caught sight of the "tree." It was an old, tired artificial Christmas tree, bare except for a single aluminum star placed adorning the top.



Feeding the Hungry

Every family we visit receives a generous supply of food and other essential items from the SVDP food pantry. The food pantry is located in the basement of the Parish House. Many of the families we serve receive food stamps, but they do not cover personal products or the total cost for food they need each month.

Grocery bags, which are delivered to each family we visit, include perishables (hamburger, cheese, and apples) non- perishables (canned meats, pasta, fruit, vegetables, soup, cookies, etc.), personal products (toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, deodorant, soap), and cleaning supplies. An additional box of food is provided for larger families.

The majority of the food and personal items are donated through monthly parish food drives, various parish organizations and the Parish School of Religion (PSR) children.

One of the most valuable items included with the groceries are Client Resource Sheets, which list over 150 agencies that assist with a variety of support services such as jobs, rent, utilities, medical care, pregnancy, child development, legal assistance, transportation and veteran's services to name a few.

As we conversed with mom and the kids, the youngest of the children was so excited about the coming Christmas. With great faith she said, "Jesus is coming, and he will take care of everything!" We joyfully helped the mother with her electric bill and brought food but wondered about that beautiful family.

Since that time, our conference has evolved through your contributions of food, clothing, furniture and money to not only distribute food but also books and toys for the children and teens. Last year, we even had a group of "silent angels" sponsor Christmas for a dozen families. Thank you, St. Anselm benefactors! You are prayed for by the families we visit each week.

Yet, we still wonder about the mother who was working two jobs to hold her family together. Is the little door greeter graduating from high school this year? Have these children survived the perils of adolescence? We continue to pray for all whom we have visited.

Beds... Beds... Beds...

Rarely does a week go by when we don't visit a family in need of beds. A few weeks ago, we visited a single mom with six children, two of whom were teenagers. The primary purpose of our visit had been to help the family avoid disconnection of their electric. They were in Section 8 housing and could not afford the disconnection of utility, which would cause them to lose their low income voucher. Praise Jesus, we were able to help the family avoid the electric disconnect.

While we were there, we asked the mother if everyone had a bed. She walked us back to a bedroom where the teenage daughters slept. There were two blankets on the floor. That's where they slept. She then led us to her bedroom. There was a full size bed that was torn and tattered. She said that the four smaller children slept in that bed while mom slept in a rocking chair next to the bed. Because of the extraordinary support that you, the members of St. Anselm Parish, provide, and with the help of the St. Vincent de Paul thrift stores, we were able to provide the family with beds for everyone.

You can only imagine the tears of gratitude that flowed. Theirs and ours. We prayed in thanksgiving for the family and for you, our benefactors. Because of your generosity, we were able to rescue this family from possible eviction, keep the lights on and give everyone the dignity of a bed. Over the course of the last 9 months, we have provided over 200 beds to families in need.



Artwork by Elise Hastings from the photography of Mev Puleo





Join us on December 3 for the SVDP Christmas Breakfast!

Celebrate Christmas with St. Vincent de Paul from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the Parish Center Auditorium. Breakfast includes eggs, sausage, bacon, potatoes, rolls, danish pastries, pancakes, coffee and juice.

Santa will be joining us, and poinsettias will be for sale! There will also be terrific raffle items, including a summer cottage in Michigan. It's a fun party for the whole family!

The Joy of Helping Others

We made a home visit a couple of weeks ago in North St. Louis. When we arrived, our client asked one of her teenage sons to help carry the grocery and household supply bags from our car. Looking for his shoes and flashing a wide smile, he sheepishly asked me, "What am I supposed to do again?" I told him, "Just help that man out there carry in some bags, and we're good."

Visiting with the family, we quickly learned that the oldest son was currently a sophomore, on scholarship and playing for his high school basketball team. The younger children were enrolled in one of the city charter schools. Mom had been working as an assistant kitchen manager, but when her employer found it necessary to cut back on staff, and that the possibility of new management was pending, she decided to find employment elsewhere. Finding work as a cook for an archdiocesan school was an answer to a prayer. Summer, however, meant a hiatus for her. In her words it was good news/bad news, because she was able to be with her children more, but the lack of a paycheck coupled with the cut in salary she took when she left her previous employer caused money to be tighter than usual. She was able to work part-time at a concession stand for a local community baseball league during the summer, which helped to a degree.

When we began to discuss the purpose of our visit, her request for help with her rent, we asked if she would be able to manage in the future. "Oh, I'll be ok. I'm back at work in the cafeteria. It was just because of the summer. We'll be ok," was her response. We prayed together for our benefactors and for the family. As we said our good-byes, the little girls in the family were finally allowed to peek into the toy bags. When one of them spied the sleeping bag, there were squeals of joy. "Now I can have my cousin for a sleepover!" Time for good-byes brought hugs all around because all the females in the room agreed that we were "huggers."

Throughout the day, I thought about that visit on so many levels. Thank you, Lord, that we could help her with her rent, that we brought relief and joy to those in need and what a blessing it was to see firsthand the fruits of our visit.