

VincentianConcern

St Vincent de Paul Society (England and Wales)

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Talking to the future: Ensuring the voices of young people are heard



Inside this edition • Poverty threatens working households
St Vincent's shops weather the storm • Our newest support project

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Finding comfort in patience

Patience is a virtue and it is one that I have been struggling to channel recently. Of all the many things I am praying for at present, to have more patience is high up the list.

The longer restrictions continue and the closer we come to their lifting, the harder I find it to reach the state of acceptance that I had earlier in the pandemic. I am impatient to travel, to meet with members and staff, to attend festival meetings, to visit projects and shops. I am impatient to have our Conference meetings in person, to visit people for longer than a few minutes, to be able to sing in church. I am impatient to finally hold a wake for my father, for my husband to be able to visit his family in Ireland, for my children's lives to get back on track. I am impatient for recovery so that the economic suffering being felt by so many may start to lift. I am impatient for a fairer society to emerge. I am impatient for the fear and anxiety to lessen.

Pope Francis, on this subject, reminds us that the testing of our faith produces patience. He says that Christian patience is neither "resignation nor an attitude of defeat but the virtue of those who are on the journey, those who are moving forward rather than stopping and becoming closed off." In other words, patience is not simply the ability to wait but it is how we behave while we are waiting. He also reminds us that "God always has patience" and that the Word of God "entered with patience in the moment of the Incarnation and thus unto death on the cross. We do not have a magic wand for everything, but we do have our trust in the Lord who accompanies us and never abandons us..." These are salutary words and certainly offer me comfort. We must focus on and give thanks for what we can achieve during this waiting game and continue to move forward with open hearts and to the best of our ability.

During the last few months and over the coming months, several central council presidents have or will have ended their terms of office. They answered the call to be servant leaders in their region, and I know we are all grateful for their dedication and hard work. I am particularly grateful for their counsel and support on National Council. I look forward to meeting the new presidents as soon as possible. Succession and passing on the flame to others is such an important part of what we do in the SVP and it reaps great rewards. We all have different talents and we are blessed to have the opportunity to use those talents in the service of others.

May I wish you all a good summer and patience in abundance.

Yours in St Vincent and Blessed Frédéric,

Helen O'Shea, National President

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Finding a challenge in prayer



Guest contributor Jon Cornwall, Director of Membership, shares his thoughts and reflections on the presence of the Society in the most challenging of circumstances.

How far is the work of the SVP prepared to go? King David in Psalm 139 engages in a fascinating

thought exercise of poetic writing and prayer. And asking the question “where can I run from your love?” although we may be more familiar with the primary school hymn with the same words. For each of these places we hear that You (God) were there. For the Society it is possible to read this same prayer as a challenge. If each of these extremes represents a place where God can be found and reached, is it also a place where we, as a Society, are willing to enter, serve and act?

It is likely that this edition of the Vincentian Concern details more than a few examples of Conferences, support centres and shops each seeking in their own way to care for others who they might encounter and journey with them together. Here we will ask, can we find the work of the SVP where people most need it?

“If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea...” (9)

Through the incredible work of Twinnage we are able to support people overseas, and through the care our Conferences, shops and community support projects regularly offer to refugees and migrants we offer much the same to those who seek to make England and Wales their home. Are we willing to serve people from other nations and who are from all faiths and none? Yes.

“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light becomes night around me’” (11)

Through the works of outreach to the homeless, visiting of prisoners, responding to urgent requests for help, journeying together the SVP regularly shines light into some of the darkest of times. Are we prepared to step out of our comfort zones and meet people where they are? Yes.



“Are we willing to actively seek and find people in need? Yes.”

“Where can I flee from your presence?”

Through visits, and lately telephone befriending, we have broken into the isolation which many people suffer under. We have grown our presence on social media and empowered those who feel voiceless to make themselves heard. Are we willing to actively seek and find people in need? Yes.

“If I go to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths you are there” (8)

Through the work of the End of Life Companionship project we provide a comforting presence during the most vulnerable and precious moments at the end of life. Are we willing to receive training, support one another and remain lasting friends to others until the very end? Yes.

In this changing world there will always be more we could do and different ways we are asked to help. Will we rise to those challenges too? With God’s help we shall.

Our usual contributor for the spirituality section, Father Paul Roche, was unfortunately unable to contribute to this month’s edition so Jon has kindly stood in. We look forward to welcoming Father Paul back in the next edition.



Pat celebrates 100th birthday with charity challenge

Indefatigable great-grandmother Pat Bishop marked her 100th birthday by walking 500 steps every day during Lent to raise money for families around the world living without access to water.

Pat, who lives with her daughter and son-in-law in Poole, Dorset, after retiring 35 years ago, is an active SVP member. A founding member and former Director of the Drama and Arts Department at Bath University, Pat is supporting international development charity CAFOD's Walk for Water campaign. She says: "I felt so awful inside when I thought about how badly people were suffering because they did not have clean water readily available.

"When I turned 100 years old people would ask what I'd like for my birthday. At my age, I don't need anything, so I would be delighted if people could sponsor me as their gift."

Pat, who is a regular tap-dancer, was inspired by centenarian Captain Sir Tom Moore who moved the nation to donate a staggering £32.8 million for the NHS. She has raised over £4,500 to date, saying: "500 steps might not seem far, and a few years ago I would have signed up to do 10,000 steps a day. However, nowadays

500 steps will still be a challenge, particularly as the weather is rather chilly."

Members of Pat's Conference in Poole describe the great-grandmother as "strong, determined and always keen to get involved and happy to help and encourage others."

Pat, who is a long-term SVP member at St Mary's Church in the Dorset town and still helps at monthly 'tea and chat' afternoons for senior citizens, says that the motivation for her charity work stems from a childhood experience in which her family were offered a home when they were in need. Pat explains: "When my father lost his job, two very good family friends kindly offered to take us into their home. They did this immediately and didn't want anything in return for their generosity, they were just pleased to have us with them."

Her daughter, Mandy Shanahan, adds: "Mum is an amazing woman who has inspired so many people through her life. Her faith has always been important to her and she was delighted to find a strong SVP at St Mary's. She has always made time for other people no matter how busy her life has been. She is an inspiration."

Lockdown, a smart watch and 774 kilometres!

Dr Monica Chidgey, President of Our Lady and St Michael Abergavenny Conference, retired as an NHS GP in April 2020, almost seamlessly coinciding with the first lockdown.

Having been brought up in a fiercely Catholic family in Cardiff, the desire to help people in need steered her to a vocation in medicine, but unfortunately Monica had little time to volunteer in the local and wider community. After retirement, she contacted her parish SVP in Abergavenny, and within six months, found herself president.

Due to lockdown and the mandatory church closures, the Conference's normal income stream of retiring collections was cut off, so funds were needed. Looking on the SVP website, she embraced the 'Rise to the Challenge' campaign by giving up alcohol for a month and asking for sponsorship. Monica raised £1,070 plus gift aid which was able to give the Conference bank account some security.

The third Welsh lockdown, winter, and recent retirement brought inevitable challenges. Having time on her hands, and a desire to learn more about the SVP, joining the Thursday Weekly Webinars became part of the week's routine. The information given about 'Twinning' in Sudan and South Sudan with the desperate plight of the people in these areas struck a chord with Monica.

Having been brought up in a typical British Catholic family in the sixties where the plight of the 'Starving Children in Africa' was frequently brought up especially at mealtimes when certain dishes on the menu were not received with enthusiasm.

She felt she had to do something. A relative mentioned he was doing The Virtual Camino so the idea for her campaign was born covering the distance of 774km (483 miles) following the Camino Frances Route, which starts at St Jean Pied de Port in the French Pyrenees then virtually covering the distance of the journey through Northern Spain on foot, bicycle and indoor rowing all recorded on a smart watch.



On 12 February, Monica began her challenge. During inclement weather this involved indoor walks and jogs whilst watching YouTube videos of virtual landscapes from coastal Hawaii to the streets of Paris; forest walks in New Zealand; virtual rowing whilst watching footage of lakes and rivers in Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and USA. On better days, Monica walked along the banks of the River Usk, listening to audiobooks, and then once it got dry getting the bike serviced and ready to knock out the distance.

Once the challenge was set, Monica went about publicising her endeavour on social media and making sure she achieved her quest. On Easter Sunday, Monica completed her 774km challenge with an early morning cycle of five and a half miles to her Parish Church. At the time of writing £1,400 has been raised as well as an increased awareness of the plight of the Sudanese within the Conference and the wider community.

Monica's JustGiving page is still open if you would like to donate, just scan the code!



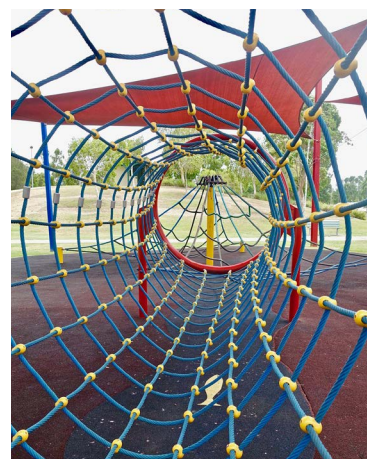
Gesture helps youngster play

Generous members of the Our Lady Immaculate Conference in Whitstable, Kent, have helped a child with complex needs to play safely.

Conference members allocated an initial £500 from the Covid-19 Emergency Fund to help a single mother of two young boys. Her eldest son, aged three, suffers from Noonan's Syndrome, Autism and ADS, and has associated problems with his sight and heart, among other things. He is constantly active with no danger awareness and will self-harm if not stimulated. He has a frequent urgency to climb, so his mother proposed building a climbing frame which would allow her son to play safely.

The climbing frame, which carries a price tag of £860, needed an extra £500 to make it safe for the youngster. The Conference is aiming to add to their initial gift to allow the extra work to take place.

The three-year-old requires constant physical attention and stimulation. To help achieve this, his mother takes him to as many activity clubs as possible, often more than once a day, as well as swimming. Although she receives a disability allowance for her son, along with other benefits, they only partly cover her expenses for these activities. The climbing frame will provide hours of safe play when activity classes close for the summer break.



Internet radio combats loneliness

St Sabina's and St Monica's Conference, which covers the towns of Wivenhoe and Brightlingsea in rural Essex, has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. Visits to beneficiaries became impossible, so regular telephone contact was introduced, and colourful cards with greetings, prayers and bible puzzles were sent out.

However, with churches closed and Eucharistic ministers not able to take Holy Communion to beneficiaries either in their own homes or in care homes, Conference members targeted the spiritual isolation of individuals they support.

The Conference turned to technology for an innovative solution, purchasing a number of Pure internet radios, which were pre-set to radio stations



transmitting Mass, such as Radio Maria England. The radios were set up by members, who enabled password access to wi-fi systems,

and people who didn't have wi-fi in their homes were given mobile routers and full instructions, making the process of getting online easy.

An older gentleman whose wife had died in a care home from Covid-19 while he had to shield at home due to medical conditions received a radio. He says: "It's absolutely marvellous. I am very, very pleased with it. I have never had the privilege of daily Mass all my life and now I am able to choose from three daily masses. It is a treasure to me."

For people suffering from loneliness, an internet radio provides an easy listening companion which only requires pressing the 'on' button. It can also be a friendly voice during sleepless nights. Radio Maria is particularly suitable in these cases as it broadcasts beautiful spiritual music of different genres.

Members have also turned to technology to hold regular Conference meetings via Zoom, and instead of the usual collection at the end of meetings, members have transferred donations by online banking directly to the Conference account.

St Clare's targets Cardiff poverty

The presence of an SVP support centre can supercharge local activity, providing a hub for members and volunteers from which to support their local community. It's the star around which the Conference planets revolve.

The SVP's portfolio of Community Support Projects (CSPs) is expanding and is soon to be joined by Cardiff Central Council's St Vincent's Ely Bridge project in the Ely district of Cardiff. The centre is due to open its doors at the end of August with manager Nathan Harding at the helm.

The Society currently operates five St Vincent's shops in South Wales; two in Cardiff and a further three in Newport, Pontypridd and Barry. The need for a support centre in Ely is clear, with the area ranked 128 out of 1,909 districts, according to the 2019 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The SVP Board of Trustees has expanded the Society's strategy to call for a CSP in every Central Council (CC) in the next five years. Setting up more support centres and projects in deprived communities will enhance the Society's mission to reach out to people experiencing the effects of poverty in all its forms.

Elizabeth Palmer, CEO, and Kate Nightingale, Deputy CEO, have been speaking to volunteer members about the need in local communities. All CSPs are initiated by local members identifying a need and working with local communities to offer help and support.

Our centres are unique to the local community they serve. In Brighton we support isolated older people with therapeutic arts, in Southend we support people experiencing homelessness and in Newcastle we support refugees and people seeking asylum, as well as supporting the community in Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and recently Wallasey.

All centres are run and managed by paid SVP staff and supported by local volunteers and SVP members who sit on a local oversight group (LOG). If you have identified a need or a project in your area, please contact your local Conference to explore the idea of developing something new.

The statistics from the area make uncomfortable reading. In Ely around 50% of children are living in low-income households, and unemployment

rates are high – in approximately 15% of Ely households, adults with dependent children are unemployed, compared with around 5% in less deprived areas of the city. It is striking that around 43% of adults living in Ely have no academic or professional qualifications compared with around 21% in most areas of Cardiff.

Above the age of 65, only 35% of men and 32% of women can expect to live their remaining years in good health, compared with 65% and 57% respectively in the rest of Cardiff. Not surprisingly then, Ely has among the lowest scores for life satisfaction and happiness and amongst the highest scores for anxiety.

During the consultation phase of the project, local people suggested using the centre to house a food bank, a drop-in centre, a debt advice service, help for the homeless, a café and a training centre. However, services for young people were high on the agenda for many locals.

Churches in Ely have also been supportive of the project, with one minister remarking that there was an "under-provision of community and public space" in the area. Additionally, schools near St Vincent's Ely Bridge were also encouraged by the potential help for young people the new centre would enable.

The first phase of the project, which is housed in the disused St Clare's Church, is a programme of refurbishment to bring it up to an appropriate standard. The second phase involves starting a food bank, a café, a children's play area and a community shop with an emphasis on good quality clothing at low prices.

The development of a drop-in day centre, a counselling service and meeting rooms together with an advice facility to 'signpost' residents to the appropriate council department or other organisation, are part of the third phase of the project.





Poverty threatens working households

According to government figures, the jobs market “is showing signs of recovery”, however, the headline statistics mask a problem few might be aware exists – poverty figures for people in work are rising. SVP Social Policy Manager, Alessandra Sciarra, highlights this growing problem.

The total number of workers in poverty has risen over the past 20 years from 2.3 million in 1996/97 to 4 million in 2017/18 with just under half in full-time employment, according to research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

In-work poverty is a complex situation, in which low pay does not always equate to poverty. For example, people contributing to a household all earning minimum wage may not be classed as ‘living in poverty’, whereas a household in which only one member of the family earns a wage, be that above the ‘living wage’, could be classed as ‘living in poverty’.

The situation is on the government’s radar, and Boris Johnson’s administration promised an Employment Bill would be introduced in 2021, however no mention was made in the Queen’s Speech. Individual MPs have said they believe a bill will be introduced this year, but no timeline has been mentioned and no details of what the bill might contain have been mooted. If the government wants to truly ‘level up’, a strong employment bill will be a key element in achieving this goal.

Covid has exacerbated the situation for many people and families who were just about ‘getting by’, but who are now struggling to make ends meet. For working households, furlough, redundancy, illness, rising household expenses due to working from home, and loss of income for self-employed workers has been disastrous. Add to that the prospect of payment holidays ending, inflation which has risen by 2.1% in the 12 months to May 2021, and escalating housing costs, and you have a toxic blend sucking previously solvent people into a poverty vortex.



Recent research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has identified three key factors contributing to the incidence of working poverty. The rising cost of accommodation in the private rented sector coupled with less availability and longer waiting times for social housing, play a significant role in trapping working people in poverty.

The research also suggests that wages falling as the cost of living increases weakens the safety net for people on a low income. Research by the IPPR has shown that two full-time earners paid at the minimum wage (currently £8.91 per hour) are needed for families to avoid being pulled into poverty.

Finally, affordable and flexible childcare is a key contributing factor to rising working poverty. This particularly affects single-parent households or households where the person working can only work part-time. Childcare support through Universal Credit is currently paid in arrears. This means many people are required to pay large sums of money upfront, resulting in difficult decisions around buying food and other necessities. Paying it upfront could be an easily-achievable solution.

For working parents and guardians of children, one of the main issues is the lack of jobs where work hours are flexible (less than two in 10 jobs), which mean people, and especially single parents, have to pay for childcare. Another issue is the rising cost of childcare, which the IPPR estimates rose by 5% in 2020. Meanwhile, another key problem is the systemic underfunding of Local Authorities. Only half (56%) have enough funded childcare for parents working full-time, according to the Coram Family and Childcare Trust.

Generally speaking, working poverty tends to be more prevalent in low pay jobs. The Low Pay Commission estimates that nearly half (48%) of all jobs paying at or below the minimum wage are in retail, hospitality and cleaning and maintenance, which are occupations usually held by either younger people, or people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Low Pay Commission also found that people on low wages were more likely to be furloughed and lose pay, increasing pressure on a group already facing a financial dilemma.



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One of the groups most affected by working poverty is single-parent families



“ Covid has exacerbated the situation for many people and families who were just about ‘getting by’, but who are now struggling to make ends meet.”

As result of the pandemic and disruptions to trade caused by Brexit, unemployment is widely predicted to rise by a further 500,000 to a peak of 6.5% at the end of 2021, which is unwelcome news for millions of working households currently teetering at the edge of the poverty trap.

Meanwhile, the £20 increase to Universal Credit has been a lifeline for millions during the pandemic, but it is coming to an end in the autumn and threatens to pull hundreds of thousands into poverty. The SVP has been vocal in calling for this payment to be made permanent.

One of the groups most affected by working poverty is single-parent families. In 1996 the average number of single parent families in working poverty was just under 30%, but that number has increased to 40% in 2020.

Single earner couple households have also been disproportionately affected. This group now experiences poverty rates almost as high as for households which contain no full-time workers.

The SVP has made the ‘levelling up’ of society and working poverty two of its main areas of social policy work. We will be campaigning on these issues over the coming months and actively contributing to the political discussions on these subjects.



'We're far more than just a retail destination'

The retail sector has been hard hit during the pandemic, but St Vincent's shops have weathered the storm and are flourishing. Vincentian Concern asks SVP Head of Retail, Helen Voyce, for the secret of her team's success.

What does the SVP's retail arm look like?

We currently have 44 shops in England and Wales, and we are looking to open a couple more this year. We have an excellent team made up of 112 paid employees and volunteers who work hard to create a welcoming and exciting, customer-focused retail experience to raise funds for the wider Society. We sell good quality second-hand items – 'pre-loved' as we call them – at great prices. We also engage with, and care about the local communities in which our shops are based.

We have a depot in West Yorkshire which straddles two sites and offers referrals to beneficiaries in addition to supporting the shops with furniture and reconditioned white goods and electrical items.

We also sell online through eBay, Etsy and Depop, and we are about to launch a Shopify shop to sell white goods and furniture from Leeds.

How did the SVP's retail arm cope with lockdowns?

The UK retail sector has suffered under lockdown restrictions, and charity shops, because they were classed as non-essential retail, were no different. We had to furlough all our retail colleagues, which was hard for them, but as we reopened in between the lockdowns the staff worked tirelessly to do all they could to keep the tills ringing. They did remarkably well, showing great resilience and dedication to the Society.

We have also looked after our colleagues throughout the pandemic, both in practical terms and with their mental well-being. Sadly, we have had some bereavements in the team, so we have supported staff who have lost loved ones. Our staff are the backbone to all we do, and being part of the SVP, we care about everyone in every circumstance.



Have you seen an increase in donations during lockdowns? And how has your team coped with that?

Donations of goods to our shops have increased, so we brought a few colleagues back from furlough early to sort things out and get things ready. We still had Christmas window displays and winter stock on the shop floor, so we had to do a complete seasonal change before we could reopen on 12 April.

When our shops reopened, we were inundated with donations, but due to new government guidance, we no longer have to quarantine goods, so it was actually easier coming back from this lockdown than it was the last time. Previously, we had to quarantine all goods for three days, which logistically made our job far more complex, and it was a nightmare trying to find somewhere to place donations in quarantine until we could get them on the shop floor.

It's all credit to our shop teams, who have managed the situation remarkably well.

Have you seen a change in the number of volunteers during the pandemic?

We have paid employees in every shop, but they are supported by an amazing team of over 500 volunteers, who we couldn't do without.

A lot of volunteers came back after lockdown eased, so we didn't see a fall in volunteering numbers. In fact, we have had quite a few new volunteers come to us – people who have found themselves unemployed, people who want to get out of the house and meet others again, and people who simply want a bit of structure to their day.



Helen Voyce

The issue is, due to Covid restrictions, we are limited to numbers in our shops because of social distancing, so it's credit to the teams in our shops that they have built rotas so that we have people in when we need them but in a safe manner.

I hope our volunteers feel valued and appreciated. We are very blessed to have wonderful volunteers who bring such a wealth of knowledge, warmth and passion.

What are sales like now?

The first day back was phenomenal. We took over £100,000, which was mind blowing. Since lockdown easing, we have been on target every week. It's an absolute credit to the team.

When my retail colleagues came back to work, they were so committed, so motivated, they wanted to do their best, so they hit the ground running. They worked extremely hard, and many did extra hours to get the shops ready to open again.

Because the reopening of our shops was so successful, my retail colleagues saw the fruits of their labours first-hand. They saw how the money was flowing in because of their hard work and passion. As retailers, that's what drives us.

We have been creative with wonderfully inventive window displays, and thanks to the amount of donations we have received, we have been able to pick the best goods to display in our shop windows and on shelves.

The St Vincent's service is unique on the high street because we're such a welcoming and friendly shop, and we're an integral part of our communities – the entire retail team work to the SVP's values by caring about people. After such a long time in lockdown, our customers want to be greeted by someone who is welcoming and friendly, have a chat and be served by a real person, and not an automated till.



Do you have any predictions for the future of St Vincent's shops?

Since the pandemic struck, we have had to innovate. As soon as we realised that our shops would have to close, we accelerated our online offering. We now have an ecommerce coordinator who supports our online retail activities, and it's working. Since we started our eBay shop a year ago, we have taken an impressive £38,000 net.

We have trained online sellers who look at the donations we receive and select items which could command a higher price online. They then list them and process the whole transaction. It's an international service – we can ship across the world, which opens up a whole new market for our pre-loved items.

It's important to note that our online offering complements our bricks and mortar shops. It will never take the place of our shops because they provide so much more than just a retail experience.

Obviously, our aim is to raise funds for the amazing work we carry out each and every day, but we are also at the centre of communities. St Vincent's shops work hand-in-hand with Conferences. For example, if there's a foodbank nearby, we will have a box in the shop for people to donate food, and that will get picked up every week.

Our shops are on the front line, raising awareness of our support services, putting people in need in touch with members who can offer support. We complement the work members carry out.

This is an area I would love to expand, so if you are an SVP member, please visit your local St Vincent's shop and see how we can help you in your community.

The retail team isn't just an inspiring set of people, they are an integral part of what makes the SVP the amazing organisation it is.





Better ways to help

Changes to the Beneficiary Support Team at SVP National Office mean that members will now receive even better service when seeking assistance, while people in need looking for help and support from the Society will get it even more quickly and efficiently.

A new member of staff has joined the team: Clare Hughes has been appointed Beneficiary Support Assistant, working alongside Brian Roxburgh, the Beneficiary Support Officer. This will bring new capacity to the team in supporting the work of Conferences. And, coming soon, look out for new resources and information designed to enhance the help that members provide to those in need.

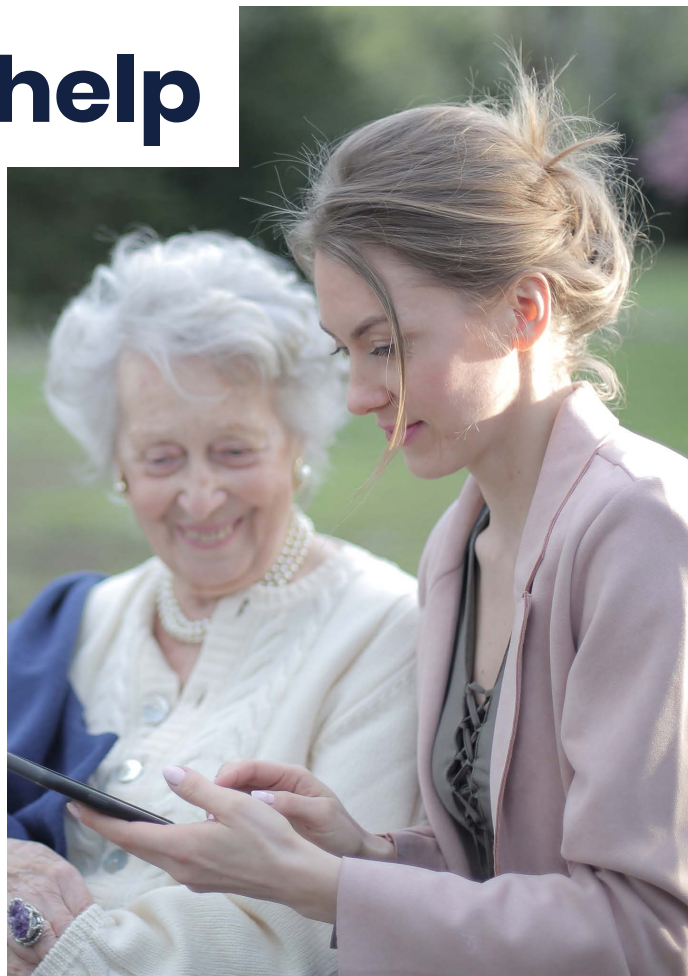
One of the main tasks of Beneficiary Support is to handle the requests for help that come to National Office. These can be received from individuals or from agencies such as Social Services or other charities like the Red Cross.

The team's role is to put them in touch with a local Conference. If a case is referred to you in this way, here's what to expect:

- 1. Brian or Clare will share details of the request with the nearest Conference for consideration – usually via email**
- 2. To comply with data protection rules, the details of the request are attached to an email in a document protected by a password. The password is sent separately. If you have trouble opening the attachment, the team will be happy to assist**
- 3. If your Conference is in a position to help, then it is over to you to contact the beneficiary for an initial chat and respond as you see fit. If you receive a request from the national office but are unable to assist, do let the team know, and they will try to arrange or signpost alternative help**

The Beneficiary Support Team also helps people in need by assisting Conferences in accessing money from 10 Special Funds. These include the Covid-19 Emergency Fund, which is for Conferences whose resources have run low during the pandemic.

Other funds include ones to support asylum seekers,



prisoners or ex-offenders, young people in need, the unemployed and young families. Details of all 10 funds can be found in the members' area of the website at www.svp.org.uk/special-funds-description-and-procedure or contact the Beneficiary Support Team.

The team say that they see it as a privilege to support the work undertaken by SVP members.

"Their ready and selfless responsiveness to those in need is both humbling and inspiring," explains Brian Roxburgh. "As an organisation, the SVP seeks to be Christ-centred in all that it does. It is our friendship with Christ that makes the task of bringing love and much-needed aid to those in need a truly 'personal' work."

He adds: "We in the Beneficiary Support Team would be very happy to hear from you to discuss how we can further support you in this essential mission."

The Beneficiary Support Team may be reached by emailing request@svp.org.uk or by calling 07587 035121 or 07918 274498.

Approved premises stand firm during pandemic

Since March 2020 we've all found new heroes: NHS workers operating at the edge of exhaustion, delivery drivers keeping supermarket shelves stocked, volunteers shepherding people to their vaccinations. These individuals used to be referred to as 'ordinary people', but we now know differently. However, there is a cast of thousands of 'ordinary people' below the radar working to keep vital services open, including the heroic staff at the SVP's two approved premises (APs) in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Ozanam House and St Christopher's House have remained open throughout the pandemic. Funded by the Ministry of Justice, the SVP's APs work closely with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service to accommodate men aged over 18 who are released from prison or directed by the courts to live at the SVP's premises.

As the first lockdown came into force all vulnerable staff at the AP were directed to shield resulting in staff shortages, however their colleagues took on additional shifts, going above and beyond to keep the premises open. The Probation Service also provided support with staff cover.

AP Operational Manager Ann Oxley adds: "To manage the risk of Covid we reduced our occupancy. Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 we accommodated 188 residents in comparison to 335 residents during the previous period."

As time progressed, those assessed to be a medium risk of Covid complications returned to work with a risk assessment in place. Two members of staff who were shielding, one from each AP, returned to work in May after receiving their second vaccination.

The safety of staff and residents has been the highest priority over the past year. Ann says: "Vulnerable staff have Covid risk assessments, and all colleagues have been offered vaccinations. The majority of staff have had their second vaccination. Residents are offered vaccinations, and most have participated."

The nature of the work at APs means face-to-face contact is sometimes unavoidable, particularly during inductions for residents and at times when someone may need additional support. However contact through



interventions has been put on hold during the pandemic to minimise the risk of infection. Contact with residents was maintained by phone, and face masks have become an accepted part of everyday life in the two houses.

The pandemic placed more emphasis on cleanliness in the APs, and it has become a priority for staff that residents understand this. Ann explains: "Cleaning is always a difficult area as we all have different standards, but there are always residents who are willing to get involved and appreciate the structure that this provides to their days, and that it counteracts boredom. They say that it gives them a sense of belonging and makes them feel they are part of Ozanam House or St Christopher's House. It is also important to acknowledge that we have excellent cleaning staff, and residents often comment on the fact that the building is much cleaner than other hostels they have lived in and how much they appreciate this."

Despite the strict cleaning routines and minimising face-to-face contact, some staff and residents tested positive for Covid. Ann comments: "To manage this we formed good links with Newcastle Health and Public Health England teams. We followed their advice and the virus was managed with no need to declare an outbreak, which ensured we could continue to serve our residents."

AP staff and residents worked together to keep the centres safe, which was demonstrated by a resident who found the cleaning routine therapeutic. During his stay at the AP he also learned to play the guitar and would often be heard performing in communal areas which helped to cheer people up and preserve morale during the height of the pandemic.

Ann adds: "His time spent in the AP undoubtedly gave him the platform to demonstrate a period of stability before he left and moved into supported accommodation. Successes like this are what drives us to go the extra mile for our residents, who need our support, particularly during challenging times such as we have experienced over the past year."



The compassion of strangers



The SVP's support for asylum seekers is needed more than ever as the government prepares to sign into law its New Plan for Immigration (NPII), which has been heavily criticised by groups across the political and religious spectrum.

SVP members Christopher and Prue Maxwell-Stewart, both 85, have been helping asylum seekers in their region around Hastings and St Leonards in East Sussex for over 20 years. The couple have seen the attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers in the seaside town change over the past two decades. Christopher, a retired civil engineer, says: "Our involvement started in 2000 when Hastings became an official asylum seeker dispersal area. Initially it was predominantly single men who were sent here, but that has changed and now we see families and women who have been trafficked."

Prue continues: "The local council has generally been very positive about asylum seekers – our local borough Community Officer was a Tutsi refugee from the Rwanda genocide. Asylum seekers have also become respected members of our community – a member of our parish council is a Yoruba from Nigeria, who qualified as a financial consultant and provides invaluable financial services. There are many asylum seekers who now play an absolutely crucial role in our parish."

Unsurprisingly, the key to a successful outcome for asylum seekers seems to be the creation of a support network. Christopher comments: "We have built up a small network of useful people who know how to get things done, but the great thing about the SVP is that it's a worldwide network, so if someone moves on from our care, we can put them in touch with the SVP in that area."

He continues: "We are there as a Conference answering to need when it arises without judgement. We're never quite sure what the need is going to be, and the phone can ring at any time, but with our network, we can usually cater for most things."

The compassion of strangers is an integral part of the support offered to asylum seekers by non-governmental organisations. Individuals who have no

“We're an island, and we're all descended from people from somewhere else. Welcoming people from somewhere else is essential for reinvigorating society.”

knowledge of the people they support other than that they are in desperate need.

However, providence is never far away when determined people like SVP members align practical support with compassionate resolution. Christopher takes up the story: "Many asylum seekers arrive in the UK with nothing but what they are stood up in, which usually includes a t-shirt and inappropriate shoes, so our initial involvement is getting them properly clothed."

"On one occasion we had no idea how we were going to achieve this, but as Prue and I discussed where we could lay our hands on some warm winter clothing, a charity in the Battle area (six miles from Hastings) rang and told us they had 100 packs of winter clothing, including hats, scarves and gloves which were surplus to requirement, and could we make use of them. Talk about the answer to a prayer. It was quite amazing."

Christopher and Prue's Conference has helped countless people escape life-threatening situations to find safety and that most vital element to life, home. Christopher adds: "Time and time again, in a very informal way, we manage to secure a future for a family who just want to be safe and play a part in the community."

Christopher Maxwell-Stewart sums it up perfectly when he says: "We're an island, and we're all descended from people from somewhere else. Welcoming people from somewhere else is essential for reinvigorating society."

Helping people to go with grace

“We weak Samaritans, outsiders as we are, have dared to approach this great sick patient. Perhaps he will be less affrighted by us? Let us try to measure the extent of his wounds in order to pour oil into them. Let us make words of peace and consolation ringing in his ears. Then, when his eyes are opened, we will hand him over to the tender care of those whom God has chosen to be the guardians and doctors of souls.” So wrote Blessed Frédéric Ozanam in the 19th Century. But how, in the 21st Century, is the SVP developing our role of helping those at the end of life?

It is well known the SVP has a long-standing tradition of looking after the most vulnerable, but not everyone remembers it all began when St Vincent heard the confession of a dying person. As Vincentians, many of us are called to undergo a change of heart just the same way St Vincent was. Some might experience it when befriending, others when helping the homeless, and others when being with the dying.

In February, the SVP launched a major new partnership with the Centre for the Art of Dying Well at St Mary's University, Twickenham. The goal is to train SVP members to support dying beneficiaries and those closest to them. In only three months, 91 members have been trained and over 130 people have expressed their interest in taking part in this project.

During the training, members get to hear the voice of experience from Julia Bearne, Manager of Marie Curie Companions service, and Gazala Makda, an end of life Doula. Guided by Lynn Bassett, a retired healthcare chaplain with 14 years' experience, participants are challenged by thought-provoking questions and encouraged to discuss their views on being with the dying and those closest to them.

When asked about one key point from the course, Gail Robinson from Jarrow District Council, who attended the course in April, praised the speakers: “I really felt touched hearing how each one felt doing what they did. Gazala Makda said, ‘You are helping people to go with grace.’ I thought that was beautiful.”

So far, the End of Life Companionship Project has received excellent feedback with an average of 81% of participants giving five stars to the course. Here is what some members have to say about the training:



“ I have found this an enlightening course, opening my eyes to the complex factors involved in such a process. I believe it is an important resource for SVP membership given their mission.”

Lance Philpott, Hallam District Council

“ I enjoyed this course immensely and really appreciated the workbook and the tasks. I found the feedback very useful indeed. The interviews with the various speakers were excellent, short enough to take everything in and in-depth enough to make you think.”

Sue Johnson, Wallasey District Council

Apart from the training, the SVP is currently engaging with NHS Trusts across England and Wales. Most recently, there was a request for help from the NHS Trust at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire. The need is tangible, now the next step is turning concern into action.

The overwhelming success of this project proves how SVP members are being called to understand the ministry of companionship. Some recognise they have been acting as End of Life Companions already without formally having that title. An exciting part of our Vincentian life is following St Vincent's path even when it happens accidentally.

If you or your Conference have not taken part in the training yet, please feel free to email Alejandra Fong, at aodw@svp.org.uk or enrol directly in the Knowledge Hub: membersknowledgehub.svp.org.uk/catalog/courses



A glimpse of the future

The Rise to the Challenge campaign was designed to make the board's plans a reality, raising money to help fund the newly developed strategy. Then Covid changed everything. The campaign pivoted to support immediate need, however its aims remain the same and its name has even greater resonance.

The campaign has had its fair share of twists and turns over the past year, but it has been highly successful to date, and we are about to cross the halfway point on the way to our ultimate aim of raising £10 million. Because funds have been coming in thanks to legacies, four-year pledges and donations, the campaign has already achieved a lot, even before it has gone fully public. Here are a few of the projects and achievements it has made possible so far.

The Hardship Fund

We set up a Hardship Fund of £100,000 from the Rise to the Challenge campaign income, to which members could apply for grants to support people in need. To date, we have fulfilled 260 requests, averaging £406 each, and we have set aside an additional £50,000 for further requests.

Some Conferences have even used grants to establish a new Conference in their area. Any Conference in need of funds to support people severely affected by Covid issues is encouraged to apply.

Through the Hardship Fund grants we have helped hundreds of people with food parcels, paid for utility bills, supported the lonely and people with dementia, and provided play sessions for children who have been affected by lockdowns and Covid restrictions, among a host of other help.

Community project support

At the start of the pandemic, our local support centres had to adapt and innovate to continue to serve their respective communities. Each centre is unique and represents our response to the needs of the communities in which they are located. The centres rose to the challenge and not only continued to provide vital support for their communities, but also became a source of hope for people who were struggling before the pandemic and who were left teetering on the edge of despair post-Covid.

The success of our support centre blueprint meant that the Rise to the Challenge campaign fund could support

the establishment of a new centre. Under the dynamic and tireless leadership of centre manager Daniel Cauchi, St Vincent's Southend-on-Sea and its team of volunteers has hit the ground running, forging links and building partnerships in the coastal town to support the homeless population and those in severe need.

The campaign will help to fund two further support centres. Plans for a centre in Cardiff are in advanced stages, while a new centre in Wallasey on the Wirral is due to open later this year.

The Wallasey centre, under the stewardship of new manager and SVP member Kevin Hogan, will serve an area suffering high unemployment and some of the most severe deprivation in the country.

Financed by a combination of funding from the campaign, Shrewsbury Central Council, rental income and a generous local supporter, the centre is the realisation of a dream for local SVP members. It will focus on alleviating poverty and helping to rehabilitate ex-offenders, and will house a drop-in café, and provide furniture, advice and signposting.

The campaign has also helped to fund the creation of a café and the refurbishment and reorganising of the Bradford support centre. The centre is now bright and welcoming and can provide nutritious meals and a relaxing area for guests.

“ The centres rose to the challenge and not only continued to provide vital support for their communities, but also became a source of hope for people...”



The site of the new Wallasey support centre



A generous gift to the campaign also funded the refurbishment of the conservatory at Tower House in Brighton, along with the provision of art materials and a part-time art activities coordinator. Tower House continues to be a haven of activity for older people and those with dementia who, without the centre, would suffer from the debilitating effects of isolation.

Exploring digital possibilities

The pandemic was the catalyst for the Society to explore the possibilities presented by digital fundraising. The results so far have been highly encouraging with last November's Giving Tuesday campaign and the recent Tea with the SVP initiative both demonstrating what can be achieved in a short time with energy and creativity.

Digital fundraising has become a major component in our plans for the Rise to the Challenge campaign and demonstrates the Society's resilience to external factors, not least a global pandemic.

Hitting the target

From the outset, our target of £10 million for the RTTC campaign might have seemed ambitious, however, with nearly half the target achieved, we have every confidence that our plans for the future of the Society will be fulfilled.





Young Vincentians to the fore

Social Policy Manager, Alessandra Sciarra, speaks to Young Vincentians on the issues facing young people today, bringing their concerns to the forefront of the conversation with key decision makers

One of the biggest questions for public policy today is around children's social care, and the reforms needed to ensure children and young people have the support and services they need to thrive. This is the question the newly elected Children's Commissioner for England and Wales, Dame Rachel de Souza, set out to answer through the Big Ask survey. Launched this spring, the Big Ask is one of the largest and most ambitious surveys of children and young people in decades.

The Big Ask sought to hear directly from children across England and Wales about their experience of living through Covid, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future. The results of the survey will form the cornerstone of the Children's Commissioner's 'Childhood Commission', an ambitious Beveridge-style report due to be published later this year.

The SVP launched a nationwide effort to make sure the voices of our Young Vincentians were also heard as part of this consultation. With the help of our youth team, I set out to speak to some of our Mini Vinnie and B-Attitude members to bring their experiences directly to Dame Rachel.

As part of this consultation, I spoke to our youth team staff, the coordinator of our Vinnie camps (which primarily support low-income families), SVP members supporting young carers, and several schools with active SVP youth groups. I was privileged to speak with more than 50 children aged between seven and 17 and their teachers in schools from Bedford to Middlesbrough. I heard directly from them about the challenges they faced, and are still facing, as well as some of the solutions to these challenges. This consultation culminated in a meeting we hosted with Dame Rachel, attended by myself, our CEO, Elizabeth Palmer, and our National President, Helen O'Shea.

The conversations with our Young Vincentians allowed me to bring the hopes and dreams of some of our young people to the ears of a decision maker. For me, this is what 'turning concern into action' is, and what real, meaningful advocacy and social change is made of. Being able to speak directly with the Commissioner enabled us to have a direct line to someone with the mandate and ability to initiate meaningful and long-lasting change. But most importantly, our recommendations on the types of investment needed to address the challenges raised by children came directly from children themselves. Putting the voices and insight of people with "lived

experience” at the centre of our social justice work is what meaningful advocacy is all about.

The experiences of the children and young people I spoke to were striking. Many spoke about the extreme hardship of having to be almost entirely isolated due to Covid restrictions, and how that led to mental health issues, anxiety, and a deterioration in their physical health.

Pupils spoke about a rise in self-harm, depression and anxiety. Many children were also aware of the pressure on families living on low incomes to buy food and digital equipment for school. They spoke about the impact of not being able to meet with their wider family (particularly grandparents) had on them, and how that led to a strong sense of isolation and alienation. They also spoke about feeling less resilient and “prepared for the world” because they have been sheltered for the past year. Another big concern shared by most children was a lack of aspiration. Many spoke about feeling demotivated as a result of lockdown, and feeling they are no longer motivated to succeed in life.

The older groups aged 16-17 shared their anxieties around financial stability and debt. Hearing about the challenges faced by university students in the past year only added to their pre-existing concerns. They shared their fear of accumulating debt because of the cost of university and that they felt this could lead them to homelessness or food poverty. I was struck by how much they seemed to be affected and concerned by this. On one occasion, I was deeply saddened to hear from a 16-year-old that he felt like giving up on his dream of going to university because of fears of falling into a spiral of debt. Fear of poverty should never be a barrier to young people’s dreams and aspirations.

Most of them also felt a strong sense of injustice as they believed young people did not receive the support other parts of the population have received in the past year. For example, they were aware that while the furlough scheme supported people who were in employment,



students did not receive waivers or subsidies for their rents or university fees. They were concerned that should there be another pandemic in the future, they might be in that position, and feared they wouldn’t have any support to get through it. This group also felt disappointed and angry at how Brexit (out of their control

as they couldn’t vote at the time) impacted negatively on their ability to study abroad, for example through the Erasmus programme, which is no longer available to UK students.

The second major concern raised by young people related to fears of not being able to find a ‘good job’ which allowed them to be financially stable and “not homeless”. Children as young as seven were very aware of the importance of achieving good grades to get a “good job”. While this demonstrates ambition, it also showed the level of anxiety faced by increasingly younger children around financial stability and employment. They displayed a real concern about being in low-paid employment and spoke about fearing homelessness as a result.

Most children said that career advice from an early age would be extremely helpful in mitigating these fears. They hoped to receive guidance on how to choose a career, as well as visiting workplaces to get a sense of what different career options might entail. The older groups, aged 15-16, shared their concerns around not feeling adequately prepared for university. They spoke about the need for more career advice and support, particularly receiving more insight into different career options. They also felt there needs to be a lot more information and guidance on alternative routes to university, particularly around work placements and other routes into work.

Finally, most children and young people spoke about the lack of outdoor spaces to exercise during lockdown as a key issue affecting their well-being. They also spoke about the need for more encouragement to exercise during and outside school hours. While most pupils understand the importance of physical exercise to maintain physical and mental well-being, they talked about their lack of motivation following Covid restrictions and missing out on school.

These conversations were eye-opening to say the least. These fears and concerns reflect some of the issues experienced by people of all ages, all over the country, but appear so much more pressing because they are experienced by some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I feel privileged and thankful for having had the opportunity to act as a conduit between some of the young people we support and decision makers such as the Children’s Commissioner. The work does of course not stop here, this was only the first step in seeking to create change and help tackle some of today’s biggest issues.



Introducing... Sarah Barber

The SVP's new Director of Youth Services, Sarah Barber, is determined to make the Society an essential part of the lives of children and young people as she raises the profile of what she sees as "the hidden treasure of youth ministry."

Sarah, who joins the Society from CAFOD where she was the Youth Team Leader, says: "The SVP is 200 years old in 2033, and I want to use that date as a goal to build greater awareness of the SVP among young people. One of my key objectives is that every school should include some expression of SVP in its community. Ultimately, I want young people leaving education to know that they can connect with the SVP because it has been a key part of their lives during their time at school."

CEO Elizabeth Palmer adds: "I am delighted to welcome Sarah to the St Vincent De Paul Society. She has a wealth of experience delivering youth ministry, both at diocesan level and nationally in her most recent role at CAFOD. The SVP Young Vincentian Programme gives young people between the ages of five and 33 the opportunity to join the Vincentian family and engage in age-appropriate social action in their school, college, university or parish. Sarah's knowledge, energy

and enthusiasm will ensure the programme goes from strength to strength in the months and years ahead."

Sarah will head up the Young Vincentian programme, which has over 600 groups in England and Wales across different age ranges, including Mini Vinnies (7 to 11 year olds), Youth SVP (11 to 14 year olds), B-Attitude (14 to 18 year olds), svp1833 (young adults – 18 to 33 year olds), and the seven summer camps for young people aged 8 to 14.

Sarah adds: "The SVP is the hidden treasure of youth ministry, there's so much going on, but not enough young people are aware of it. The potential is exciting and I'm really looking forward to working with the team to reach out to more of our young people."

Sarah lives in Billericay in Essex and has been married to husband James, a teacher, for 30 years. They have two children, aged 20 and 22.



Corona-kindness

St Alban's Catholic Primary School turned to the St Vincent de Paul Society and founded their very own Mini Vinnie group in 2020. Given the restrictions, this meant that the group had to adapt to the circumstances surrounding Covid-19.

As part of their role to turn concern into action, the children decided to reach out to a local care home and show 'Corona-kindness'. They spoke to each of their classes and encouraged their peers to create virtual Christmas cards and letters for the residents. The initiative was a huge success, and the residents appreciated their messages. Since the reintroduction of remote learning in 2021, the Mini Vinnie group has met virtually and created a video liturgy for other pupils based upon the Gospel and the theme of 'community'. Members of the adult Conference say that the children have been a delight to work with and have been led brilliantly by Conference Presidents Adelaide and William. We all look forward to seeing what they get up to next!

Knowledge Hub is a hit

The Knowledge Hub, which offers a central location for accessing all training, webinars, guidance documents and more, launched on 12 April and has been a huge success with almost 1,500 members logging in so far.

What's available?

There's a wide range of resources to help members in their work:

- **Fact sheets** – Useful information on a wide range of subjects from setting up a JustGiving page to helping migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Social media** – Resources and training sessions on becoming more visible
- **Webinar recordings** – Recordings of all webinars from 2021 are available
- **Safeguarding, compliance, finance and administration training** can all be booked through the Knowledge Hub

The Knowledge Hub is easy to use

The Knowledge Hub has been designed to be user-friendly, but try these tips to make it even easier.

- After logging in, you will find a tutorial video and guidance document in the centre of your screen. Take a look to help you navigate the system
- Why not spend 10 minutes at your next Conference meeting exploring the Knowledge Hub together?
- Drop-in Knowledge Hub demonstration sessions on Zoom will take place in September (contact rebeccam@svp.org.uk for more information or to ask a question)
- Ask your fellow members to share anything they have seen on the Knowledge Hub which might be of interest

Getting started

Use your 'invitation email' (sent to all members on 12 April and again on 18 June) to log into the system for the first time. If you are unsure what to do, please contact rebeccam@svp.org.uk.

After logging in for the first time, the Knowledge Hub can be reached by visiting membersknowledgehub.svp.org.uk, or via the Learning & Development page in the Members' Area of the SVP website.

Awareness Month has added importance

Never has Awareness Month had such importance and significance as it does this year.

Throughout September we will recognise the selfless contribution of our amazing members and volunteers who have continued to make a huge difference to the lives of thousands of people in the most challenging of circumstances. Awareness Month, which runs from Monday 6 September to the feast day of St Vincent de Paul on Monday 27 September, is also a chance to demonstrate the value of our work to a wider audience, and to encourage people to join us in our mission.

Time to make a change

We live in unprecedented times and the need for our support is increasing at an alarming rate. Thousands of families are falling into poverty every week, our younger people are at great risk of becoming a forgotten generation, and the loneliness of isolation has become an uncomfortable way of life for many.

Over the past 18 months, our members and volunteers have risen to the challenge, discovering new ways to support anyone in need and inspiring others through

their actions. The Society has also sought to tackle the causes of poverty and injustice through lobbying Government at national and regional level, with our campaigns already attracting media and political attention.

Your experiences are vital

The SVP is a unique organisation – we witness need at grassroots level and often at the most difficult period in people's lives. Our members, volunteers and colleagues collectively have a wealth of experience to share. Awareness Month is the perfect time to celebrate what we do every day; the thousands of small gestures of kindness which change lives. It is also an opportunity to use our shared experience to highlight and address the growing need for our services.

Supporting the Awareness Month campaign means you're part of the SVP's movement for positive change and ensures our Society remains the inspiring organisation it has been for almost 200 years.

Please watch for further information via email, post and in your church.



India in crisis from Covid

We have all seen in the news the terrible crisis that the Covid pandemic has caused in India. The SVP in England and Wales is standing by our brothers and sisters there and supporting them in the most horrific of circumstances. With the Delta variant causing devastation for families and communities across India, SVP England and Wales is appealing for emergency funds and many Conferences have generously responded to this call.

Of course, Covid-19 is a global pandemic, and all six of our twinned countries have been experiencing hardship and monumental challenges over the last year:

But it's in India where the impact of Covid has been most catastrophic. Hospitals are at full capacity and turning away many sick people, education has been put on hold for countless children, and many of our twinned Conferences have experienced loss in their families or communities

While we have been able to keep responding to these needs, this has been affected by the impact of Covid on our own communities in England and Wales. With the prevention of face-to-face meetings and limits on church donations, we are facing a drop in twin-to-twin support. Yet we are determined to continue to help overseas Conferences, especially as the need today is probably greater than ever.

There are various ways you can help:

- **Ensure your Conference is supporting an overseas Conference** – you can be twinned with a Conference in one of the six countries and you will receive a certificate and details of how to communicate with your twin
- **You can support a Conference as an individual (either as a member or non-member)** – from as little as £12.50 a month, individuals can support a Conference and provide the vital support needed
- Other ways to support a Conference can be through a school, Community Support Project or shop – find out more by emailing twinnage@svp.org.uk
- **Make a donation** to the Covid crisis in India at www.svp.org.uk/twinnage-and-overseas-aid/india

“When a Conference is supported you will be providing an essential lifeline to help a family or community, filling a critical gap where they would otherwise go without,” explains Elaine Heyworth, chair of the National Twinningage Committee.



She adds: “It is important to recognise the dedication and generosity of England and Wales SVP Conferences and individuals who have stood side by side with our brothers and sisters in our twinned countries over many years. This has made a huge difference to those in need.”

To join this effort and for more information on how to show your support, please email twinnage@svp.org.uk

Support this vital scheme



The SVP's India student sponsorship scheme is continuing, and it has never been so important as it is now. As a new phase launches, it is becoming

increasingly critical that we continue to help young people and children through their education as the Covid-19 Delta variant rages. “Many children and young people have not been able to attend school over the last 12 months and it is important we do everything we can to enable them to make up for this,” says Head of Twinningage Gemma Heard.

A donation can make the difference between whether a young person receives an education or not, and the implications for them and their families can be huge. But with your help, we can make a big difference.

To take part in the India student sponsorships scheme go to www.svp.org.uk/twinnage-and-overseas-aid/india or email twinnage@svp.org.uk

A Twinnage legacy

The SVP has a longstanding and unique partnership with its members in Sudan and South Sudan spanning over 50 years. Ian Mawdsley, who is retiring from his country ambassadorship this year, recounts his 25 years of turning concern into action in a very real and personal way.

“One evening in 1996, after I’d had a large gin and tonic, the phone rang and Les Slee, the SVP Central Council President, asked me to take on the role of CC Twinnage Officer. I agreed – the word ‘no’ isn’t in my vocabulary.

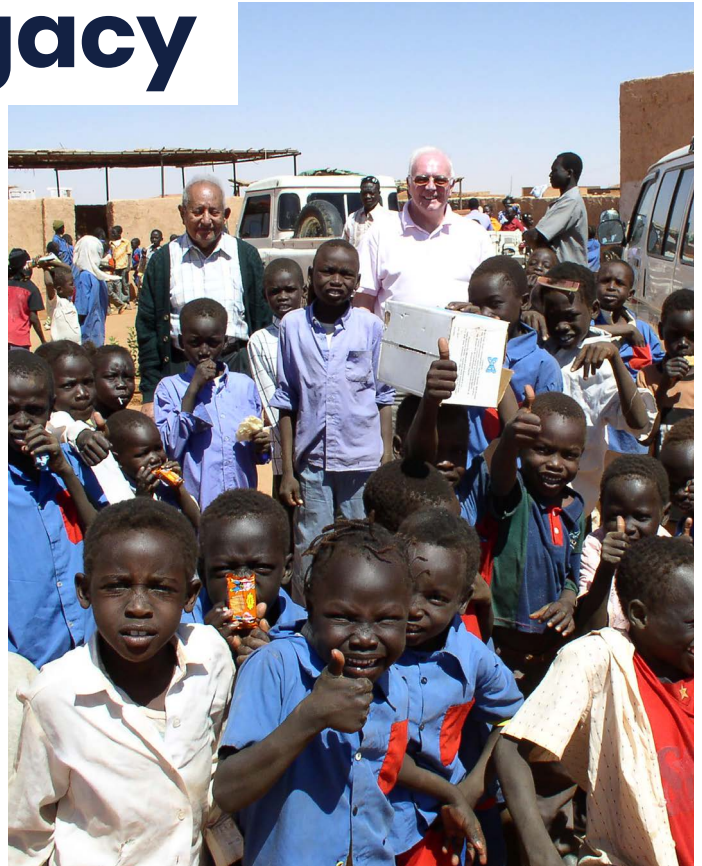
After attending the beatification of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam by Pope John Paul II at Notre Dame de Paris in 1997, I met some members from Khartoum, in particular the late Giorgio de Bona, who returned to Llandudno with us.

It was in those few days that we all realised the gravity of the situation in Sudan and the incredible support given by SVP members in Khartoum to some of the poorest people in the world under difficult conditions, often at great personal risk.

In 1998 I was encouraged to visit Khartoum with Terry Brown, a trip during which I contracted malaria. After this first visit to Sudan, a report written by Alban Dunn was published in The New Vincetian (forerunner to the Vincetian Concern), which included extracts from my personal diary, which read: ‘I will never ... forget those small children holding out their bowls in anticipation of the food they were about to be given. Their wide eyes were pleading for food. Some of the newer arrivals had swollen bellies – a sign of malnutrition.

‘The nun told us that although some were little more than babies, they would not eat all of their food, but save some to take back to other members of the family, including grandparents who had no food at all.’

In 1986, the first home for orphaned boys was opened for children who had literally been brought from the streets. Thanks to the efforts of SVP members the number of children benefiting from this programme increased ten-fold within 15 years, reaching 70,000 in early 2000. Over the years more projects developed through collaboration with the SVP and the constant generosity of Conferences in England and Wales.



The SVP would like to thank Ian for all his hard work and determination over the years. Your legacy will live on in the successes you have brought about through your energy and compassion.

Other projects subsequently followed such as a programme for street children in Sudan, which was started in 1986 to care for the children who used to live on the streets of Khartoum having fled the war raging in South Sudan. Then came three foster homes, a farm, a vocational teaching centre, a medical centre, a water aid project and many more.

The support of members and friends of the SVP means we have contributed in excess of £5 million over the 21 years since our first visit. Sadly, the need has not changed, and these countries continue to require our help and support.

I would like to say a special thanks to many of the key players who have made all of this happen over the years, including Dr Tadros Samaan, Emile Mikhariz, Sister Emmanuelle (ASAS), Terry Brown, Alban Dunn, Charles Loboka, Bertram Kuol, Lucy Akello, Joseph Makwinja, and of course my wife Ruth and my family for all their support.”



Survey reveals high level of satisfaction

The past year has taught us that to remain relevant, to be true to your values and to grow during a crisis you have to be brave and move swiftly. At times, that may feel like the pace of innovation and action may be too much, so it's a good idea to pause and take a moment to check in on how we're doing and find out if there is anything we can do better.

As lockdown restrictions eased, we launched a Member Survey to assess the impact of the Covid pandemic on members and the people we serve. The survey also sought feedback on National Office functions, including the Communications, Membership, Compliance and Finance teams.

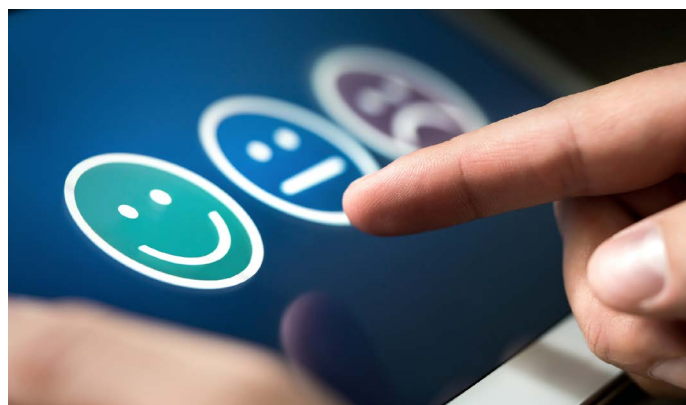
"It's amazing how well our organisation has supported its members"

According to the survey, the Membership Team made an extremely positive impact on members during the pandemic with over 90% of respondents expressing a good overall level of satisfaction with Membership services.

All areas of the Membership Team's service came in for praise and were rated excellent. Of particular interest for members was online training, with almost 85% of respondents stating they took part in this activity.

One member said: "I think the Knowledge Hub is a great step forward. I have found all contact with central office staff to be prompt and helpful, and training sessions excellent."

Meanwhile, 65% of respondents sought guidance on Covid-related issues and the same percentage wanted advice on making special funds available to support people in need. "...it's amazing how well our organisation has supported its members," stated another respondent.



When it came to things that could be improved, some members felt that documents could be easier to find online, and that some processes could be streamlined further, such as when a Conference goes into abeyance.

"Letters from the President are very encouraging"

The Communications Team also scored an impressive satisfaction rating with almost 90% of respondents content with communication services from National Office.

Of the Communications Team, one member stated: "They gave very specific support... with advice and media coverage resulting in a record fundraising year for our Conference."

Messages of support from the Society's senior leadership also came in for praise. National President Helen O'Shea's correspondence was described as "very encouraging."

Some members said they struggled with technology, which made accessing online communications difficult, however many actively embraced the digital world to connect with other members and National Office.

"Without the help of the Finance team... I shudder to think where we might be"

The survey revealed that almost 55% of respondents were satisfied with the service they receive from the



Finance Team, however that lower satisfaction level should be tempered with the fact that over 42% of respondents said they didn't deal with SVP finances.

The pandemic has posed a complicated and relentless challenge for the Finance Team, but the level of assistance they've given was illustrated by a member who said: "Without the help of the Finance Team on many occasions in what has been a complex year I shudder to think where we might be. All contacts have been 100% helpful."

Comments for Finance Team services were broadly positive, though some members said they would like more training in completing documentation, while others mentioned that some procedures needed streamlining.

"We received excellent guidance"

The Compliance Team received a satisfaction rating of almost 80%. Members praised the "useful training and materials" and the "excellent guidance from Matthew and his team."

Respondents also said that the team were "always good at responding quickly" but that more emphasis should be put on "what you can do rather what you can't do."



"National staff have carried on valiantly"



The survey shone a light on the activity of National Office with members generally appreciative of the "very supportive" service of staff who "carried on valiantly" during the pandemic.

One member said: "I have felt well supported by the national staff and I have actually

learnt quite a lot about how the SVP works on a national basis during this time." Another added: "Overall I felt that every effort was made to keep in contact with Conferences and to offer support when it was needed."

Particular praise went to the series of webinars and online training given by National Office staff, however a small number of members suggested that "the number and length of communications" was "a bit much" during the Covid crisis.

Finding new ways to stay in touch

The survey revealed that 61% of respondents embraced technology and met their Conference colleagues online under pandemic restrictions. As we learn to live with Covid this trend is set to continue with almost 75% of respondents saying they were comfortable to continue online meetings. However, over 52% said they would prefer to meet in person.

The survey also suggests that members see geographical considerations as an important factor in deciding when to use online media for meetings. The more local the meeting the more preference there is for face-to-face contact, however the use of digital platforms is more popular for training.

Members' determination to stay in contact with the people they serve was revealed in the survey with over 53% of respondents managing to remain in touch with all their beneficiaries during the pandemic. Under 7% of respondents didn't keep in touch with beneficiaries, though under shielding rules and strict lockdown restrictions this is a mercifully small number. Many members took to the phone to stay in touch with beneficiaries and over 80% of those who replied believe that telephone befriending could work well as a complementary support measure in the future.

Learning more about the Society

The survey also highlighted recognition among members of the work carried out by our Community Support Centres (CSPs) during the Covid crisis. The data showed that over 70% of members are aware of the work carried out by CSPs. The survey also revealed a desire to know more about the work of CSPs (65%), and 67% of respondents wanted more CSPs to be established throughout the country.

Christmas card catalogue



Gold Olive Branch



Bethlehem Evening



Christmas Angel

The sound of birds singing, a gentle summer breeze, butterflies drifting over the top of the overgrown weeds while we sip a glass of wine in the garden. It can only mean one thing, yes you guessed it, Christmas. At the SVP we've never shied away from getting into the spirit a little early, and this year is no exception. With the talk of Christmas comes a reminder that you can shop for family and friends with the SVP through our online Christmas shop and Christmas catalogue.

Last year's sales were an overwhelming success, and as a result this year's selection features an even bigger range to choose from, as well as more gift options for your family and friends.

As well as cards and gifts, including a range of environmentally friendly options, you can always opt for the gift of giving, with one of our alternative gifts, which go towards supporting the vital work undertaken by the Society.

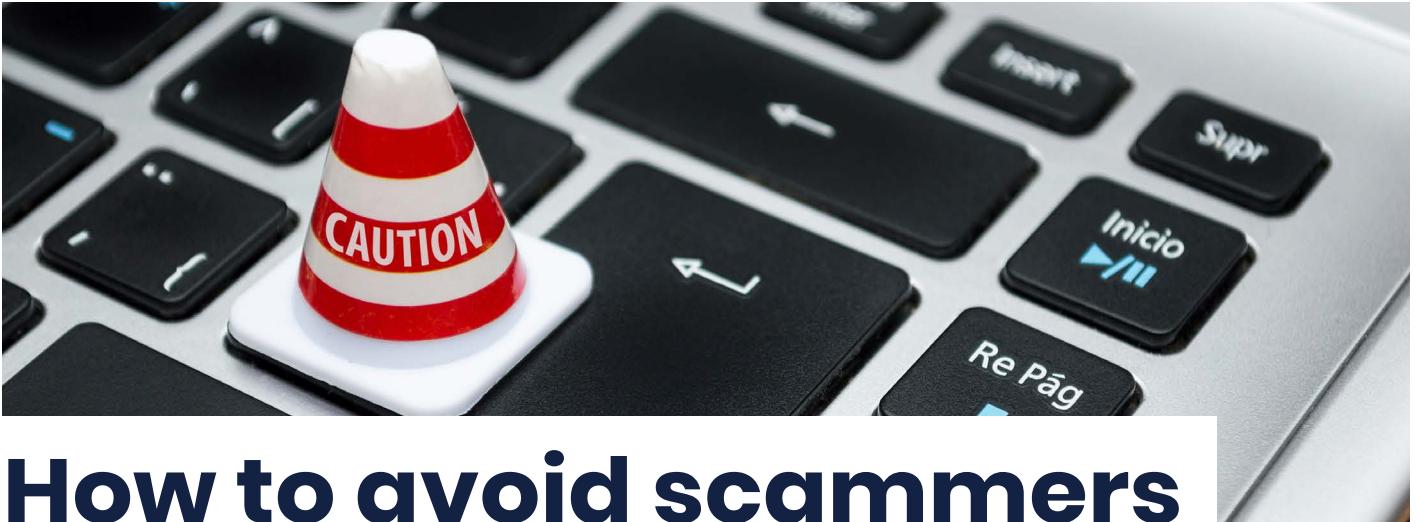
Remember that members buy Christmas cards at a special low rate. You can then sell the cards to the

public – friends, family, parishioners – at the normal retail price (marked on the pack), with the difference going to your Conference. Remember, too, that you can purchase the cards on a sale-or-return basis – which means that any cards you don't sell can be sent back to receive a refund. This removes any risk that you'll be left with unsold cards.

Last year our stock moved very quickly, and while we're hoping we'll be able to supply everyone who missed out last year with an opportunity to buy gifts, do keep an eye out for the launch of our shop, and the arrival of the Christmas catalogue to avoid missing out! Many happy returns! (In advance...)



Make your own sock dinosaur!



How to avoid scammers

Recently we have seen an increase in members contacting National Office about potential scams, mainly from people claiming they need assistance and wanting money paid directly into a bank account, with no wish to meet up. But what do you need to look for to avoid falling for their cons?

Particularly during the Covid pandemic there has been a significant rise in the number of scams, and also the level of sophistication of the fraudsters.

The tactics used can vary. Chances are, you have heard of the most common types of scams but, while some can be quite easy to spot and avoid, others are much more subtle and complex.

Ways to protect yourself against scams

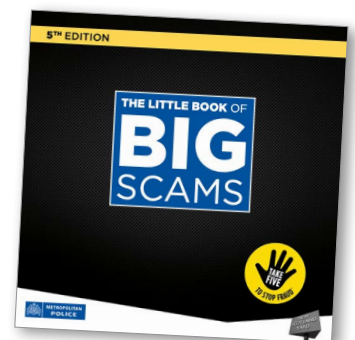
- If you get an unsolicited email, click or hover over the name, it might reveal something different to the person or organisation it's purporting to be from. If it's a scam, the email address might not match the sender's name, have misspellings or random numbers.
- Modern scammers can make their numbers look like one you trust. This is known as 'number spoofing'. Just in case, avoid clicking links in text messages.
- Be vigilant if an email from an organisation like a bank is badly worded or littered with spelling mistakes. Professional organisations will make an effort preparing any emails they send, and they're likely to proof them too – so poor grammar, spelling and punctuation should make you suspicious.
- Also, be suspicious if you are pushed into making a decision on the spot. Scammers don't want you to have time to think about it.



If you believe that you are a victim of fraud, please contact your local police and if it is SVP member or Conference related, report it to Matthew Stockton as soon as possible by email: matthews@svp.org.uk

- Avoid answering phone calls, letters or emails if they look unfamiliar.
- Never give out personal information – make the parish aware if you don't want your details given out to potential beneficiaries. Members and staff should never give out your personal information to potential beneficiaries.
- Make sure all your accounts (email, bank, pension) have strong passwords.
- Don't make any payments until you are sure the person you're dealing with is legitimate.
- Use safe and secure wifi connections and avoid public wifi.
- If you are unsure, you should contact the person directly, if you know them, and ask them about any requests to seek clarification.

For more information about scams visit the Metropolitan Police website at www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/fa/fraud/personal-fraud where you can download a free copy of the Little Book of Big Scams.





Becoming a better Society

The Society's strategic planning process usually takes place in September every year, but given the unprecedented events we have all experienced, there is a sense that the Society is resetting itself, as we slowly emerge from lockdown. It seems appropriate that as a Society we review our plans and build on our experiences over the past year to ensure we are mindful of any changes to which we need to adapt. With this in mind the Society is introducing four new workstreams within its administrative structure, supported by staff at the SVP, each with an area of focus, in order to look at our current systems and procedures, and how we can improve to become a better organisation.

Workplace

In many ways the entire landscape of the working environment will change for many SVP staff in the future. Considering this the Society is introducing a new workstream which will look at covering topical pandemic issues such as remote working, alternative working patterns and health and wellbeing in the workplace. Ensuring that staff are supported allows our teams across England and Wales to, in turn, support our members.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

To help us understand and adapt our culture more effectively, we have introduced a workstream to respond

to the Society's growing need for more equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This workstream will look at how we operate to ensure EDI across the Society.

Measurement, impact and insight

We need to be able to 'tell our story' through tangible information and outcomes, providing better insight into what we do for people in need. Therefore, a new measurement, impact and insight (MII) workstream will be created to develop better ways to gather and provide evidence, so that we can ultimately share the important work we do with potential funders or other organisations.

Environment

Finally, we are all aware that we are facing a global environmental crisis. Although it is important to emphasise that a wide range of views about nature and the environmental crisis exist, there is generally broad agreement that the crisis encompasses central issues such as climate change, ozone depletion, the degradation and scarcity of water, and deforestation among others.

With this in mind and looking at how we can help reduce our own carbon footprint, we will be introducing a new environmental review workstream.

Each workstream will work across all SVP workplaces including our support centres, allowing us to listen, respond and most importantly improve.



The Society's Covid policy is one of caution

This pandemic is a marathon not a sprint

As I write this article, England is on the cusp of “freedom day”, when the restrictions imposed upon us because of a pandemic are lifted, even while the pandemic still rages around us, albeit with greater protection than before in the form of medical advances.

This concept of freedom is an interesting one. Freedom for whom? While everyone has been affected, the pandemic has not promoted equality. In terms of the disease itself it has impacted worst on those who are older, sick or frail, and people whose work or living conditions enable contagion to spread more easily. In terms of the indirect impact, it has favoured those who live in big houses, with gardens, with good internet connections and multiple devices at hand to school effectively from home.

“Freedom day” too, will be worst for those who are most vulnerable, for whom the vaccine provides little or no protection, or people whose hospital treatments for other ailments will be further delayed as hospitals fill up again with younger Covid patients, albeit at a slower rate than before.

The Society's Covid policy is one of caution and reflects the Vincientian way of service and putting the needs of others first, indeed it is about the preferential option for the poor. What is the minor irritation of wearing a mask or undertaking a lateral flow test compared

with the need to protect the members of our community who are more vulnerable, but who should be allowed their freedom too. They deserve to know that we will do all we can to ensure that they are not put at risk by our actions.



I would hope that “freedom day” for the SVP will be less about selfish personal freedoms promoted by newspaper headlines, but the freedom for members and staff alike at the SVP to reach out to more people in need. In our projects, staff will be able to welcome guests once more inside our buildings, providing food, company and services in a Covid safe environment, while members will continue to befriend the lonely, marginalised and vulnerable, albeit in the garden or wearing a mask indoors.

This pandemic is a marathon and not a sprint and we want everyone to cross the finishing line, not just the lucky few. So please remember hands, face, space and fresh air and a lateral flow test or two for good measure! If we can all do that then hopefully everyone we know will have a good summer.

Elizabeth Palmer, CEO



Remembering those we have lost

With deepest regret we announce the deaths of the following valued members:

Ray Cawley, St Wilfrid, Hulme: Ray was a long-serving and committed member of St Wilfrid's Conference. For many years, he helped feed the hungry in one of the most deprived areas of inner-city Manchester at the SVP Food Depot, which operates out of the Sisters of Charity Convent.

Anne Dennis, St Joseph's, Sale 1914: Anne was born in London in 1926 and joined the SVP almost as soon as it changed from a men's to a mixed Conference in 1996. Her amazingly positive attitude was an asset on visits which she did until 2007, and then remained as an auxiliary member, always enthusiastically supporting events. She was the life and soul of the party and truly lived life to the full.

Joe Edwards, SS George & Teresa, Dorridge: Joe joined the SVP quite late in life and for over 15 years he was a regular and loyal visitor at home or in hospital. He helped on several farm visits arranged for the children of St Vincent's school. In 2019 Joe was presented with an SVP Long Service Certificate by Clare O'Brien. May he rest in peace.

Vincent Finan, St Mary Mother of God, Hornchurch: Vince was an active member of the SVP for nearly 60 years. He was a longstanding Conference president, treasurer and secretary as well as holding office at district and Brentwood Central Council. A much loved and respected friend who will be greatly missed. May he rest in peace.

Roy Maine, St Etheldreda, Ely: Roy was a good man and a caring and diligent President of the SVP Ely Conference following him as President was like following Alex Ferguson as Manager, a hard act to follow. Rest in peace Roy.

Lemuel Joseph Murphy, Our Lady of the Rosary, Bexhill: Lem was a long-standing member. He was a loving, caring and unassuming man who enjoyed being a Vincentian, and carried out his duties with compassion. May he rest in the peace of Christ, amen.

Tommy O'Toole, Our Lady Star of The Sea, Liverpool: A member for over 70 years, for many of which he was president of the Star of the Sea Conference on Seaforth. He dedicated himself to his home parish and school, helping many families over the years. Nothing was too much for Tommy to undertake, and he did it all modestly and without fuss. He was a unique individual, living a life of dedication to others.

Patrick Edward Pearson 'Paddy', Our Lady of The Rosary, Bexhill: Paddy was a dedicated member of the SVP for over 32 years. He spent many hours looking after people, always having time to listen to their concerns and worries. We have lost a true gentleman, friend and SVP brother, who will be sadly missed by us all. May he rest in the peace of Christ, Amen.

Molly Pugh, St Anne, Nantwich: A retired nurse with 50 years' experience in several fields of medicine, she joined the Conference on moving to Nantwich in 2003 when she was 83. She participated fully in the activities of the Conference until 2016. She had a gentle disposition that endeared her to those she visited.

Joseph Reynolds 'Joe', Our Lady of Pity, Greasby: Joe was a long-standing member of the SVP and a founding member of our Conference in the 1970's, a man of great faith who quietly got on with the job. Joe worked for many years in one of the most deprived areas of Wirral, and was still an active member at 90. May he rest in peace.

Frank Thompson, St Joseph, Brindle: A key Conference member for over 55 years, Frank cared deeply for the people in twinned countries and supported the Twinnage project in a kind and courageous way. He was a keen sportsman and active in the community for many years. He will be greatly missed. May he rest in peace.

John Wild, Our Lady of All Nations, Camborne-Redruth: John was a member for many years and maintained an active interest even when lockdown limited Conference activities. His particular concern was for those experiencing memory loss, and he attended the local Memory Café weekly.

Aster Wilkin, St Bede's, Newport Pagnell and Christ the King, Kents Hill: Aster passed to her eternal reward in May 2021 after a short illness. An esteemed member of our Conference, Aster served as Secretary for several years. She particularly demonstrated a special caring nature for those of advancing years whom she befriended, and she will be sadly missed by all. May she rest in peace.

Should you wish to light a candle in memory of a friend or loved one, please visit www.svp.org.uk/light-candle. The candle will show the name of the person you have chosen to remember and will burn down slowly over time.

CHAS

Catholic Housing Aid Society

CHAS (West London) was established in 1965 with the aim to assist anyone with a financial housing problem. For instance, the Trustees would consider supporting someone with rent arrears who may be in danger of being evicted. However we are a 'specialised fund' and cannot make grants for more general purposes. The fund works closely with the St Vincent de Paul Society throughout England and Wales and, where applications are made through the SVP, we would expect the SVP to be committed to the particular case they are submitting with time and appropriate funds. Although £250 is a general amount for a grant, consideration is given to the circumstances of each case and the amount is varied accordingly.

An application form can be downloaded from www.chas-uk.org or obtained from Noreen Villiers by post, **46 Bradley Road, London SE19 3NS**, or email at noreenvilliers@AOL.com.

Please submit the application to Noreen Villiers with as much supporting detail and documentation as possible in order to receive the full consideration of the Trustees. Registered Charity Number: 241225

David Young's Charity

The trustees of the David Young's Charity are aware of the work that the Society undertakes at all levels. Some cases need more support than normal and even after District Council and Central Council assistance, there may be a shortfall. As a separate registered Charity, we can try to assist any member of the Society who may have fallen on hard times. Any applications for grants must be sent with any other documentation that would prove helpful to the Trustees for consideration.

The reply should be received within 30 days. As a Special Work of the Society, we are able to receive donations from Conferences, Councils and individual members. We are most grateful for those received in the past and it is helpful for administrative purposes to send cheques made out to the David Young's Charity.

The trustees of the SVP have approved support of NYC. For further information, an application form or any guidance please contact: **The Trustees of the David Young's Charity, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB**. Visit the David Young's Charity website: www.davidyoungscharity.co.uk or email trustees@davidyoungscharity.co.uk

Registered Charity Number: 238877



Save the date

The Society has confirmed a date for the next SVP Annual National Meeting from 9 – 11 June 2022 at Loughborough University. We are hopeful that, circumstances permitting, we will be able to host you in person. Keep an eye out in our members' e-newsletters for any further updates.



2021

Dates for the diary

Board Meetings

Friday 24 – Saturday 25 September

Remote

Friday 26 November

Remote

Thursday 24 February 2022

Location TBC

National Council Meetings

Friday 26 – Saturday 27 November

Remote

National Meeting

Thursday 9 – Saturday 11 June 2022

Loughborough University

Committee Meetings

Committees should hold their meetings at least 3 weeks before the Board meeting dates in order to allow enough time to prepare any papers to be submitted to National Office by the deadline. Board papers will be sent out 2 weeks in advance of the Board meeting.

Please pass it on!

Once you have read your copy of the Vincentian Concern please feel free to pass it on so that others in your local community can learn more about the SVP.

About the SVP



The St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) is an international Christian voluntary organisation dedicated to tackling poverty and disadvantage by providing practical assistance to people in need – irrespective of ideology, faith, ethnicity, age or gender.

The Society is a lay organisation initially formed in Paris in 1833 by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and his companions, and active in England and Wales since 1844. Placed under the Patronage of St Vincent de Paul, it is inspired by his thinking and works. It seeks, in the spirit of justice and charity, to help those who are suffering the effects of poverty in whatever form. Works include visiting the lonely, soup runs, food banks, furniture shops and charity shops in areas of deprivation, visiting the sick, giving grants to those in need, debt counselling, and assisting refugees and asylum seekers. Last year, SVP members made over 400,000 visits to families and individuals in need. Working face to face with the people we seek to help, SVP members develop lasting relationships with the people they serve, and gain a rare insight into the lives of the people they help.

Editorial Policy



**St Vincent
de Paul Society**

England and Wales

The Vincentian Concern is the official publication of the St Vincent de Paul Society of England and Wales.

Share your stories

The next deadline to submit content for the Vincentian Concern is **Friday 29 October 2021**. Articles for inclusion in the magazine should be emailed to Rachael Crookes at rachaelc@svp.org.uk. Please include a high resolution image with your article.

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