



SOCIETY NEWS

THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL DENVER METRO COUNCIL

May 2023

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Society of Saint Vincent de Paul-Denver
Metro Council



From Our Board President



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is all about the teachings of Christ, community, and each other. It is about how we make a positive difference in our communities.

The spike in housing, home energy, food, and gasoline triggered a surge in requests for financial assistance from many households across the country including northern Colorado. Our 28 conferences are responding to the large increase in calls using every resource available. Compared with last year, we are helping twice as many families with paying energy bills using Energy Outreach Colorado. During the last 12 months, the Council has used \$718,761 in EOC funds to support conferences, and \$219,372 in Ozanam housing, ARC gift cards, pay day loans, and auto repairs. We are grateful to the organizations giving us grants and especially to the Routzon Family Foundation, which provided an additional \$346,000 to our conferences within the Denver Archdiocese. Despite these record numbers, we still are not able to respond to all valid requests.

As we return to home visits following several years of Covid-19 protocols, we are renewing our in-person outreach initiatives. This includes a variety of ways we have connected with neighbor(s) in need (NIN). We have gone to motels to meet NIN and made arrangements for their stay, hauled donated bottled water and snacks to parishes with youth programs, delivered furniture and laundry equipment, worked with courts to support NIN against dishonest landlords, delivered food and prescriptions to homebound NIN, gone to homes with tools and parts to make minor home and auto repairs, combined efforts with Catholic Charities to assist Marshall Fire survivors, and driven thousands of miles to NIN homes to provide financial aid.

All of this is not about us personally: it is about our strong belief in Christ's teaching and in following in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul assisting those in need. We do this in a nonjudgmental manner and as we recognize the dignity of everyone regardless of demographics. This is what Vincentians do.

Charity is the cement which binds Communities to God and persons to one another. – Vincent de Paul

-Pat Hanafee

From Our Executive Director



Greetings Everyone!

It is an honor and privilege to be the new Executive Director of The Society of St Vincent de Paul, Denver Metro Council. While I've had the pleasure of meeting many of the wonderful Vincentian volunteers and generous donors, I haven't met everyone, so I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

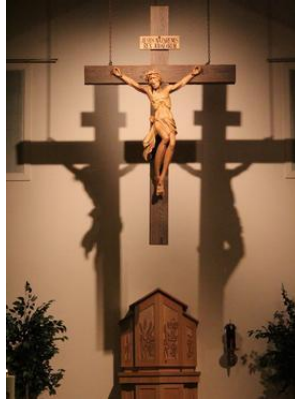
My formal education is in business, and my professional years have been split between working in the field of Economics in corporate America, and as a small business owner for a laboratory automation company that my husband and I started. My family has lived in Colorado for 22 years where we've been parishioners at St. Michael the Archangel in Aurora.

Many years ago, my parents were Vincentian volunteers, and they would relay stories about the dedication and amazing work done by everyone in the organization. When the opportunity presented itself to work for SVdP, I knew it would be a wonderful, rewarding experience. I am incredibly blessed to work with Anna Peetz in the Metro Council Office.

While we are both relatively new, we are striving to build an efficient team to serve the 28 conferences in the most effective manner possible. While our hearts break to hear the stories of our neighbors in need, we pray that our small role in this amazing organization will somehow ease the suffering of those we serve. I look forward to eventually meeting everyone and please don't hesitate to reach out if we can help in any way. May God bless you all.

-Erin Hice

Our Lady Mother of the Church



Our Lady Mother of the Church is a parish in Commerce City, CO, with an only three-year-old SVdP conference, but it has done some amazing work in this time. First, the conference itself has been able to attract a diverse group of 15 volunteers, among whom three are fully bilingual (very helpful in this predominately Hispanic suburb), and between whom there is an age gap of 80 years! But don't let that gap take you back; the youngest and oldest are both equally content to sit down together and make posters requesting assistance and promoting their work. The conference has a remarkable ability to team up with other groups to pool resources and serve the NINs in their community. For example, three of their Vincentians come from different faith traditions, and the conference has collaborated on a food pantry with the Muslim community, on laundry vouchers with the local school district (for families without such facilities at home), and on gift cards with the Colorado Hosting Asylum Network, which works with immigrants. Funding, of course, is always an issue, but solutions, of course, are always at hand. So, the conference, with the full support of their pastor, has conducted yard sales (their second annual is this June – don't miss out!), hosted a New Year's Eve dance, and held a raffle for Valentine's Day. Each time, they have been amazed at the generosity of donors.

The conference certainly faces many challenges in this part of the metro area. "Slumlords" are rampant; in fact, on just one day in April, 3 of 15 people who called the conference for assistance did not even have leases. The lucky ones, among people who are crowded into small rundown tenements, are those who may have a bedroom to themselves. Some NIN will rent, maybe, a living room, but the kitchen is off-limits, and some have young children at home living with un-related adult men in these crowded habitations. And then there are the immigrants. The Our Lady Mother of the Church Conference wants to provide them with information on resources, such as SNAP (food stamps) or WIC, but they have to be careful they are not leading the NIN down a road that would end with them being a "public charge" and, therefore, not eligible for citizenship or sponsorship of a relative. "It is very difficult to try to keep up with all the ever-changing immigration laws," said Jo Roman, past president of the conference, and wife of the current president Tony Roman.

So, it is fair to say that this conference stays really busy. They tackle about five cases per week, but they receive 15-30 calls per week of neighbors in need of help. But at least the conference returns the calls of the people they cannot help. Jo Roman noted how important it is to do something as simple as not ignoring people; "At least you called me back," Jo repeated, having heard this probably dozens of times from NIN who do not receive this dignity from other organizations and agencies.

The work of the SVdPS in Commerce City is truly a blessing to the city; with every phone call and visit, Christ's mission is being carried out. In speaking of her conference, Jo said, "They create a greater, closer-knit community, even while taking care of just the immediate needs, even while Covid set us backward. We need to foster love of neighbor."

Of course, there is always more to do. So, they keep serving, and they keep loving.

-Story by Jennifer Otey; information provided by Jo Roman

Message from Voice of the Poor

In keeping with the words and actions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, the Denver Metro Council's Voice of the Poor (VOP) continues to identify issues critical to our neighbors who live in poverty and need; the committee seeks to advocate for them so that our elected officials can help develop strategies and tactics that will provide the most effective and efficient means to reduce or eliminate poverty.

As all Vincentians know from their home visits and conference discussions, the ability to meet their rent demands is one of our NIN's most difficult issues. This year, in collaboration with Together Colorado, the statewide faith-based organization comprised of over 200 faith leaders, VOP supported HB 1171, Just Cause for Eviction, which would clarify the conditions under which someone can be evicted. This would ensure that tenants are protected so that more Coloradans can stay in their homes and communities. The bill would prevent displacement of families in gentrifying neighborhoods. It would also, according to studies of four cities with Just Cause Eviction ordinances, decrease evictions, promote better health, and enhance well-being and stability for all Colorado renters. HB 1115, a bill proposing to allow communities of any size to regulate rents and decide rent stabilization policies within their boundaries failed for the second year. But it is sure to continue as an issue in the Colorado legislature.

In response to the state's affordable housing crisis, your VOP recommends that Vincentians familiarize themselves with the recent report of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. This document provides information on housing affordability, the Colorado housing crisis landscape, historic federal government disinvestment, and the alarming failure to address critical and systemic issues that have long plagued low-income households and communities of color. To learn more, please visit

https://www.coloradocoalition.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/Summary3Pager_COAffordableHousingCrisis.pdf.

Vincentians currently have an important opportunity to make their voices heard on a national level through the Farm Bill Principles Letter signed by the Catholic organizations (SVdP, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Rural Life, Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities, USA). It can be found on SVDP's website at <https://members.ssvpusa.org/download/120/hunger-and-nutrition/6052/circle-of-protection-farm-bill-principles-letter.pdf>.

Among other priorities, the letter addresses the importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for those in need. SNAP helped feed more than 41 million Americans in 2021 and lifted nearly 3 million out of poverty. It is responsive to increased and decreased periods of need and continues to have one of the lowest fraud rates for federal programs. SNAP should be strengthened through updates to calculations that account for rising food prices, improvements to the standard medical deduction, elimination of the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction, and increased benefits for households with young children. Additional funding would be helpful for SNAP Employment and Training as well as SNAP Education.

In addition to sending this letter, Vincentians can directly share their thoughts with the Senate Ag Committee at <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/farm-bill-input>. Further, IMPORTANT – EVERY VINCENTIAN CAN SUSCRIBE TO VOTER VOICE <https://votervoicenet.org/SVDPUSA/Campaigns/104574/Respond>.

This year members of VOP participated with Together Colorado in their annual national level through Lobby Day, which offers the opportunity to advocate on a personal level with elected officials. Members not only met with these individuals but also enjoyed hearing their assemblywomen and men and senators speak on a variety of issues in their respective chambers.

Another important opportunity for advocacy occurred again this year at the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington in early February. The National Voice of the Poor Committee is a major supporter of this conference, which brings together over 500 Catholics devoted to issues of social justice under the auspices of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Issues that the delegates addressed during meetings on Capitol Hill with their legislators and staffers included supporting children and families by passing a strengthened Child Tax Credit; supporting hungry and vulnerable people with robust international humanitarian relief and development assistance; and passing legislation providing Afghan humanitarian parolees in the United States with a pathway to permanent legal status, such as the bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act (S. 4787/H.R. 8685) introduced during the 117th Congress.

Every Vincentian can participate in the work of VOP in several ways: represent your conference and be an active member of the Denver metro VOP, join the national webinars listed in your e-Gazette (not getting it? check with your conference president), and become an important advocate through VoterVoice (see link above).

Need more information before you add your voice and that of your conference to our committee? Please send your questions or comments to corkytreacy@comcast.net or Sallykwolfe@gmail.com. Together we can fight the injustice of poverty and its root causes.



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St. Catherine of Sienna

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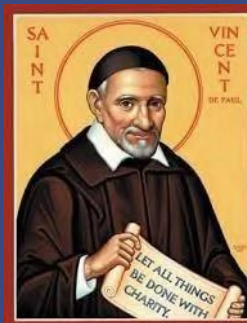
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Society of St. Vincent de Paul



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"Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover all rules must lead to charity."

St. Vincent de Paul