Mike Zorena Appointed as Vice President

Dear Fellow Vincentians,

I am pleased to inform you that after a unanimous vote by the Diocesan Council’s Board of Directors, Mike Zorena has been appointed to the position of Diocesan Council Vice President. His term begins immediately and continues through September, 2021. For the past five years, he has been serving as president of the Akron District, which is one of our Council’s largest and most dynamic and active districts. His second term as District President ends September 30.

Mike is a member of both Saint Victor Church in Richfield and Saint Hillary Church in Fairlawn.

He is currently vice president of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul’s St. Victor Conference and previously served as its president. He also participated on the pastoral council under Bishop Richard Lennon, and is on the board of directors for Catholic Worker. He serves on the RCIA team at St. Hilary, and volunteers for the hot meals program at Saint Bernard Church in Akron.

Mike is a retired Bath Police Department Lieutenant and is currently employed part-time as a bailiff for Parma Municipal Court. He is a proud father of three and grandfather of three.

Ed Leszynski
Board President

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is pleased to welcome Sister Cheryl Keehner, CSA as its new spiritual advisor.

Through her ministry as a Sister of Charity of St. Augustine, she focuses on “helping people – especially those in need – and sharing God’s love with each person she encounters while recognizing the incarnate God in others.” She currently is a prayer leader at Centering Space, a CSA retreat/program ministry in Lakewood.

She began her ministry as an English teacher and taught at area schools that included Erieview Catholic (now closed), Beaumont High School in Cleveland Heights, and Archbishop Hoban High School in Akron.

Sister Cheryl’s background includes experience in youth ministry at St. Matthias parish in Parma, and outreach to the poor at St. Richard parish in North Olmsted. She has served in leadership for the congregation at its Motherhouse in Richfield, and led retreat days for adults in Cleveland area parishes. Additionally, she was a volunteer for Cleveland Catholic Charities’ Migration and Refugee services.

“In my parish work with families, I have greatly appreciated the work of the St. Vincent de Paul volunteers,” she says. “I am honored to be asked to share my time and talents with all of you.”

Welcome Sister Cheryl!
Dear friends,

It has been a while. I truly hope that you are all doing fine - as fine can be. Everything has changed, and we are all learning to adapt and adjust to the new ‘normal’.

Yet, as Vincentians we are people of Faith. So I thought I would share a reflection sent out by my pastor at St. Ladislas, which has stayed with me since I read it. It is my hope that you appreciate it as much as I did.

He reflected upon Mary standing at the foot of the cross. He also referenced Fr. Rohlheiser's book "Sacred Fire" (which coincidentally I am reading right now). He asks: What is Mary doing?

"On the surface, she appears not to be doing anything at all. She does not speak, she does not try to stop the crucifixion, she does not even protest the unfairness or plead for Jesus’ innocence. Yet Mary’s silence is rooted in an incredible faith. Her silent presence in the face of such sorrow speaks these words: ‘Today, I can’t stop the crucifixion; nobody can. Sometimes darkness will have its hour.’ Mary is radiating in her resilient silence, a contrast of not just courage but hope. That is not easy to do.

We know some of this in our own dark time; everything inside of us demands an end to this pandemic. We want to scream out, refusing to remain silent in the presence of suffering. But like Mary at the cross, such protests are no longer helpful. Darkness will have its hour. What is needed is some spark of light, some reason to hope.

We need to have our eyes firmly on that cross where Love is so starkly and abundantly offered. Mary could stand by that cross in that dark time because she knew that this Love was deeper, His forgiveness more overpowering and the presence of God more real than the suffering she was seeing.

Easter is our time to stand by the cross witnessing the darkness of the hour, but remaining in the Light. After that dark Friday afternoon a joyful and unimaginable occurrence; death no longer has any power. Resurrection and new life are the enduring truths. Even as we stand at the foot of this current cross we know the tomb is empty, and no darkness can eliminate such a Light.

The resurrection of Jesus reminds us day after day that no matter how dark it is, Light – the Light of Christ - is always more powerful than darkness. And that no matter how much trouble or difficulty there could be in the world, Love – the Love of Christ - conquers all fear and fills us with Hope and New Life."

So we too, as Vincentians, are called to be the Light of Christ to others. We always say that we are the face of Christ to those we serve. Well, at this time of distancing, we may be called to be the voice of Christ, or His hands – but still to share His Love through the work we do.

May God bless you and keep you, now and always. And may He strengthen and enlighten you as you strive to serve those in your communities in evermore creative ways, following the footsteps of our patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

Anelize Nader, CEO

SVDP Ozanam Centers: Continuing to Feed People in Need During the Health Crisis

Now, more than ever, SVDP’s hunger relief program is vital to preventing hunger among individuals and families in need.

Due to the COVID-19 health crisis and subsequent loss of income for many households as people shelter in place, the amount of individuals seeking hunger relief has already doubled at SVDP’s hunger centers, with a 20-30 percent increase in new families served.

Thanks to SVDP’s Ozanam Centers and their dedicated volunteers, numerous men, women, children and seniors are still able to receive nourishment during this pandemic.

Southwest (2145 Broadview Road, Cleveland), St. John Paul II (8328 Broadway Avenue at Holy Name Church, Cleveland) and Fr. Michael Wittman (13824 Euclid Avenue at St. Philomena Church, East Cleveland) Ozanam Centers have remained open and serve as a beacon of light and hope in this challenging time.

In an effort to keep both visitors and volunteers safe, our volunteers comply with all safety guidelines to prevent the virus’ spread. This includes changing food distribution procedures, such as converting to a drive-thru system wherever possible, the usage of masks and social distancing among volunteers and clients.

At this time, Fr. Hilkert Ozanam Center (93 Kent Street at Visitation of Mary Church, Akron) is temporarily closed, as our volunteers review options to best accomplish social distancing for the optimal safety of everyone involved.

We thank our Ozanam Center volunteers for their unwavering commitment to feed people in need!

To remain updated on SVDP hunger center hours of operation changes during the health crisis, follow SVDP on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
Lent in 2020 will certainly be memorable. Who could have imagined that we all would be “fasting” from the Eucharist, our churches closed and Holy Week/Easter services cancelled?

Perhaps this “corona crisis” is more of a blessing than we think. For Vincentians, spirituality, friendship and service are core values. They are also values called for in our world as the pandemic continues. All of us are called to prayer, community and love of our neighbors.

As followers of Jesus, we are examples to others: feeding the hungry, visiting the home-bound and providing for human needs. In doing so, we see the face of Jesus in others and they encounter Jesus in us.

The threat of serious illness, increased closures and restrictions in our daily lives, weakness in our supply chains, unemployment and limited resources must not deter us. Still, we must observe the restrictions put on us by the state of Ohio as we go about our ministry. We must all be careful and observe social distancing and other hygienic practices. We must make telephone contacts to keep track of the needs of our neighbors. We must work with people in our parishes, members of our local Conferences and districts.

Let us continue to pray that the Holy Spirit increase our compassion and understanding and give us wisdom to find new and creative ways to serve the needs of the poor.

Meanwhile, know that we are experiencing holy communion daily in our ministry. Let us be open as the early Christians were, believing that “wherever two or three of us are gathered in His name” the Risen Jesus is with us.

Together we ask God to shower abundant blessings on our world and fill our hearts with peace and gratitude as we celebrate the Easter season.

Home Visits Tomorrow
by Gary Sole, COO

“They are interesting times.” How often have we all thought these words for one reason or another?

Well, this does seem like an interesting time, with much of our traditional daily routines disrupted with the closing of businesses, recreation centers and churches. Add to this, for some of us, the economic uncertainty of our future.

During this health crisis, please consider some new ways to comfort our friends when making ‘home visits,’ but not by physically being in their homes.

Beyond praying with our friends, one of the nicest things someone can do for another is to be an active listener. Our ability to listen might be the most important thing we can do for our friends who are asking for our help. Especially if this is a new social experience for that person.

You become the face of Saint Vincent de Paul for that individual, and consider that you perhaps are more valuable to them than the assistance you are there to provide.

Please be safe!

Peace,
Gary

Conference Meeting Opportunities While Social Distancing

Just because we were asked to keep some distance does not preclude us from having meetings – and actually very productive ones. Is the Conference leadership making an effort to keep members joined together, even if at a distance? Fortunately, technology offers many options for ‘virtual meetings’ during this challenging time. Here are a few free ways to keep in touch with your Conference members.

Although we have used Zoom, I was recently alerted that Google banned it from use within its Chrome browser, with several security issues at the moment – so I would not recommend it. Instead, I recommend the free version of Skype.

For conference calls, we have been using freeconferencecall.com, which can accommodate any number of callers in a ‘meeting.’ Once you set up an account, you will be given a number for people to call, with an access code and a PIN for the host. Then just schedule the meeting and be prepared to conduct it as if you were meeting face-to-face. It’s that easy.

Hoping this helps keep your Conferences as vibrant as possible at this time as you get ready for when things come back to (perhaps a ‘new’) normal. God bless!

By Anelize Nader