

Holy Moments



VINCENTIAN NEWSLETTER
Fall, 2025

Executive Director's Notes • A Season of Service: From Akron to Lorain to Bay Village

"No work of charity is foreign to the Society"

In this edition of Holy Moments, we'll fulfill Frederic Ozanam's favorite maxim: "no work of charity is foreign to the Society." You'll discover how our members engage with local grocers to distribute excess food to grateful shelters, food pantries, and hot meal programs. Juan Diaz, our Lorain district president, describes his newly formed **ministry to the incarcerated** where he and other Vincentians visit residents of the Lorain County Jail each Wednesday night. And finally, Kevin Connnelius discusses his first year leading the St. Raphael conference in Bay Village and the tremendous void his group is filling on the West side of Cleveland.

In September, I had the opportunity to visit the Fr. Hilkert Ozanam Center in Akron. It is a very well-run resource for the neighborhood, and includes a food pantry, clothing outlet, diapers, and now beds and bedding. Under the steady leadership of Jim and Cathie Perusek, Fr. Hilkert's many volunteers are a blessing for SVdP and the many neighbors relying on its ministry.

Our 39th annual Blanket Sunday appeal starts October 12! This is our biggest campaign raising funds to purchase blankets, beds and bedding for use by homeless outreach programs and our conferences, and to pay neighbors'

utility bills. We have worked to better promote this year's drive. Look for billboards on local highways, listen for radio ads on WTAM and The Rock, and check out our new domain blanketsunday.org.

A big welcome to the Our Lady of Angels conference, located on Rocky River Drive in Cleveland, our third new conference in 2025! Thank you to Father Rob Ramser and our new Vincentians for answering St. Vincent's call for friendship, spirituality, and service.



Jack Bedell, Executive Director

**BLANKETS.
BEDS.
HOPE.**

**SHARE THE WARMTH
IN NE OHIO**





**DONATE AT
BLANKETSUNDAY.ORG**

Money raised from the Blanket Sunday campaign will be used to purchase 5,000+ warm winter blankets, 500+ beds including bedding, and will pay the utility bills for 600+ families this winter.

You can also donate by check, made out and mailed to:
Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 1404 E. 9th St. 3rd Floor, Cleveland, OH 44114

Ministry to the Incarcerated



Volunteers from our Lorain District, led by President Juan Diaz, visit the Lorain County Correctional Facility every Wednesday and meet with incarcerated residents. During these sessions, they reflect on scripture, pray together and offer hope and reassurance.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is able to offer in-residence support such as a special meal, reading materials, and basic care essentials.

They hope to one day be able to

provide tuition assistance, clothing, transportation, job support and training for those about to be released and reintegrated.

Offering spiritual guidance and financial support not only helps inmates find hope but offers positive life-changing skills and helps to reduce recidivism.

Juan Diaz told us, "The program has been very well-received by both inmates and jail administrators.

We met with almost 300 individuals on a recent visit! Our goal is to work with the inmates and facility staff to create a positive outcome for everyone, regardless of their circumstances."

Volunteers receive a manual that helps start a foundation for confident spiritual conversations. It includes techniques and ideas for meaningful discussions, prayers, ways to navigate challenges and how to help the incarcerated individuals grow in faith.

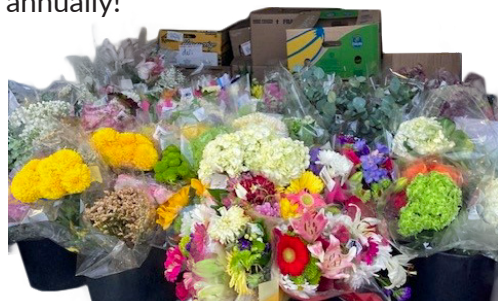
Recently, Juan's group received a \$2,100 grant from the Shook Construction Foundation which helped to purchase bibles in both English and Spanish.

A special thank you goes to Sr. Rita Mary Harwood, SND, for her support and mentoring to get the ministry started.

Conference Partnerships

St. Ladislav in Westlake has worked with local businesses that we all know and love, for the past 20+ years. When Conference members Don and Arlene Spence started receiving food from local restaurants, the only place to store it was in Vincentians' home freezers. Mike Dickey, the current Conference Partnerships leader, used his Ford Escape to pick up the goods when he first started. Now, they have a proper delivery van and 22 drivers!

The restaurants and stores include Trader Joe's Westlake, Giant Eagle Market District, Chick-fil-A, Panera, Olive Garden, and they recently added Cooper's Hawk Restaurant in Avon. The donations total over \$1M in food annually!



Trader Joe's is the largest contributor with about 60% of the total donations. It is primarily chicken, ground beef and pork approaching its expiration date. They have also given turkeys at Thanksgiving with one year totaling over 200! Trader Joe's sometimes provides flowers which are donated to St. Lads for funerals or to Ames

Hospice.

Giant Eagle Market District donates pastry seven days a week! They have given as many as 12 large boxes in one donation. The group picks up at Chick-fil-A two days a week. Olive Garden is one day a week but donates enough lasagna and spaghetti to serve 125 hot meals. Panera used to throw out day-old pastry, but after St. Lads SVdP contacted them, they now donate five days a week. Cooper's Hawk Restaurant is the newest establishment on the list and they donate rice and potatoes every Friday.

Food donations are shared with local partnering nonprofits including St. Ignatius of Antioch, Edna House, St. Malachi, St. Herman's Monastery, Primary Purpose Center, and Jean Marie House, among others.

Thank you to St. Lads for your wonderful example of partnerships with local businesses for the benefit of so many!

Do you know a Conference doing exceptional things? We would love to hear about it! Email your stories to info@svdpcle.org. You may find them in the next edition of Holy Moments or on social media!



Growing the Mission at St. Raphael Parish

As part of our commitment to serving neighbors in need, we are excited to share that St. Raphael Parish in Bay Village formed a brand-new St. Vincent de Paul Conference earlier this year.

Starting a parish-based conference is both a leap of faith and an act of service—uniting volunteers around a common mission to bring Christ's love to those who are struggling.

Each new conference strengthens the Society's presence in Northeast Ohio and extends our ability to respond with compassion to families and individuals who turn to us in difficult times.

We sat down with Conference President, Kevin Cornelius, to talk about the journey of starting a new parish group, the challenges, and the many blessings already unfolding.



1. What challenges did you face in getting your conference started?

As a new conference, we have been surprised at the quantity and urgency of requests. It has also been challenging to identify, develop and become familiar with the list of possible resources our neighbors can use.

We are new, and not yet well structured to quickly respond to a neighbor's needs. We expect to be more responsive and cooperative with experience and through setting up effective procedures.

2. What benefits have you seen?

We have helped provide beds, bedding, and monetary assistance for utilities, rents, and transportation to a wide-range of neighbors on the west side of Cleveland.

Personally, I have seen my own spirituality grow and recognize that all are loved by God. It is rewarding to bring hope to so many people.

3. How do you reach the community in need?

People call our Pastor or church office and then they pass the request to SVdP. Sometimes calls are directed our way

from the Diocesan Message Ministry. We then vet the need and our call ministry reaches out by phone initially and then we set up a home visit.

We also have an SVdP page on the St. Raphael website to get help, donate, or volunteer. Check it out here: [St. Raphael SVdP](#)

4. How has the parish received SVdP?

Extremely well! Fundraising has gone very well, and parishioners have readily volunteered. There is an exciting buzz throughout the conference and parish. Fr. Dan Schlegel has been a huge supporter of SVdP throughout the process.

5. Do you have any suggestions for other parishes that may want to start an SVdP Conference?

Use the SVdP resources available at the Cleveland Council (Diocese) level. Having the support of the Pastor and parish is very important. Create awareness in the parish to recruit an initial set of members for fundraising and resources.

Other advice I would give is to set up committees for things like fundraisers, grants, a PR group (for bulletin announcements), etc. Let the parish know that you are open to volunteers.

Interested in Starting a Group at Your Parish?

The story of St. Raphael shows how much can be accomplished when parishioners come together with faith, creativity, and compassion.

If you believe your parish community may be interested in forming a new St. Vincent de Paul Conference, we invite you to take the next step. To learn more about the Society's mission reach out directly to Jack Bedell, Executive Director, at jbedell@svdpcle.org

