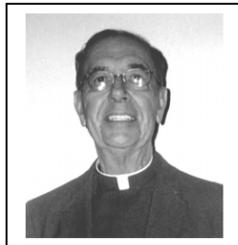


A COMMUNITY GATHERS TO SHARE A LENTEN MISSION

By Christine Abbate-Reuland

It was a cold week in March, but you wouldn't have known it if you had entered the doors of St. Francis Xavier during the recent Lenten Mission. The Mission ran each evening from March 8-10. The church was simply glowing with the prayers and spirit of the large group of gathered parishioners.



Visiting presenters, **Rev. George Cowan and Msgr. Larry Hinch**, shared stories and prayers that deeply affected their audience. For three Lenten evenings, people gathered to reflect, pray, listen, grow in holiness, come closer to God, and remember who they are called to be.

According to **Sister Helene**, the force behind the 2010 Lenten Mission, "The Missions we've had in the past have always been opportunities for strengthening our sense of community and for personal growth and renewal. It has been ten years since our last Mission and we wanted to provide that opportunity once again. We were not disappointed! The approximately 150 parishioners who gathered for the three evenings did feel that strong community bond and were refreshed and renewed in their faith. Mission accomplished!! We are so grateful to Fr. Cowan,

Msgr. Hinch and all those parishioners who served on committees preparing for the Mission."

Participating members of the church community were unanimous in their enthusiasm about the experience and the gift that the Lenten Mission gave to

them. "This was my first time coming, but I felt that it filled a void," said **Richard Pontone**. "I wanted to learn more about the spirit behind Lent—share love and have compassion." Another participant, **Maureen Rooney**, said: "I came because many years ago I came to a Lenten Mission here and it started me on my own spiritual journey. Because of work, I do not get to be here at St Francis as much as I would like. So that is why I am here now. I wanted to connect again."

Many of the active church committees joined forces to make the Mission a success. "We were focused on making sure the sanctuary represented the theme of the night and was welcoming," said Church Environment Committee member **Sarah Napolitan** on the second night of the Mission. "We got the program beforehand so that we could plan. We created different banners for each night and helped plan the little gifts that the participants received. Last night we heard about being a light to others and everyone received little candles to symbolize that light. Tonight we were all given cards with little gifts that God wants us to have. Tomorrow it is the gift of reconciliation."

Anne Marie Dougherty, who was in charge of the Hospitality Committee, said: "We are a small core group so we asked the Choir, Catechists and Children's Liturgy of the Word Committee to share the work. I was impressed by the enthusiasm and generosity of spirit. It was simply an amazing outpouring of love. People really lingered to enjoy the food and company at the end of each night."

"We are all looking for something," said **Sister Kathleen**. "Life is hard enough and we all need a little lift. We are all searching to be better people. It has been a while since we did a Lenten Mission, but I think all that participated were inspired to grow closer to God."

SFX ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY - THE SPIRIT OF HELPING OTHERS

By Christine Napolitan

This article began as a straightforward reporting task for our parish newsletter—to report on the work of The St. Vincent de Paul Society. It became a marvelous journey of inspiration, history, and deep respect for the corporal works of mercy performed every week by members of this ministry.

On any given Sunday there is a visible reminder of the work of the St. Francis Xavier Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. In front of Mary's Altar are shopping bags and boxes of groceries. For many of us there is the recognition that these are groceries for those in need, donated by members of the parish. They may serve as a reminder to continue to bring donations. For many of us, though, there is little knowledge of the full work of this society, or of its strong historical background.

For about seven years the president of the St. Francis Xavier Conference has been **Patricia Kabacinski**. It is obvious that she is both deeply committed to this work and proud of its long and active presence at SFX, a history that dates back to 1892.

What The Society actually does far exceeds distributing the non-perishable foods that have been placed in the church. While this is an important part of their work, they also distribute food coupons used for buying milk, meat, and other perishables. Often tragedies result in the total loss of a household, and those needs are also filled.

At times psychiatric and/or legal help is provided for those who need it. One of the members can provide information, knowledge, and referrals to individuals in need of legal assistance regarding housing court, eviction, foreclosure, and benefits. The group also works closely with the social

worker from the YMCA to help people who are ready to leave the Y and live in a supervised apartment. Monetary contributions are often the most efficient means for them to fill emergency needs. The **Rosary Society, Boy Scouts, and CCD Loose Change Program** all contribute to their work.

Individual parishioners who would like to donate can do so by placing a check made out to St. Vincent de Paul Society in a sealed, marked envelope and bringing it to the rectory, or giving it to S. Helene.

The Society meets at the rectory every Wednesday from 7:00 to 8:00 PM. Anyone who needs support can arrive then and one of the members will meet with them and begin working on the help they need in complete confidentiality. Pat says the rewards of this work come from seeing a need and knowing it can't always be left to someone else. For some of the people she's worked with, she says, "I don't know where else they could go."

The National Office of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is currently (from Sept. 27, 2009 to Sept. 27, 2010) celebrating the 350th anniversary of his death. The theme of the Jubilee Year is "Charity and Mission. (See *Life of St. Vincent de Paul* story next page.



HOLY WEEK CALENDAR

PALM SUNDAY, March 28th

5:00 pm *Saturday Evening Mass (March 27th)*
9:30 am *Family Mass with Sacra Musica Choir & Organ*
12:15 pm *Mass with Contemporary Choir*

RECONCILIATION MONDAY, March 29th

7:30 pm. *Prayer with opportunity for Confession.*

HOLY THURSDAY, April 1st

8:00 pm. *Mass of the Lord's Supper, with Sacra Musica Choir & Organ*

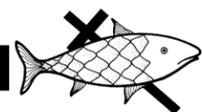
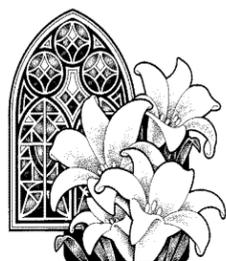
GOOD FRIDAY, April 2nd

3:00 pm. *Celebration of the Lord's Passion.*
Afternoon prayer Service, Biblical readings, Veneration of the Cross & Communion.

EASTER SUNDAY: *Masses in Celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord.*

Easter Vigil Mass. Saturday, April 3rd, 8:00 pm.

Easter Sunday Mass. April 4th
9:30 am. *Family Mass with Sacra Musica Choir & Organ*
12:15 pm. *Mass with Contemporary Choir*



THE LIFE OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

St. Vincent, The Apostle of Charity, is the patron of charitable societies. Born in France in 1580, Vincent died in Paris on September 27, 1660. His biography reads as both a testament to a loving and giving spirit, and as a riveting adventure novel.

Among his adventures, he was abducted by pirates on a sea journey and served as a slave for two years. He escaped and returned to France where he continued the theological work that earned him high esteem, and worked for many important people. Hired as a tutor and spiritual advisor by an illustrious French family, the de Gondis, Vincent received their permission to hold missions on their estate for the rural peasants. He was appointed a pastor in Bresse where he founded the first “conference of charity for the assistance of the poor.” After having established that work, he resumed his missions to the peasants. Other priests began to join him, and as they traveled to give these missions, they founded a “conference of charity” at each site for the relief of the poor.

Vincent also directed his attention to convicts. Assisted by another priest, Vincent began visiting the prisons, ministering to both the bodies and the hearts of the prisoners. As he did for all of his activities, he left that work only after establishing a cadre of priests and laypeople who continued his work. He also established a hospital.

St. Vincent founded The Congregation of Priests of the Mission who vowed to evangelize the country people. They filled a need dear to Vincent to minister to the peasants. At a time when French seminaries were closing at rapid rates, Vincent established a total of fifty-three upper and nine lesser seminaries in France—one-third of all the seminaries in France at that time.

When the conferences of charity began attracting more people, the need for help in ministering to the poor was met at first by Vincent’s “Ladies of Charity.” This was a group of noblewomen, recruited by Vincent to work in the hospitals, founding homes, and prisons. They were able to supply

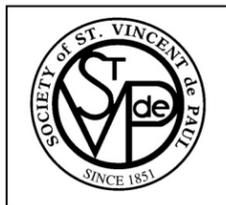
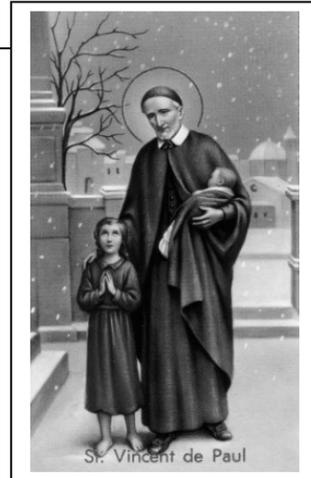
material goods and pay visits to the needy, but had no knowledge of (or desire to learn) how to perform some of the needed chores of hygiene and health for these people, and would send their servants to do it.

As Vincent was considering what could be done to fill this need, he became the spiritual advisor for a widow, Louise de Marillac. She had always felt a vocation to the convent, but had been advised by her priest to marry. She did and bore two sons. When she was widowed, she saw the opportunity to pursue what she had always felt to be her true vocation.

With the superior organizational abilities of Louise, Vincent had someone who could help him establish an order of nuns to continue what he had hoped would be done by his “Ladies of Charity.” Together, they founded the Daughters of Charity, who continue the work begun by St. Vincent and St. Louise to this day. The Daughters of Charity claim their mission as “to serve the poor and marginalized,” and besides the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, they take a fourth vow, one of service to the poor.

The Daughters of Charity and lay parishioners continue to fill the needs of the poor and marginalized in numbers St. Vincent himself couldn’t have imagined.

The followers of St. Vincent, the success of his work, and the continuation of the Daughters of Charity remain a force in today’s world. The work of lay parishioners in conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society continues to fill the needs of the poor and marginalized in numbers St. Vincent himself couldn’t have imagined.



“Our mission, to evangelize and serve the poor, is motivated as always by God’s love which we translate into hands-on charity, direct contact with and love of the poor. We are celebrating our past, giving thanks to God for the wonderful examples of love that He has given us through St. Vincent and St. Louise. They were involved in a mission of love...They carried out their mission with a passion which was so deep that it continues to be felt and lived in the Vincentian Family throughout the world, in ways far beyond what Vincent and Louise would have imagined.”

MAPPING A WORLD OF NEEDS AND CAUSES *By John Labate*

Sometimes the right idea or even the right name can make all the difference. St Francis Xavier parish has long undertaken community outreach projects that led to such worthy efforts as presents and food to needy parishioners at Christmas and distributing food to needy parishioners. The Parish Pastoral Plan developed in 2007 included renewed efforts at outreach. But it was only after parish council member **Regina Hawkey** came up with the idea of calling the group the **Social Justice Ministry** that the effort was able to take on a more ambitious agenda and attract more members. “About a year ago I was thinking about it and I thought, ‘it’s social justice,’ and others agreed and understood and they said it grabs them,” says Regie.

The response was encouraging. The group now has 15 members, up from eight a year ago. And under the leadership of chairman **Benjamin Thomas**, there are many other hands that want to help improve the plights of others, both in this country and around the world. “A fundamental issue with social justice and the church is that a lot of people really want to do something good, but they don’t know what opportunities are out there,” says Ben.

In his nine months as chairman Ben Thomas, who has traveled extensively throughout developing countries in the Middle East and Africa, has been instrumental in organizing the group’s efforts and spearheading its program of causes to consider. One of his first efforts was to create a document of 17 Park Slope and surrounding charitable and service organizations as a reference for anyone in the parish who wants to get more involved with a cause. The list, which includes contact details as well as detailed needs and services provided, ranges from Christian Help in Park Slope (CHIPs) to the Center Against Domestic Violence.

The Social Justice Ministry strives to balance the local needs of the parish and the surrounding Park Slope community with those that encompass crises in other parts of the world. Locally, the group participates in the running of the local food pantry, run by **Saint Vincent de Paul** and operated by SFX parishioners (see related article), and conducts Operation Outreach, in which specific food, clothing and other needs of parishioners are collected, organized and distributed. During Advent, the group conducts the annual

Christmas Clothing Drive and during the summer months it organizes an Eye Glass Drive, in which donated eye glasses are provided to those in need.

Those needs and programs are continually expanding, thanks to the imaginations of an active committee. One of the newest programs is called **Jack’s Sandwich Project**, named in honor of Saint Francis’s recently deceased, and much loved, **Deacon Jack França**. “A group of us were talking about all the things that Deacon Jack and his family used to do to help the needy, including volunteering to cook for the needy on Thanksgiving,” says Regie Hawkey. “And one of the newer members of the group, **Christine Doyle**, called me the next day and said ‘I’d really like to get this started.’”

So Regie cooked a turkey and others helped to make sandwiches and hand them out to those in need along 7th Avenue. The group enjoyed their efforts so much that they distributed more sandwiches on Christmas morning as well as more recently during Lent.

The Social Justice Ministry is also looking across borders and across the globe for worthy causes. Last year, \$500 was raised to contribute wood-less cooking stoves for distribution in Darfur refugee camps. The need arose from a shortage of wood within the camps, which would lead women to gather wood in unsafe areas outside the camps where some were raped. That fund drive is expected to be repeated this Easter season. Other overseas causes are also being considered.

“With the great success of our most recent effort, the Adopt-a-Family Initiative, we’re looking to add to our community programs a new project with international reach by partnering with a local nonprofit that addresses the needs of orphans in Uganda,” says Ben. “We’re hoping to host a Friend Raiser Dinner for Fount of Mercy within the next six months and donate all proceeds to sustainable initiatives assisting the 40 million or more orphans in sub-Saharan Africa.”

New members are always welcome to join the Social Justice Ministry. Another option is joining the “Friends of Social Justice,” which is open to anyone in the congregation who wants to get involved but doesn’t have the time available to be a committee member.

Contact Ben Thomas or Regie Hawkey for more details.

MAKE PLANS FOR THE SPRING FLING – MAY 1, 2010

*Spring is in the air, and parishioners of St. Francis Xavier are already getting prepared for the upcoming Spring Fling event, which will take place on the evening of May 1. This annual dance is a chance for adult members of the parish to come together, enjoy a good dinner, “cut the rug,” and raise some funds for the church. Past themes have included Mardi Gras and Dancing Through the Decades, but this year, the theme is spring and all of the promise and joyfulness the season can bring. Tickets are \$40/person. Interested singles and couples are welcome. Festivities begin at 6:30 pm in the St Francis Xavier School Auditorium. **Tickets will be on sale in the vestibule of the church after mass.***



COME HOME FOR EASTER * COME HOME TO ST. FRANCIS XAVIER PARISH

