



# THE VINCENTIAN QUARTERLY

News from the St. Vincent de Paul of Alameda County

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## Special ADVOCACY & CHANGE Edition

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## From SERVICE to ADVOCACY:

### *Vincentians Find New Channels to Serve the Poor*

#### Service work is a way of life for Brian O'Reilly

For the past 14 years he has volunteered at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's Free Dining Room in Oakland. He washes pots, serves meals, and helps to train new volunteers. The native of Ireland also logs countless volunteer hours in his local community of Livermore, where he handles deliveries for the local food pantry, works in the soup kitchen, and volunteers at the homeless shelter.

Most observers would marvel at the many and varied ways in which O'Reilly serves the poor in his local community and the larger county. But the more this Vincentian of 40-plus years volunteered, the more he realized that traditional service work alone would never address the root causes of the poverty he saw all around him.

"Five years ago I realized that working in the food pantry and soup kitchens and volunteering in the homeless shelter wasn't enough," recalls O'Reilly in his trademark Irish brogue. We need to focus on the many factors that contribute to poverty, he adds, such as housing costs, transportation, childcare, and low wages. "They're all inter-related," says O'Reilly. "You can't just focus on one thing."

In addition to his ongoing service work, O'Reilly is now active in the Tri-Valley Interfaith Poverty Forum, a nonprofit organization that seeks to mobilize people of faith to address the needs and rights of low-income people. Working with others in his community he was able to bring 22 Habitat for Humanity homes to Livermore for working families in the area.

#### Informing Action

O'Reilly is just one of the many Vincentians throughout Alameda County and the country who are being called to move beyond traditional service work to advocate locally and on a state and national level for systemic changes to address the needs of the poor and marginalized in their communities.

Cynthia Ney, a member of St. Edwards's conference in Fremont, and Cynthia Wyman of the St. Margaret Mary conference in Oakland also heard the call to take their St. Vincent de Paul work to another level and to begin advocating for long-term change in their



*Cindy Sheridan, Laura Gonzales-Escoto and Cynthia Ney.*

neighborhoods and communities.

Wyman's work has focused on the Bay Area's housing crisis. She started by working with others in her conference to educate fellow parishioners about the high cost of housing as part of the Catholic Housing Initiative of the East Bay. From there, she joined with other Vincentians from St. Margaret Mary, St. Theresa, and Corpus Christi parishes in Oakland to research steps they could take locally to better meet the needs of the community. As a tangible first step they established a fund to assist poor families in paying the high fees associated with securing rental housing.

Like Wyman, Ney is a member of the Catholic Housing Initiative of the East Bay. She is also active in Congregations Organizing for Renewal (COR), a faith-based community organizing effort affiliated with the PICO National Network. She became involved in COR because of the group's work to provide more affordable housing opportunities in south Alameda County, where she and her family live. She knows the need first hand, having had to move from Fremont, where she lived for 15 years, due to the high cost of housing in the area. As a member of COR she has advocated for inclusionary zoning ordinances and other city and countywide efforts to increase the availability of affordable rentals and affordable home ownership opportunities.

For these three Vincentians and countless others throughout the council and the country, advocacy work is just one more way in which they follow the call of St. Vincent. "I find myself moving back and forth from service to advocacy and back to service work," says Ney. "It all flows together."



# president's message

by Vaughn Donahue, President

For the last few days, I have been contemplating what to write about our Vincentian work in this issue. Many things come to mind, as we do have so many different District Council programs and efforts focused on serving those in need; our Dining Room (serving 1,000 meals a day), our Visitation Center for Women and our Champion Guidance Men's Center, the Food Locker and our Retail Services that support operations and employ so many, our affordable housing efforts, and of course—the support given to the Conferences working in communities throughout Alameda County.

However, what is currently uppermost in our minds has been in our operational forefront, is the need for additional income to continue these programs. We have reduced expenses significantly relative to FY 2003; but unless we increase income, there may be not choice but to reduce our services to the needy as we move into our next fiscal year.

We are appealing to you for help with individual donations by using the envelope inside this Quarterly, and with this message we are starting a campaign to ask the conferences to join in our effort to raise funds for the next budget year. An easy way for a Conference to do this is to call Lu Cuevas, Director of Conferences, at (510) 568-6123, or Philip Arca, Executive Director, at (510) 636-4246 and make them aware of your willingness to help. Either will follow up and point you in the right direction.

We ask that you join us in this effort and also please pray that we won't have to make any further cutbacks. We are trying our best to weather the economic downturn and recapture momentum on an economic upturn.

In Vincent and Frederick,

## Developing a Collective Vision

This spring, staff, board members, and clients of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Alameda County met to discuss organizational strengths and weaknesses and to begin developing a collective vision to guide the council efforts over the next three to five years.

"It was a great opportunity to take a step back and look at our efforts from a different point of view," says Kelli Zenn, Director of Human Resources and Administration.

Two consultants, Steven Leventhal and Valerie Nuzum, helped to organize the planning sessions, facilitating discussions, and then assisted working groups in developing specific action steps and timelines around four key areas:

*We all left hopeful and with a clear sense of where we are headed.*

public relations, community partnerships, employment for clients, and recruitment of volunteers. (Work has already begun in several of these areas, as you'll read about elsewhere in this issue.)

Zenn notes that the planning sessions came at a critical time for the organization, which had been faced with tough financial decisions in 2003 and early 2004.

"We were able to look at the whole organization and develop strategies to improve our future," says Zenn. "We all left hopeful and with a clear sense of where we are headed."

Action plans developed during the meeting will be added to the Five-Year Plan previously developed by the District Council's Board of Directors.

## VOICE of the POOR

In its April 2001 paper, *Speaking in One Voice for Christ's Poor*, the national Society of St. Vincent de Paul urged Vincentians to become involved in local, state, even national policy initiatives to improve the quality of life of the poor in the United States. For more information on the Voice of the Poor initiative, visit [www.voiceofthepoor.org](http://www.voiceofthepoor.org), where you'll find background information, position papers on key social justice issues, and news about Vincentian advocacy work throughout the country and the world.

DISTRICT COUNCIL NEWS



## THE VINCENTIAN QUARTERLY

The *Vincentian Quarterly* is published four times a year by The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Alameda County. We are a nonprofit charitable organization dedicated to helping the hungry, the needy and others less fortunate than ourselves. We do this by helping them with food, temporary lodging, clothing, furniture and providing employment in our facilities, to make their lives a little easier. We carefully protect the dignity of every person we encounter through our work. Our funding comes from donations of used clothing, and household goods, furniture, food and financial contributions.

### BOARD of TRUSTEES

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- Ed Frakes  
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- Bill Giammona  
*Transfiguration, Castro Valley*
- Richard Nivens  
*St. Theresa, Oakland*
- Dave Nolan  
*Oakland Free Dining Room*
- Richard Oakman  
*St. Joachim, Hayward*
- Donna Watson  
*St. Albert, Alameda*

## Dining Room Manager Hired

Ron Smith, a volunteer with St. Vincent de Paul for more than 10 years, has been hired as the new Manager of the Dining Room in Oakland.

Smith first became involved through St. Patrick's conference in Rodeo and has been working as a Dining Room volunteer for many years. At St. Patrick's he also has been a Eucharistic Minister, lector, Parish Council and Knights of Columbus member, and an active supporter in the parish's successful campaign to build a new church.

In addition to his parish activities, Smith is also active in the Lions International. He has had a wide range of commercial experience as well, most recently with the Home Depot.



## Volunteer Manager Hired

The Alameda Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is redoubling its efforts to attract new volunteers. Leading this initiative is Rebecca Jewell, our newly hired Volunteer Manager.

Rebecca is Co-Chair of the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network ([www.ynpn.org](http://www.ynpn.org)) of the San Francisco Bay Area and joins the council after working with community based and international organizations. In keeping with the District Council's strategic focus of expanding its volunteer base, Rebecca is charged with increasing the number and variety of volunteer opportunities available to individuals and organizations interested in supporting the work of the council.

Besides working with other District Council staff to identify specific areas of needs, Rebecca is reaching out to the business and professional community to encourage their involvement in both one-time and ongoing projects. In particular, she is working to identify individuals with specific areas of expertise (in business management or recycling, for example) who can work with society staff to improve programs and services.

Rebecca notes that current volunteer needs at the society include the following:

- *Champion Center* Men's Mentors: Men interested in working with homeless and at-risk men on a personal level.
- *Main Office* Fundraising Social Enterprise Venture: Write grants and grants research for Social Enterprise programs working with homeless and at-risk populations and self-sufficiency.
- *Thrift Store* Donations Attendant: Sort books, clothing, misc. items.
- *Visitation Center* Spanish-speaking playroom monitors: Play with young children (ages 1-6 years of age) while their mothers take English classes in the next room.
- *Visitation Center* Baby Room Attendant: Sort, wash and organize children's donated clothing, keep storage room organized and stocked.
- *Visitation Center* Children's Room Clerk: Accept and distribute donations, check in clients. Downtown Oakland

If you are interested in volunteering for St. Vincent de Paul, please contact Rebecca at (510) 636-4253 or email [volunteer@svdp-alameda.org](mailto:volunteer@svdp-alameda.org).

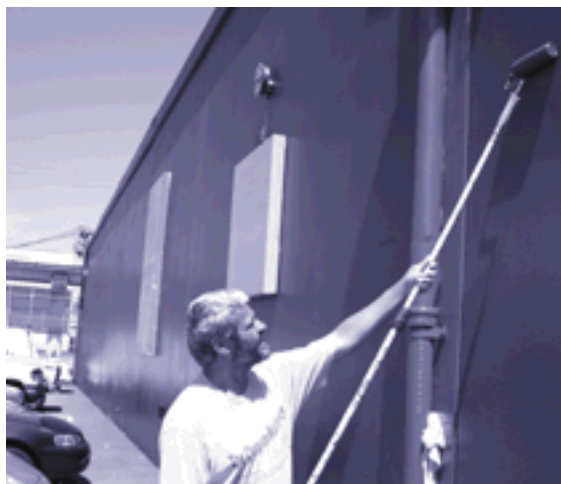
## CHAMPION Workforce Starts at Home

A new project of the CHAMPION Guidance Center for Men aims to help clients gain job experience that will provide them with the resources and skills needed to take the first step down the road to independence.

The CHAMPION WorkForce, launched in May of 2004, works with approximately 30 men who are part of a temporary labor pool that local businesses can tap when they have small jobs or day projects to be completed. WorkForce members were selected after being interviewed by staff to determine availability, interest, and need.

The first employer to take advantage of this new labor source was the Society of St. Vincent de Paul itself. Members of the CHAMPION WorkForce were hired to paint the exteriors of the Alameda, Fremont, and Oakland stores, which are all being renovated. They also cleared out the "Tin Building" and may be hired to distribute postcards and to landscape the Fremont store later this summer.

The CHAMPION WorkForce initiative is similar to a successful program started by the Portland Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul several years ago. "Portland's success with their employment program validated our idea," says Executive Director Philip Arca, adding that the goal is to connect clients to broader employment opportunities over the next year and for years to come.



*Champion workforce employee, Charles Hernandez, paints the St. Vincent de Paul building on San Leandro Boulevard.*

## WANTED: Car Donations

Are you in the market for a new car? Do you own an old car that's no longer being used? Instead of having it sit in your driveway, donate it to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Alameda County. We'll take any car – typically even if it's not running – as well as RVs in working condition. You get a tax write-off; and if your parish Conference is the referring entity, it receives a portion of the proceeds. And in these tough economic times, the District Council receives much-needed funds to continue our programs and service.

According to a recent analysis of vehicle donations, the Alameda County District Council receives fewer donations than many of our sister organizations in the Bay Area. With your help, we can increase donations and generate much needed revenue to support our Special Projects in Downtown Oakland and the beginning efforts of a new resource and referral emergency office in Fremont.

For more information, please call or e-mail us at (510) 636-4245 or [info@svdp-alameda.org](mailto:info@svdp-alameda.org).



## MBA's Analyze Retail Sales Operations

Thanks to an innovative program that links Stanford Business School alumni with local nonprofits, the council's retail sales operations are undergoing a much-needed business analysis. Volunteer MBAs from several area businesses are participating in the project as part of the School's Alumni Consulting Team (ACT).

From reviewing financial data to analyzing systems, staff, and hours of operations, the volunteer consultants will identify inefficiencies and potential savings opportunities, as well as revenue-generating opportunities.

The operations analysis comes at a good time. The thrift store operations have been struggling for several years. In late 2003, several steps were immediately taken to improve retail operations, which provide roughly 60 percent of the council's annual revenue. The ACT project is also part of an ongoing effort to encourage local professionals to volunteer their time and services in support of council activities and programs. A full report is expected by the end of the year.

### Saint Vincent de Paul stores

**Alameda**  
2315 Lincoln Ave.  
(510) 865-1109  
Manager: Leah

**Fremont**  
3777 Decoto Road  
(510) 792-3711  
Manager: Beth

**Livermore**  
1817 W. 2nd St.  
(925) 455-1104  
Manager: Margaret

**Oakland (East)**  
9235 San Leandro St.  
(510) 636-4252  
Manager: Aida

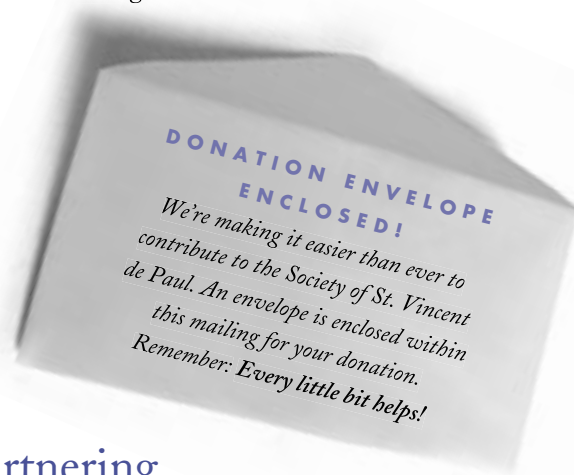
**Oakland (Downtown)**  
2272 San Pablo Ave  
(510) 834-4647  
Manager: Mary

## Don't Hide Your GENEROSITY

Have you listed the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Alameda County in your will or other planned giving instrument? If so, we would like to hear from you.

By informing us of your plans, you give us the opportunity to thank you for your generosity and provide us with valuable information that helps us plan for future growth.

In the coming years, we would also like to begin organizing an annual gathering for major donors where we can acknowledge your contribution and encourage others, through your example and stories, to consider ways in which they, too, can be a long-term contributor to the efforts of SVdP.



## Partnering

Special thanks to CURA for their gift of time and talent. In the spirit of collaboration of community-based nonprofits, they came to our rescue and painted our Decoto offices this April. We have opened a Resource and Referral Emergency Service Office through the good works of the Tri-City SVdP Conferences. Special thanks and blessings to CURA and their paint crew; we would not have been able to open without you.

### How to Reach Us

**District Council Office:** (510) 638-7600

**Philip Arca**, Executive Director  
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**Lu Cuevas**, Director of Conferences/Vincentian Life  
(510) 568-6123 • [lcuevas@svdp-alameda.org](mailto:lcuevas@svdp-alameda.org)

**Inga Lewis**, Executive Assistant to E.D.  
(510) 636-4247 • [ilewis@svdp-alameda.org](mailto:ilewis@svdp-alameda.org)

**Kelli Zenn**, Director of Administration  
(510) 636-4242 • [kzenn@svdp-alameda.org](mailto:kzenn@svdp-alameda.org)

**Food Donations:** Jerry Ratti (510) 636-4250

**Auto Donations:** Charles McGlothen (510) 636-4245

**Dining Room:** Ron Smith (510) 451-7676

**Visitation Center:** Sr. Marion Bill (510) 444-3790

**Men's Center:** Stephen Krank (510) 444-0269

**General Info:** [info@svdp-alameda.org](mailto:info@svdp-alameda.org)

**Website:** [www.svdp-alameda.org](http://www.svdp-alameda.org)