

President's Address to the Toronto Central Council AGM

Tuesday September 19, 2017

Good evening my fellow Vincentians. I am honored and humbled to be elected the President of Toronto Central Council and to be able to speak to you this evening.

We have just witness the legally required Annual General Meeting of a mid-sized not for profit corporation registered in and subject to laws of the Province of Ontario. We heard we are a corporate charity with an annual operating budget of over \$ 8 Million, over 300 employees and professional staff, with real estate (camps and homes) and other assets and liabilities that exceed \$13 Million. We have the required Corporate Board of Directors, Financial Statements, Auditors report and have confirmed the appointment of our Auditors for the coming year.

Is that a WOW factor for you? Kind of necessary boring from my perspective and maybe yours. Perhaps you might be here tonight because of our celebration of mass in this beautiful Our Lady of Sorrows Church and the opportunity to connect personally with his Eminence Archbishop Thomas Cardinal Collins. Cardinal Collins is inspiring, I am pretty sure this business meeting of our Toronto Central Council is not inspiring.

But wait, there is a wow factor here that I want to shout out about and most importantly thank for their efforts over the past year.

First, I want to thank outgoing President Bob Ossowski and his executive officers Bey Grieve, Mike Burns, John Sidle for their work and commitment over the past year and indeed over the last 5 years of service the Society.

Second, I want to acknowledge and thank Louise Coutu and the professional staff at Toronto Central Council and in our Supportive, Recovering, Emergency Housing and our summer camps for girls and boys. Thank you from my heart for taking the care and diligence necessary to protect and serve some of the most vulnerable people in need in our society.

When I became a Vincentian 12 years ago I had no idea of the scope of the challenges the Society embraced in our "Special Works". After 3 years on the Board of Directors I know understand that these "Special Works" are part of our Vincentian DNA. Since being elected to this role as President I have been able to engage with the professional staff who are responsible for serving in these "homes" (not houses) and camps.

The work our staff are doing in the name of our Society is stunningly brilliant. I spent a half day at Marygrove Camp for Girls in late August and can tell you the experience the camp counselors and staff are giving these young girls is simply magical.

It would be correct to say that the work of our Stores Division is less magical but no less important in keeping our commitment to serve the poor. This is small but mighty group of committed staff who make our Vincentian "volunteers" at the conference level more effective in our service to those in need. Thank you all.

This AGM is really about the past year and all about our legal responsibility as a not for profit charity incorporated in Ontario. But you and I know that is not all that the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is about.

For the next few minutes I want to talk to you about the future as it affects

1. You

2. Me

and 3.Us.

1.What about you?

Well I know you to be one of the over 1300 Vincentians who toil in one of the 114 active Conferences in the Toronto Central Council. You are part of a world-wide organization that is active in 148 Countries with 800,000 active members in 60,000 plus conference. I did the math, that is on average 13 Vincentians in every conference around the world committed to serving the poor primarily through person to person contact with those in need in their homes. Keep that average of 13 in every conference as a marker for the future.

I don't know your personal story of how you became a Vincentian but I know it is powerful and important story. It is story of commitment to serve the poor through person to person contact with those in need.

Let me share with you my story

2.What about me? Let me share with you my story

12 years ago, I joined 7 experienced Vincentian in a wealthy conference with few neighbours in need. Home visits were rarely done except for new callers. Most of our neighbours were long term and well known to us. We simply delivered food vouchers or had our neighbours pick up vouchers at the rectory. Other than sharing a collegial and administratively well run monthly meeting our conference didn't do much except pass up our excess funds to Toronto North Particular Council (TNPC). I agreed to be the President of our conference and continued to do exactly what my predecessor had done. I went to a few TNPC meetings that were uninspiring and delegated attendance to my solid and willing Treasurer. Toronto Central Council, Special Works and TNPC had no impact in our conference or for me. But I felt our work seemed to lack meaning and purpose.

In 2012 special joint Particular Council meetings were held across the GTA to review the recently developed Toronto Central Council's Five Guiding Principles of Service and to get Vincentians input on their needs.

This session was a revelation to me. Home visits were meaningful and our primary mission, equity of service, continuous learning, spiritual development, and the need for renewal and sharing were core values. Clearly, I was not well trained or even aware of our core Vincentian values. I recognized that my conference was not meeting the Vincentian mission to grow spiritually by offering person to person service to those in need. It was a conversion that has

changed my life. I started a recruitment drive to renew our conference membership. It worked; we grew to 14, all of whom were introduced to the core mission and the Five Guiding Principles. Making meaningful home visits over the next years brought new energy, spiritual growth and new knowledge to our conference. I became a Vincentian.

I joined the TCC 's Membership Development Committee and in that role, I have connected with many conferences with the learning sessions on the 5 Guiding Principles and Vincentian Leadership.

I became President of the TNPC in 2014 and automatically (who knew) a Director of the TCC Corporate Board that in theory governs the 11 Councils and all the Special Works. Not what I bargained for, because in fact, the TCC Corporate Board is consumed by the legal responsibility for the governance of a non-profit corporation whose Special Works programs provide shelter for 270 vulnerable people and a camping experience for 1,500 children each year with 73 full time and 300-part time staff an annual operating budget of \$8 million. The TCC "Special Works" are well managed and delivering on their varied and complex missions.

The challenge we face is that the work of 1300 Vincentians in 114 Conferences is being given limited attention by the TCC Corporate Board due to a mix of time constraints and reporting obligations.

I made the decision to run for the Presidency primarily because I believe Toronto Central Council must change in order to provide the same attention and support to Vincentians at the Conference level as they do the Special Works.

I have 3 goals that I would like to share with you.

My first goal is to change our governance model to better deliver on our Vision Statement to support and assist Vincentians at the Council and Conference level.

This governance change will create a new nomination and selection process for Corporate Directors. The goal is to ensure highly qualified Vincentian candidates have the talents, skills and experience needed to govern the complex, highly regulated Special Works programs as well as the Vincentian mission at the conference level within the Corporation. The Corporate Board will by necessity focus on the Special Works and be made up of a different group of Vincentians than is now the case.

My second goal is the creation of a reconstituted and refocused Toronto Central President's Council (made up of the 11 Particular Council Presidents) and charged with the sole responsibility to strengthen, collaborate and support the work of Councils and Conferences. That means helping to rejuvenate struggling Conferences; opening new conferences where needed; recruiting and training new members; mentoring and educating all Vincentians.

My third goal is **Resurrecting 3 Working Committees and creating 1 new Committee that will report to this Toronto Central President's Council:**

- a) **A Vision, Mission and Strategic Planning Task Force** with the mandate to establish the vision, direction and strategic plan and to monitor performance in achieving that plan.
- b) **A Spirituality Committee** with the mandate to assist conferences to engage a spiritual director; to provide guidance and mentorship to spiritual directors; and to provide spiritual growth and development opportunities for all Vincentians.
- c) **A Social Justice and Advocacy Committee** with the mandate to broaden our Vincentian mission of charity by applying the principles of Systemic change and Advocacy and learning how to proclaim the Christian response to all forms of injustice.
- d) **A Communications and Development Committee** with the mandate to review all existing communications tools, revise and update those that are useful and develop new communication tools needed to help conferences recruit new members, inform and educate parishioners about the work of the society in the community, and encourage giving financially to the society in support of the poor and marginalized.

I have talked about you and me as I promised. So where is the us in this?

It is simple. The “US” is our Vincentian community putting their talents and gifts forward to support the goals of serving the poor through person to person contact; to growing our membership and to provide spiritual and personal development opportunities for all Vincentians

I am humbly aware that I cannot make these changes happen without your full committed support and willingness to serve.

What does that mean? Well in the next months as these proposed changes move forward we will be reaching out to our Vincentian community to take on the challenges outlined. We will need a new slate of Corporate Directors with very specific skills and talents to govern the TCC. We will need committee and task force members for the Committee work discussed. Councils and Conferences will need renewed leadership and commitment to engage our members in the spiritual and developmental growth so important to fulfilling our mission as Vincentians.

I am hopeful that with your support, talents and collective effort we can achieve our common goal of simply being better Vincentians in every way.

Thank you and may God Bless us all.

Rob Greenaway,

President, Toronto Central Council

