

CHAIR'S REMARKS AT THE 2021 AGM OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, GREATER TORONTO CENTRAL COUNCIL

Good evening, Brothers and Sisters. Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge my Board colleagues with us tonight;

Sister Valerie Chavossy, Sister Cathy Grant, Brother John Sidle, our Treasurer, Brother Michael Wiley, our Secretary, Brother Danny Bourne, and Brother Joe Brisbois.

I would also like to acknowledge Brother Frank McNulty whose health forced his early retirement from the Board. Please keep him in your prayers as he is undergoing major surgery today.

Thank you, again, for taking the time to attend this important meeting. It has been my privilege to serve as Chair of the Board. While the past year has certainly not been without its challenges, I have been blessed to serve with committed Board colleagues, an extraordinarily dedicated staff, and a wide array of devoted Vincentians, like you, all determined to live out our mission of service to our neighbours in need wherever we find them.

It's always dangerous to name individuals because we inevitably forget someone, but I did want to recognize a few people whose good graces made my job much easier. On the Board, I want to thank John Sidle for his flinty resolve, his financial

acumen and for hanging around a lot longer than he planned. On the staff, I want to thank Liza Gowe for making the morass of financial material comprehensible to us lay people; I must give a huge shout out to the woman who really runs the place, that indispensable woman – Anar!

And then there's Louise! Without her, we'd all be lost. We owe her a debt we'll never be able to repay.

When I look back over the last year, it would be easy to be disheartened. Not only did we have to deal with external pressures created by the pandemic, shutdowns, increasing government regulation, shuttered camps, and limited church availability but we struggled with internal strife and in many ways that was worse than the external because, as Lincoln, channeling St. Mark, observed, “a house divided against itself cannot stand.”

Too many, who should know better, seemed to misunderstand key principles, like subsidiarity, which does not mean subordinate or secondary or the duality of our governance structure which relies on both the Rule and The Law of the Land. I found this latter confusion odd since, we are all aware of the biblical admonition to render unto Caesar and we accept the deeper mystery of Christ's duality as both God and man. Surely, those who can wrap their heads around such important ideas, can grasp our fundamental governance structure.

I am happy to report that we seem to have made great strides in sorting out our internal strife which is critical as we continue to contend with a host of external concerns.

On this feast day of St. Vincent de Paul, we are reminded that, as Christians, we are members of what the African American minister and theologian, Howard Thurman, called “a religion of the poor.” Christianity was, he wrote, “an outpouring of divine solicitude for all those who stand at a moment in history, with their backs against the wall”. Jesus, said Thurman, was a Jew: a member of a group of people who had faced the sharp end of slavery, exile and foreign occupation.

Moreover, Jesus was a poor Jew, born in a stable to parents of very modest means he lived the life of an itinerant; all things which put him in the same camp as the masses subject to all the indignities suffered by those” without wealth, power or control – like many of the neighbours we serve daily.

So, my friends, we are heirs to several magnificent traditions and thus stewards of them. For over 150 years, Toronto Central Council and its Vincentian community have lived the mission and vision of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. We must have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle and uphold our traditions.

If we can find that courage within us, we will be living proof of the words of St. James,

“So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.”

Show me your faith apart from your works,

And I, by my works, will show you my faith.”

As we look to the future, and strive to live our faith through our works, I will leave you with some words of encouragement from Margaret Mead,

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has”.

Thank you.

Bro. Gary Valcour, Chair, Board of Directors