

CHAIR'S REMARKS AT THE 2020 AGM OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, TORONTO CENTRAL COUNCIL

Good morning.

In preparing remarks for today's meeting three ideas immediately struck me. The first was the familiar expression attributed, incorrectly, as a Chinese curse, "may you live in interesting times." The second was Cardinal Collins' timely homily on his establishment of Stewardship Sunday and the third was a famous episode from the martyrdom of St. Lawrence.

It is both trite and true to say that we are living in interesting times. The pandemic which has turned our lives inside out and upside down has created a vast array of new challenges for all of us both in our personal and professional lives. In terms of the Society and the work of the Toronto Central Council, the pandemic hit us just as we were beginning to wrap our minds around a totally new governance structure which itself was a radical revision years in the making. Our Board members were new not only to the manner and complexities of the change in governance structure but in many cases new to each other. With

our parish churches and halls shuttered we lost not only a cornerstone of our spiritual nourishment but a significant source of revenue. Our camps, the heart of the organization in many ways, could not open and our stores closed down. Through all this upheaval, the need to provide for our residents and our neighbours in need remained uppermost in our minds. It is a testament to the inspiration of our founder and the courage, determination and professionalism of everyone involved, from Louise in her leadership to to our office and residential staff and all those dedicated Vincentians that we have been able not merely to carry on but to prevail.

My second thought was of Cardinal Collins' homily last weekend. As he introduced the first Stewardship Sunday his closing comments were an admonition to be faithful, creative stewards of the many gifts that we have received from our good and graciously magnificent Lord God! As Board members we are servants of the servants called upon to bear witness to the powerful idea of subsidiarity. Like all good stewards and good shepherds we are sometimes called upon to act with courage; to stand up to the wolf in whatever guise who would do harm to the flock. Chapter 31 of Proverbs reminds us that we are called upon to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the

rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Which leads me to my third thought, also inspirational, of the young Spanish theologian whom Pope Sixtus II made archdeacon of Rome and placed in charge of all the Church's wealth together with responsibility for the Church's outreach to the poor. In 258 AD the Emperor Valerian beheaded Pope Sixtus, arrested Lawrence and gave him three days to hand over all the Church's wealth. Lawrence sold off as much as he could and gave it all to the poor, to widows and the sick. On the third day, the Emperor summoned Lawrence to his palace and asked for the treasure. Lawrence, interpreting the Emperor's words with utmost seriousness, gathered together the impoverished, the disabled, the widowed, the orphaned, the sick, and the elderly, and brought them before the court. Valerian, enraged by the commotion, demanded an explanation, to which Lawrence replied: “Sir, I have provided you with precisely what you have asked for. These are the treasures of the Church.” Neither amused or moved, Valerian ordered Lawrence's death that same day by grilling on a rack. Hundreds of years later, Lawrence is still remembered for his final quip: while being barbecued alive, he cried out to his executioners, “I'm well done. Turn me over!”

I have been blessed with the opportunity to serve in many stewardship roles over the years but none more meaningful or compelling than my work as the first chair of the Board of Toronto Central Council. My heartfelt thanks go out to all the staff and especially Louise for her unfailing good counsel which is matched only by her historical knowledge and sunny disposition. I want to thank as well all my colleagues on the Board who have worked so hard with great congeniality to successfully bring the new governance model to life. It has been an honour to serve with all of them.

Our challenges, like our obligations to our neighbours in need, go on. God willing we will continue to discharge our stewardship with the courage of St. Lawrence and in the spirit of our founder and the imitation of our good shepherd and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Thank you.