

Vincentian Charities

Newsletter and Chronicle of Activities
DIOCESAN COUNCIL--SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL
Serving God's Poor in this Community Since 1865

Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Christmas Edition

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If Every Day Was Like Christmas

Everyone who hears the Christmas song, *If Every Day Was Like Christmas*, loves the line that says, "What a wonderful world it would be." For just a moment, think about that powerful concept. Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if every day was filled with the Christmas spirit of giving and caring? That's our challenge, not only during the holidays, but throughout the year.

The people who come to us aren't thinking about what they want for Christmas: they are wondering where their next meal is coming from or where they will sleep tonight. And we are there to help them in their time of need. Every day, we share the Christmas spirit with people who need a helping hand.



As the economy continues to struggle, we are seeing so many new faces at all our facilities. This year, we anticipate setting a new record for the number of meals served. We expect to serve more than 217,000

meals this year to people whose primary concern is where their next meal is coming from. Our shelters for men, women and children continue to stay full. Our pharmacy continues to help people who have lost their jobs or health insurance. Our stores continue to provide clothing and furniture at no cost to needy families.

Every Christmas is special at St. Vincent de Paul, and what makes our organization so special is the support we receive from those who pray for our efforts, volunteer at our special works program, and support us financially. There are so many great examples of volunteers throughout our Society. We hope you saw the Thanksgiving issue of our Vincentian Charities newsletter. In it, we talked about our Annual St. Vincent de Paul Mass where special people were honored. Every Christmas for the last decade and a half, one of those honorees and a group of his friends have fried turkeys for our St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room. They spend the days
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Contestants in the turkey carving contest included: (left to right) Sister Joan LaPlace, St. Joseph Academy; State Representative Hunter Greene; Judge Laura Davis; Tarvald Smith, EBR School Board; EBR Sheriff Sid Gautreaux; Rudy Macklin, Director of Governor's Council on Physical Fitness; Tara Wicker, EBR Councilwoman; Charles Moniotte, Moniotte Investments; EBR District Attorney Hillar Moore; D-D Breau, LSU Gymnastics Coach; and Steve Lousteau, Capital One City President.

Turkey Carving Winners

On the day before Thanksgiving, the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room held its first-ever turkey carving contest. The event was put together to help our Dining Room with the massive task of carving turkeys for our annual Thanksgiving Day meal. Every year, we are blessed with so many volunteers on Thanksgiving Day and the Thanksgiving weekend. But, sometimes, it's difficult to find volunteers who will come in the day before Thanksgiving to carve turkeys. That's what motivated us to come up with the concept of a turkey carving contest.

To make this an event people would get excited about, we started thinking about all the wonderful community leaders we could ask to be a part of this. We started talking to people like District Attorney Hillar Moore who quickly said, "I'm in." Hillar's brother, attorney Steven Moore then
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Bishop Ott Shelter Collection Drive

In today's difficult economy, our shelters are staying full – not just during inclement weather, but year-round. Every year at this special time, we begin collecting personal hygiene items for our shelter guests. This is a critical, ongoing need, and this effort ensures that we have a supply of items such as soap, shampoo and deodorant – things that
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before Christmas planning, organizing and then frying turkeys for our St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room's Christmas Day meal service. Thanks to Bobby DeAngelo and his phenomenal volunteers, we have some of the best tasting turkeys anywhere in Baton Rouge on Christmas Day.

That same Christmas spirit is alive every night at the Bishop Ott Shelters. People are amazed when we tell them about our Manna Givers Program where volunteers prepare home cooked meals and then bring them in and serve them to the guests at our shelter facilities. The homeless guests love the interaction they have with these volunteers. Once the volunteers serve the meal they prepared, they then serve themselves and sit down and visit with our guests.

Our thrift stores also do a remarkable job of helping the poor – first by giving items away free of charge, but also by providing a source of income for St. Vincent de Paul. There are so many great volunteers involved with our stores program, but two very special volunteers at our Staring Lane store in Baton Rouge do a remarkable job. Gail Smith and Marlene Conran volunteer their time to sort through, organize and shelve donated books for our customers. Going to a retail bookstore can be quite expensive, and many of the people we serve can't afford to pay full price for books (for themselves or as Christmas gifts). These two wonderful volunteers come in every week and make sure our book section is a pleasant place for our customers to browse and make their selections.

If you asked Kay Kyes what she would do without our volunteers at the St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy, she would say, "We'd have to shut down." That's a true statement at all our activities, and this year has been a very difficult time for our pharmacy where demand has increased so much and support has declined because of economic reasons. Volunteers have stepped up and helped to fill the gaps. They do everything from sorting medicines to volunteer pharmacists that actually fill prescriptions.

When you look at what St. Vincent de Paul accomplishes during the holiday season, it's remarkable. And it's remarkable that we are able to share that Christmas spirit, not only through the holidays, but throughout the year. Our small staff and volunteers are pretty tired by the end of the year, but what keeps us going are the smiles and thank-you's from those who come to us with nowhere else to turn.

We hope your Christmas season is not an exhausting marathon, but a time where you can enjoy your family and friends. Please keep the poor and homeless in your thoughts and prayers during this special time of year.



Mayor-President Kip Holden is ready for the next turkey. He knows how important it is to help St. Vincent de Paul in our work to serve the poor and homeless.

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helped St. Vincent de Paul recruit other individuals. Sheriff Sid Gautreaux said, "I'd love to be a part of this effort." Tarvald Smith said, "Sign me up." Judge Laura Davis said, "Consider that decision made." Steve Lousteau, Capital One City President, said, "You can count on me." D-D Breaux, LSU Gymnastics Coach, said, "I'm honored to be invited to this event." In addition, State Senator Hunter Greene, Mayor Kip Holden, Tara Wicker, Rudy Macklin, Sister Joan LaPlace, and Charles Moniotte all agreed to step forward and put their turkey carving skills to the test.

The event kicked off at 1:30, right after our daily meal service at the Dining Room. The judges, who were selected from a wide array of backgrounds, were Sister Carolyn Brady, Cary Kearny and Pam Hutchinson. They were asked to judge the contestants on the following factors: technique, most entertaining (who's having the most fun), time/speed, appearance/results. These scores were totaled to determine who carved the best turkeys. As part of this event, each contestant brought a couple of volunteers to go back into our kitchen and carve turkeys while the contest was going on. (It takes a surprising amount of skill to carve a turkey.)

This was a blast! We had so much fun, all for a great cause – Thanksgiving dinner for the poor and homeless in our community. During the contest, our contestants had an opportunity for a little friendly rivalry. At one point the sheriff and D-D Breaux got into a hilarious conversation that ended with D-D being cuffed by the sheriff for interfering with his turkey carving efforts. All in good fun, the sheriff told D-D that Hillar had agreed to prosecute. It was a great time, and the event reflected what St. Vincent de Paul is all about – experiencing the joy of serving the needy and making a difference.

Within an hour or so, all the turkeys were carved and ready for the next day. These individuals who gave so generously of their time and talent helped us to achieve an important goal: giving back to the less fortunate. The holidays are the perfect time to reflect on the many blessings in our lives, and at St. Vincent de Paul, we know we are blessed to have supporters like these. They are all winners!

Our judges had their work cut out for them, and the scoring was extremely close. Michael Acaldo, who emceed the event, said it was a lot like a gymnastics meet at LSU with the scoring being so close. Having the highest point total was Sheriff Sid Gautreaux, who was crowned the best turkey carver in Baton Rouge. When asked if he would come back next year, he said, "I sure will; I've got to defend my title." Coming in a close second was LSU Hall of Fame basketball player, Rudy Macklin; with Coach D-D Breaux close behind him in third place. These three individuals were all awarded with impressive plaques (generously donated by Carco Awards) recognizing them as the top winners of the day.

Thanks to the efforts of these community leaders and so many others, on Thanksgiving Day, we served 543 meals. Then on Thanksgiving Friday, Saturday and Sunday, we also served a large number of guests. This would not have been possible without our supporters!

Visit the Society on the web at www.svdpbr.org!

Leadership Perspective

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul continues to be one of the most innovative and dynamic charitable organizations in our community. A big part of our success is the phenomenal volunteer leaders who make up our Special Works Board of Directors. We recently had an opportunity to visit with our Board Chair, Cary Kearny, and she shared some important thoughts with us. We asked Cary the following questions:

Why is St. Vincent de Paul so important to the community?

Cary: St. Vincent de Paul is important to the community because of the critical services we provide. Our underlying philosophy is to treat each person with the dignity and respect they deserve as a child of God. It's so important to provide services in a way that strengthens a person's self esteem and empowers them to take the steps necessary to get their lives back on track.

Why is faith important in our work? Cary: Our mission calls us to serve those in need, and as we do this, we grow spiritually. This gives each of us a personal opportunity to grow closer to Christ by helping others. As St. Vincent de Paul volunteers and supporters, we follow Christ's call to service, and in the best way we can, we try to be His true disciples.

Since you have been involved in critical leadership roles with the Society over the past decade, how has this impacted your faith life?

Cary: I've grown spiritually, and I've grown in humility. I understand that it's important to recognize our own weaknesses, because once we recognize our weaknesses, we are in a position to better serve others without judging them. For me, I see every day as another opportunity to improve, especially in my spiritual life. I realize that every day is truly a blessing, and the time we have is finite. I recognize that the poor we serve are struggling to obtain things that I used to take for granted. I no longer take the blessings in my life for granted, and I recognize what a great opportunity it is to share my blessings with those in need.

The Society has announced Vision 150. What excites you most about this planning process?

Cary: St. Vincent de Paul is a vibrant, dynamic organization. Over the next few years, as we prepare to celebrate our 150th anniversary of serving the Baton Rouge community, I think it's important that we examine our image and look for ways to attract new volunteers and supporters. We need to attract more young people and use technology, such as social networking, to engage them and get them excited about our mission.

I am also excited about the One-Stop Center collaborative project. This project, which is a collaboration with the Capital Area Alliance for the Homeless, Gulf Coast Housing Partnership, is going to be a great step forward for our community.

I would like to see a shelter or housing program for intact families. We are seeing more intact families and want to respond to this need. As a part of our future, we also have a vision for a chapel on our main charitable campus, a place for the people we serve to quietly talk to God through prayer.

Vision 150 is all about our future. We have done a remarkable job over the last 145 years. The community has entrusted us with their volunteer and financial support, and we have wisely used that support to respond to local needs. I encourage anyone who wants to visit us to come by our main charitable campus and see our special works in action.

Our Board of Directors and dedicated staff are good stewards of the support we receive. We see that support as a sacred trust and want our supporters to know that they can count on us to serve the needy on their behalf. Our Board of Directors has a strong and diverse leadership. They are professionals that have come together from different backgrounds and are committed to improving the lives of the poor and homeless in our community. I thank the volunteers and financial supporters that make our work a reality. An essential part of our *Vision 150* strategic planning process, which starts next year, will be recognition of the people who provide the volunteer hours and financial dollars that make our work a reality. Their input during this process will be invaluable.



Bishop Muench and Mayor-President Kip Holden talk turkey and visit with volunteers at the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room on Thanksgiving Day.

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most of us take for granted. This year, we particularly want to thank WVLA NBC 33, WGMB FOX 44, WBRL CW 21 and KZUP RTV19. Their continued support of this collection effort is critical. The number of people facing eviction is at an all-time high, and we have seen that translate into many new homeless cases. We are doing our best, but the rising number of homeless individuals and families has put a tremendous strain on our limited resources and our ability to respond.

Our goal for every shelter guest is not a hand-out, but a hand-up to self-sufficiency. When someone checks in, we are delighted when they ask for a toothbrush or a razor so they can clean themselves up and look for work. This annual collection drive makes sure they have everything they need to restore their dignity and make a good impression during a job interview.

Every year, our homeless guests find hundreds of jobs and are able to do what's necessary to end their homelessness. Unfortunately, the economic downturn has made finding employment more competitive than in the past. Jobs are scarce, and these items are needed more than ever.

We need your help to get the word out. Speak to your civic organization, church group or school. Select an item, such as toothbrushes, and get your group to collect enough toothbrushes to help us for a year. Collect enough disposable diapers for all the infants at our women and children's shelter. But before you pick an item (or items) give us a call to make sure other groups aren't collecting the same thing.

If you are interested in donating items, or if you have questions, don't hesitate to give us a call at 383-7837, extension O. Items can be dropped off at our shelter located at 1623 Convention St.

Ensure that your values and beliefs live forever by remembering the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in your will.

Make Every Day Christmas

When I wake up on Christmas morning, I thank God for the blessing of a new day. But when you stop to think about it, every day is a gift from God. Every day is a fresh start, filled with opportunities. It's

up to us to make each day count, to make someone's life a little better through our efforts. We are all called to share our blessings with others: our families and friends – and for every St. Vincent de Paul supporter – the less fortunate.

This year, I will celebrate my 21st Christmas at St. Vincent de Paul. What makes each one even more special is the knowledge that I will be blessed with only so many Christmases. At best, we can hope for perhaps 100 Christmases – only 100 chances to celebrate Christ's birthday in the best way possible, by reaching out to someone in need. But if we lived every day as if it were Christmas, we would have over 36,000 opportunities to make a difference. If only we could wake up every day with our hearts filled with the Christmas spirit!

Christmas Day at the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room and Bishop Ott Shelters for men, women and children is a very special time. The excitement you feel in your home is also felt in the home we provide to those in need. But just as important as the food and shelter we provide are the gifts of hope and compassion.

This past year has been extremely challenging for our St. Vincent de Paul family. The economy has dramatically increased the number of people coming to us for food, clothing, shelter, prescription medicine and other basic essentials. We have taken steps to improve our services, and we have come up with creative ways to do more with less.

What's on St. Vincent de Paul's Christmas list? First, we need your continued prayers. We see prayers being answered every day. We may not know where the next turkey is coming from, and then we get a call from someone wanting to donate one, or two, or a dozen. God does indeed provide. Every day, we see Him using our supporters to answer someone's prayer.

We also ask you to continue to volunteer at our various ministries. And if you haven't already done so, please consider making a financial gift to St. Vincent de Paul by sending a check to P. O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821, or go to our website at www.svdpbr.org. We thank you for your continued support, and we pray that this Christmas and the coming year are filled with blessings for you and your family. We hope you will join us this Christmas season in praying for the people we are blessed to serve, and also that our Society will grow stronger financially during 2011 so that we are able to help the growing number of people who come to us in need of life's basic necessities. -- **Michael J. Acaldo, President & CEO, St. Vincent de Paul Charities**

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