

## **Chair's Remarks at 2022 AGM**

Brothers and Sisters, ladies and gentlemen:

I have had the privilege of serving as Chair of the Board again for the past year. Like most things in life, the role comes with its share of challenges and rewards. The work we do as Vincentians is inherently rewarding and made more so by the opportunity to work with such caring and dedicated people as we are fortunate to have in our midst. So, I must begin these remarks with some notes of gratitude.

Thanks to all the staff for their dedication and commitment and my special thanks to Louise for her constant example of calm leadership and good judgement and for her encouragement, support and advice.

Thanks to my colleagues on the Board for their ongoing diligence in keeping our ship moving in the right direction, sometimes through rough waters.

Thanks to all of you and to all the committee members who give so much of your time and talent to the challenging work of our Society.

Louise has done her usual, masterful job of highlighting the broad range of our work over the past year and I cannot imagine improving on that report. Instead, I would like to share a few thoughts as we embark on a new year of service to our neighbours in need.

In preparing these remarks I found inspiration from several sources that seemed to play out in real time. The first was the towering example of the late Queen Elizabeth II whose death and funeral and consequently her life were front and centre for the past few weeks. A woman of deep faith and personal strength, her 70-year reign came to embody the idea of service before self. The role may have been thrust upon her by an accident of fate but the way she carried it out was all her own making and we are much the better for it.

Muhammad Ali once said that “service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth”, a comment that might have come from Queen Elizabeth or our founder himself.

The second source of inspiration for me was Cardinal Collins very fine homily read to all of us last week on Stewardship Sunday. Stewardship and its relevance and importance to us in our roles as leaders of our organization is something that is always on my mind. In helping our neighbours in need, we must be mindful as well of our obligations to our donors without whose generosity we could do little. The Cardinal wrote of the three key elements of stewardship; to see, to judge and to act. To see those in need, a concept reflected in our opening prayer, “to make us responsive to our Christian calling to seek and find the forgotten, the suffering or the deprived”. To judge, not in any sense of being judgmental but rather to have a set of principles by which we live and work and which give us the courage and strength to do what is right and just in living our Vincentian vocation.

And finally, to act effectively and with intelligence and wisdom in carrying out our duties. We must be more than merely purveyors of food vouchers or a monthly dole; we are called, in the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, “to be friends and advisors offering help in life’s emergencies.” In other words, we must be truly good stewards.

And while that applies to all of us as Vincentians, it is an even greater obligation on us here today. We are the leaders of this organization, the Presidents of Conferences and Councils, the members of the Board and key committees. We are called not to be masters but servants, not merely students but mentors. We are called to lead the way in seeing, in judging and in acting. We must see what our organization and its members need, we must exercise good judgement in discerning our priorities and we must act with creativity and courage. It’s a tremendous responsibility and I commend you for stepping up and undertaking it.

I thank each of you for all you do for Toronto Central Council, for your own Councils and Conferences and the neighbours we all serve. As you go about living your Vincentian vocation in whatever role you find yourself, I encourage you to remember the admonition of St. Francis of Assisi; “The deeds you do may be the only sermon some persons will hear today.” Let’s make it a good one.

Thank you and God bless you.