



I come before you today and there is something that I want to say, Thank you, Lord. for 30 years of blessing to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and for the faithful, generous and compassionate support for the needy that this community has extended to the Society. As one of the 2 remaining original members in the Society, it is my joy to share with you our *Service in Hope* beyond the Christmas hampers.

The Society of Saint de Paul was founded in 1834 in Paris by students at the *Universite de Paris*, led by Frederic Ozanam who knew that faith must be translated into action by the practice of charity. From a conference of 6 students, the Society became an international organization serving in 150 countries¹. In January 1994, the Society was invited by Fr. Len Hagel to serve at St. Michael and this year, the Society celebrates 30 years of service the needy in our community.

In 30 years, our service has evolved from providing food assistance to responding to the needs for rent, utilities, prescriptions, moving assistance, medical equipment, dental assistance, transportation, laptops for students, etc... No work of charity is foreign to *The Society*. The generosity of our benefactors at St. Michaels has enabled us in these difficult economic times to keep many from homelessness especially women and to keep the power on in many homes. Our goal in providing assistance is to bridge individuals to sustainability, not to create dependency. We honour our responsibility for good stewardship of the resources entrusted to us by assessing each situation and making referrals where appropriate. We serve anyone who calls on us. In our encounters, we seek to bring God's presence and hope in a spirit of love, compassion, humility and respect. We are honoured to serve the needy and it is a privilege to distribute your gifts for which we are profoundly grateful.

Over our 30 years, we have been involved in special situations which speak to our ability and flexibility to respond with specialized support.

1. The Society at St. Michael called upon the network of conferences across Canada in support of a single mother and her son both suffering from Lyme's disease to return home to Nova Scotia for treatment. At that time, Lyme's disease was not recognized in Alberta and their symptoms were becoming more pronounced and debilitating. A travel plan was worked out with stops in centres across Canada where *The Society* operated. At each stop, the family was met by Vincentians, sheltered either in homes or motels, and provided food and gas for the next lap of their journey. After 6 stops, the family arrived safely.
2. An immigrant family from Iran was referred to us for assistance by the Community Resource Centre in our area. The family of 3 had been in Calgary for 6 months and the husband, an electrical engineer, had been unable to find work. Their financial resources were exhausted and the husband had been diagnosed with colon cancer. He spent the next year in and out of the hospital with recurring infections and surgeries. *The Society* extended rent, food and emotional support until the family was on its feet.
3. A social worker at the Children's Hospital referred a family who had given birth to triplets and had 5 children under the age of 6. The family was told that we were the only organization that she knew that could extend ongoing support. The family did not have relatives in Canada, the father was unemployed, and the second child had special needs. The mother was overwhelmed! A 'Triplets Club' of volunteers was organized to provide in-home support: clothes, equipment, food, and formula were provided until the family could manage. A donor was found who paid for full time support for the summer holidays.

Below are acknowledgments from some of the people we have served:

¹The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul today, <https://www.ssvpglobal.org/about-us/>

"Thank you so much for your kindness. Love and kindness are never wasted. They make a difference. They bless the one who receives and they bless you, the giver."

"I would like to express that your financial support and generosity during a time in need is greatly appreciated. Your contribution is a testament to your faith and commitment to making the world a better place. I was honoured to have your support and grateful for your kindness!"

"I want you to know how much gratefulness I have for you and your Catholic community. You have given me and my 2 girls a chance to rise above the darkness and reach the light again, I truly do not know what I would have done without your help with my Telus bill, the move and the spiritual support in dealing with my husband's major surgery. Thank you for listening to my call and for helping me in my most desperate time of life."

These acknowledgments are extended to you, our benefactors, in thanksgiving.

Unfortunately, our 30th year has been challenged with the harsh realities of our economy - a 380% increase in food costs, a 68% increase in utilities, a 55% decrease in donations and increased demands on our service. The waiting list for access to the Food Bank is 3 weeks and callers are being referred to us by the Food Bank and Salvation Army. Regrettably, the Society suspended financial assistance in June to help us better manage our funds.

Your faithful partnership has sustained our service in hope for 30 years and we trust that your compassion for the needy will sustain us into the future.